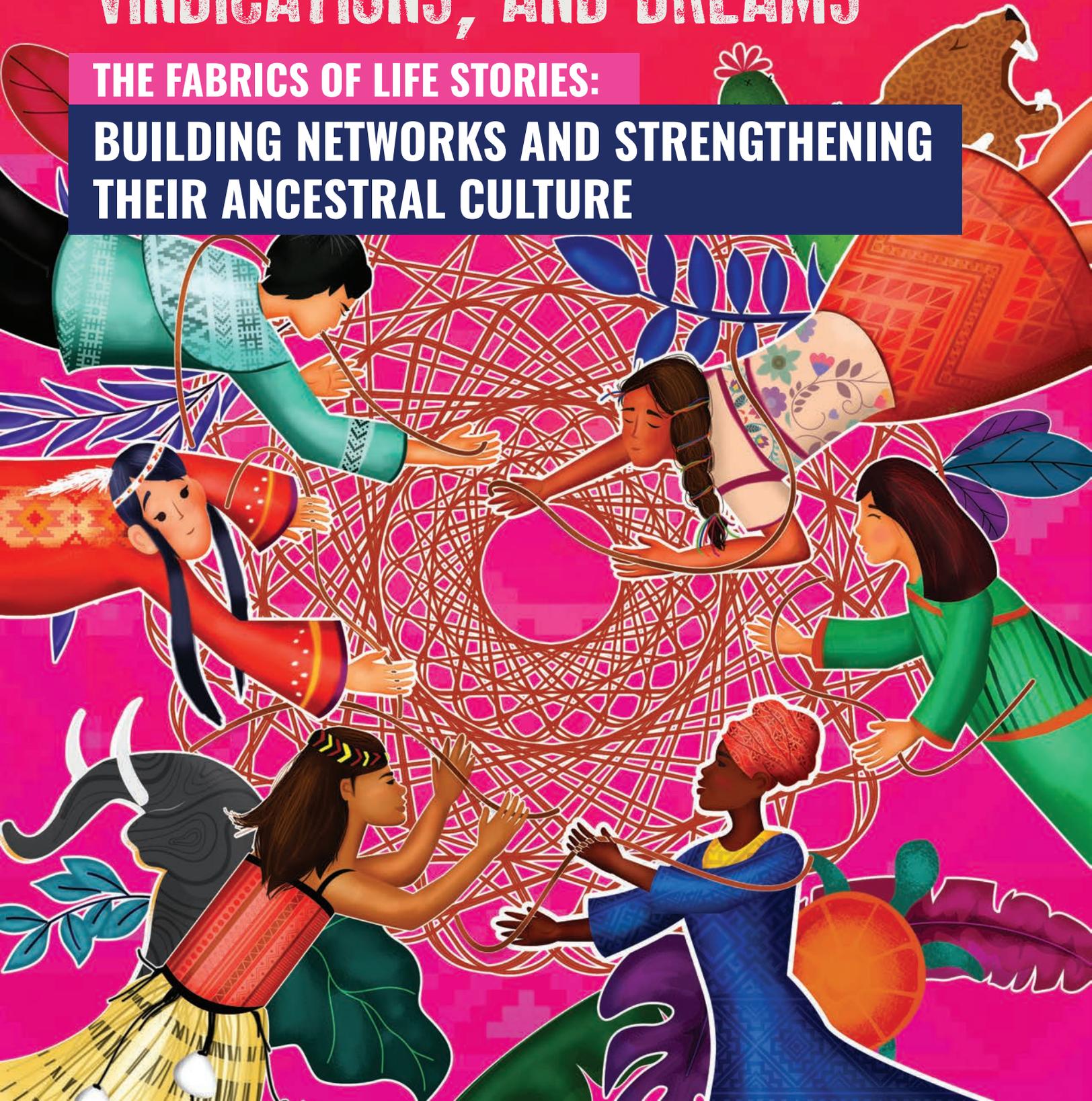




A FABRIC OF KNOWLEDGE, VINDICATIONS, AND DREAMS

**THE FABRICS OF LIFE STORIES:
BUILDING NETWORKS AND STRENGTHENING
THEIR ANCESTRAL CULTURE**



A FABRIC OF KNOWLEDGE, VINDICATIONS, AND DREAMS

THE FABRICS OF LIFE STORIES:

**BUILDING NETWORKS AND STRENGTHENING
THEIR ANCESTRAL CULTURE**

CREDITS

✿ **General coordination:**

Teresa Zapeta, *FIMI Executive Director.*

✿ **Stories Project Coordination:**

Cecilia Ramírez Pérez, *Indigenous Women's Global Leadership School Coord.*

✿ **Senior Writer:**

Alma G. López Mejía

✿ **Interviews made by:**

Fresia Paineñil, Winnie Kodi, Rohani Inta Dewi y Elvi Cheruto.

✿ **Typographic correction:**

Javier Trejo Tabares

✿ **Cover illustration:**

Daniela Vanessa Herrera Castro

✿ **English translation by:**

Grupo Heca-Servicios Lingüísticos <https://grupohecatranslations.com/en/>

✿ **Layout by:**

Eloisa Washington

✿ **Technical collaboration:**

María de León Mazariegos

✿ **Copyright**

© International Indigenous Women's Forum FIMI, 2020

✿ **Reservation of rights**

The content of this publication may be reproduced without authorization but always providing the source of it and its use will be always for a non-commercial purpose.

This publication was funded by Tamal Pais. The contents and comments of this publication are the responsibility of FIMI, who has the authorization of the members and communities in the present document.

Comments to this publication can be submitted to the FIMI International Indigenous Women's Forum c.ramirez@FIMI.org

Address: Av. Horacio Urteaga 534-602, Jesús María (Lima 11), Perú.

Photography Credits:

Picture 1: ©FIMI. Photography of face-to-face activities, GLSIW, 3rd edition. p. 7.

Picture 2: ©FIMI. Photograph taken from the AYNI Indigenous Women's Fund projects. p. 11.

Picture 3: ©FIMI. Activities during the regional capacity building program South America, Santiago de Chile. p. 12.

Picture 4: ©FIMI. Photograph taken from the projects of the AYNI Indigenous Women's Fund. p. 15.

Picture 5: ©FIMI. United Nations entry, participants of the 5th edition of the GLSIW. New York City. p. 17.

Picture 6: ©FIMI. During the opening of activities, the 5th edition of the GLSIW. New York City. p. 18.

Picture 7: ©FIMI. Postcards presented to FIMI by participants from the Arctic, GLSIW, New York City. p. 19.

Picture 8: ©FIMI. Photograph provided by Dr. Myrna Cunningham. p. 20.

Picture 9: ©FIMI. Photograph provided by Dr. Myrna Cunningham. p. 21.

Picture 10: ©FIMI. Photograph provided by Dr. Myrna Cunningham. p. 23.

Picture 11: © FIMI. During the FIMI Leadership Award ceremony, 2013. New York City. p. 24.

Picture 12: ©FIMI. Participants of the 4th edition of the GLSIW. p. 25.

Picture 13: ©FIMI. During the 2013 FIMI Leadership Award ceremony. New York City. p. 26.

Picture 14: ©FIMI. Victoria Tauli Corpuz, Former Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples with participants of the 3rd edition of EGLMI, New York City.. p. 28.

Picture 15: ©FIMI. . Photograph provided by participant Laura Vukson, 4th edition of GLSIW. p. 29.

Picture 16: ©FIMI. Walter Strong 2019. Legacy of a Nation: Tlicho hand games, drumming and the elders. Recuperado de <https://newsinteractives.cbc.ca/longform/legacy-of-a-nation-tlicho-handgames-drumming-and-the-elders>. p. 30.

Picture 17: ©FIMI. Photograph provided by participant Laura Vukson, 4th edition of GLSIW.. p. 31.

Picture 18: ©FIMI. Photograph provided by participant Stephanie Big Crow, 4th edition of GLSIW. p.34.

Picture 19: ©FIMI. Photograph provided by participant Stephanie Big Crow, 4th edition of GLSIW. p. 35.

Picture 20: ©FIMI. Photograph provided by participant Stephanie Big Crow, 4th edition of GLSIW. p. 37.

Picture 21: ©FIMI. Photograph provided by participant Stephanie Big Crow, 4th edition of GLSIW. p. 38.

Picture 22: ©FIMI. Photograph provided by participant

Theresa John, 2nd edition of GLSIW. p. 41.

Picture 23: ©FIMI. Photograph provided by participant Theresa John, 2nd edition of GLSIW. p. 43.

Picture 24: ©FIMI. Photograph provided by participant Theresa John, 2nd edition of GLSIW. p. 44

Picture 25: ©FIMI. Photograph provided by participant Theresa John, 2nd edition of GLSIW. p. 45.

Picture 26: ©FIMI. Photograph taken from the projects of the AYNI Indigenous Women's Fund. p. 48.

Picture 27: ©FIMI. Romba' Marannu and Martha Ntoipo, GLSIW 2nd edition. p. 49.

Picture 28: ©FIMI. Photograph provided by Romba' Marannu, GLSIW 2nd edition. p.50.

Picture 29: ©FIMI. Photograph provided by Romba' Marannu, GLSIW 2nd edition. p. 51.

Picture 30: ©FIMI. Group photo of GLSIW 2nd edition. p. 52.

Picture 31: ©FIMI. Photograph provided by Romba' Marannu. p. 53.

Picture 32: ©FIMI. Photograph provided by Romba' Marannu. p. 54.

Picture 33: ©FIMI. Photograph taken from the projects of the AYNI Indigenous Women's Fund. p. 57.

Picture 34: ©FIMI. Photograph provided by Antonia Zamora, participant of the 2nd edition of the GLSIW. p. 58.

Picture 35: ©FIMI. Photograph provided by Antonia Zamora, participant of the 2nd edition of the GLSIW. p. 59.

Picture 36: ©FIMI. Participants of the 2nd edition of the GLSIW. p. 60.

Picture 37: ©FIMI. Group photo of GLSIW 2nd edition, during the seminars of Columbia University. p. 64.

Picture 38: ©FIMI. Photograph provided by Indira Vargas, participant of the 5th edition of the GLSIW. p. 67.

Picture 39: ©FIMI. Activities during the national training program, New Delhi, India.. p. 69.

Picture 40: ©FIMI. Photo taken from the projects of the Indigenous Women's Fund AYNI. p. 71.

Picture 41: ©FIMI. Activities during the Mesoamerica regional capacity building program of the GLSIW, Guatemala City, Guatemala. p. 73.

Picture 42: ©FIMI. Irma Doris Percca, participant of the 4th edition of the GLSIW. p. 75.

Picture 43: ©FIMI. Activity during the classroom stage, 3rd edition of the GLSIW. p. 76.

Picture 44: ©FIMI. Activity during the classroom stage,

Photography Credits:

3rd edition of the GLSIW. p. 77.

Picture 45: ©FIMI. Photograph provided by Irma Doris Percca, participant of the 4th edition of the GLSIW. p. 77.

Picture 46: ©FIMI. Photograph provided by Sandra Creamer, participant of the 1st . Photograph provided by Irma Doris Percca, during the implementation of her Advocacy Plan. p. 79.

Picture 47: ©FIMI. María Luz Piñacue, participant of the 2nd edition of the GLSIW. p. 83.

Picture 48: ©FIMI. María Luz Piñacue, during her participation in the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. p. 84.

Picture 49: ©FIMI. Group photo in front of the UN, 2nd edition of the GLSIW. p. 86.

Picture 50: ©FIMI. During the seminars at Columbia University, 2nd edition of the GLSIW. p. 87.

Picture 51: ©FIMI. . Offering. Activities of the classroom stage, 2nd edition of the GLSIW. p. 89.

Picture 52: ©FIMI. Petrona Fernández, participant of the 4th edition of the GLSIW. p. 92.

Picture 53: ©FIMI. Petrona Fernández, participant of the 4th edition of the GLSIW. p. 93.

Picture 54: ©FIMI. Petrona Fernández, participant of the 4th edition of the GLSIW, during the regional capacity building program South America. p. 94.

Picture 55: ©FIMI. Petrona Fernández, participant of the 4th edition of the GLSIW, during the regional capacity building program South America. p.95.

Picture 56: ©FIMI. Participants of the regional capacity building program South America, Santiago de Chile, 2018. p. 96.

Picture 57: ©FIMI. Participants of the regional capacity building program South America, Santiago de Chile, 2018. p. 97.

Picture 58: © FIMI. Closing of activities, during the regional capacity building program South America, Santiago de Chile, 2018. p. 98.

Picture 59: ©FIMI. During the regional capacity building program South America, Santiago de Chile, 2018. Pág. 100.

Picture 60: ©FIMI. During the regional capacity building program South America, Santiago de Chile, 2018. p. 101.

Picture 61: ©FIMI. Closing of activities, during the regional capacity building program South America, Santiago de Chile, 2018. p. 103.

Picture 62: ©FIMI. Closing of face-to-face activities of the 6th edition of the GLSIW. New York City. p. 104.

Picture 63: ©FIMI. Closing activity, regional capacity building program South America, Santiago de Chile, 2018. p. 105.

Picture 64: ©FIMI. Award of diplomas, GLSIW Asia regional capacity building program. City of Gujarat, India, 2018. p. 106.

Picture 65: ©FIMI. Photograph taken from the projects of the AYNÍ Indigenous Women's Fund. p. 109.

Picture 66: ©FIMI. Group photo, 3rd edition of GLSIW, New York City. p. 111.

Picture 67: ©FIMI. Group photo, participants of the 3rd edition of GLSIW, United Nations Headquarters, New York City. p. 112.

Picture 68: ©FIMI. Exhibition of cultural pieces, regional capacity building program South America, Santiago de Chile, 2018. p. 113.

Picture 69: ©FIMI. Group activity during the GLSIW Africa regional capacity building program. City of Nairobi, Kenya. p. 114.

Picture 70: ©FIMI. Exhibition of cultural pieces by GLSIW participants, New York City. p. 115.

©FIMI. Photography of face-to-face activities, GLSIW, 3rd edition.

I. INDEX

- I. INDEX 7
- 2. ACRONYMS 10
- 3. PROLOGUE..... 12
- 4. BACKGROUND 15
 - Myrna Cunningham Kain– Nicaragua - Miskito* 20**
 - A gathering of knowledge: the emergence of the Global Leadership School of indigenous women..... 21
 - Experiences, challenges, and dreams in building leadership for indigenous women at a global level 25
 - Main lessons 27
 - Life stories:..... 28
 - Indigenous women leaders from the Arctic, North America, and the Pacific 28
 - Laura Vukson– Canada - Tlicho* 29**
 - Leadership as an indigenous woman 30
 - Her participation in the Global Leadership School 31
 - Individual and collective dreams 33
 - Stephanie Big Crow– United States of America - Lakota* 34**
 - Leadership in the defense and vindication of Lakota identity 35
 - Global Leadership School: inspiration and struggle for Lakota Women’s rights..... 37
 - Individual and collective dreams 40
 - Theresa John– Alaska – Esquimal Yupik*..... 41**
 - Leadership as an indigenous woman 42
 - Participation at the Global Leadership School 44
 - Individual and collective dreams for life..... 46
 - Life stories:..... 48
 - Indigenous women leaders from Asia 48
 - Romba’ Marannu Sombolinggi’– Indonesia - Toraya* 49**
 - Leadership as an indigenous woman in favor of community development 51
 - Global Leadership School to Empower Indigenous Women 54
 - Individual and collective rights 55
 - Life stories:..... 57
 - Indigenous women leaders from Latin America..... 57
 - Antonia Zamora Garza– Mexico - Náhuatl Tlaxcalteca* 58**
 - Leadership as community-building and by the collective 59
 - Global Leadership School, a space for reflection and action regarding the situation of indigenous women

	63
Challenges and dreams for achieving a fair society	65
<i>Indira Azucena Vargas Guatatuca–Ecuador - Kichwa</i>	67
Leadership as the strength to deal with inequality and injustice	68
Global Leadership School: a training tool to position ancestral people’s rights	71
Individual and collective dreams and challenges	74
<i>Irma Doris Percca Marca–Peru - Aymara</i>	75
Leadership as an indigenous woman	76
Leadership School: a space for understanding indigenous women’s rights	78
Individual and collective dreams	80
<i>María Luz Piñacue Achicue–Colombia –Nasa</i>	83
Leadership development as a forefront of the struggle and the defense of life	85
The Global Leadership School: a process of learning and reciprocity	88
Challenges and dreams to continue changing individually and collectively.....	90
<i>Petrona Fernández Osco–Bolivia - Aymara</i>	92
Leadership as a light and guide for good living	94
The Global School: a space to learn and share knowledge as Aymara people	98
Challenges and dreams to continue sowing seeds of leadership	100
<i>Cecilia Ramírez Pérez–Mexico –Mixteca</i>	103
Being part of the Global Leadership School of Indigenous Women: an opportunity to learn and unlearn ...	105
5. CONCLUSIONS	109
Identity and origin, determining factors in the being of women leaders	110
Decisive relevant events in the lives of those women leaders.....	111
Indigenous women’s leadership: a banner of struggle and defense for life and rights	112
Global Leadership School of Indigenous Women: a gathering of knowledge.....	113
Challenges and dreams: a new cycle in the development of leadership	114
6. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	115

©FIMI. Photograph taken from the AYNII
Indigenous Women's Fund projects

A group of women in traditional attire are gathered around a wooden wall, looking at a document posted on it. The woman in the foreground is wearing a red lace top and a dark patterned skirt. Other women are wearing pink and blue lace tops. The background shows a lush green environment with banana trees.

2. ACRONYMS

A

AIWN: Asian Indigenous Women's Network

AYNI: FIMI Indigenous Women's Fund

C

CEDAW: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

CONAIE: Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador

CONAP: Coordinator of Indigenous Women of Pastaza

CONFENIAE: Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of the Amazon Ecuadorian

CRIC: Indigenous Regional Council of Cauca

CSW: Commission on the Legal and Social Status of Women

E

ECOSOC: Economic and Social Council

G

GLSIW: Global Leadership School of Indigenous Women

I

FIMI: International Indigenous Women's Forum

IFAD: International Fund for Agricultural Development

S

SDG: Sustainable Development Goals

P

PEREMPUAN AMAN: Alliance of the Indigenous Peoples of the Archipelago

R

RANPERDA: Toraya People Regional Regulation

U

UN: United Nations Organization

UN Women: United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

©FIMI. Activities during the regional capacity building program South America, Santiago de Chile.



3. PROLOGUE

Indigenous women are writing their own history.

These four inspiring books published by the International Indigenous Women's Forum describe the trajectory of extraordinary Indigenous women throughout the world. The 43 stories are about how they built their strength, vision, organization and advocacy to become defenders of their peoples, lands and cultures and weavers of a more just and peaceful future.

As is evident from the life stories we read in these books, Indigenous women do not see themselves as passive spectators or victims. In numerous instances, Indigenous women have bravely taken up the roles of mediators and peace builders, defenders of their lands, of the environment, of their self-determination. They have been promoters, creators and teachers of their cultures. They have been defenders of individual and collective human rights. Indigenous women have sought to address these issues at the local, national and international levels. At the United Nations, they have been advocates and leaders since the very first year of the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations, in 1982 in Geneva. Indigenous women were active participants and major contributors during the more than two decades of negotiations regarding the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which was adopted by the General Assembly in 2007. They were major contributors at the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples in 2014. Through their advocacy they have impacted the work of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and the follow up processes of the Beijing Global Conference on Women. Indigenous women are now clearly among the international actors that count. Their leadership is organic to the Indigenous Peoples movement, informed by it and informing it.

It is no surprise that a unique Indigenous women's organization, FIMI—the International Indigenous Women's Forum, sprang out of such a strong movement. As an umbrella organization of Indigenous women from around the world, FIMI has reached a level of visibility and respect that few enjoy. In its 2020 Global Study on the Situation of Indigenous Women and Girls FIMI also tells the story of how the Indigenous women's movements, inspired by the Indigenous women's struggles at local and national level, worked over the years to place their issues on the international agenda, in order to strengthen respect, galvanize action and achieve implementation of collective and individual rights.

The wise leadership and input of Indigenous women led to the realization that a space had to be created for reaffirming that empowerment and leadership can be acquired through a process of participation, capacity building, and organizational strengthening; through unlearning, knowledge sharing and learning. This gave birth, in 2013, to FIMI's training project, the Global Leadership School of Indigenous Women (EGLMI, for its acronym in Spanish), and specifically, the International Program on Human Rights and Advocacy Strategies. The Institute for the Study of Human Rights at Columbia University had the honor to accompany the process from the beginning and to host Indigenous women leaders for an annual seminar.

The life trajectories of women described in these books demonstrate the strength, depth and validity of a strategic program such as the Global Leadership



School of Indigenous Women. The bonds, knowledge sharing, mutual encouragement and inspiration participants experience are unparalleled, so that Indigenous women can continue their multifaceted struggles with more vigor and determination.

The publication of these books is an occasion to pay tribute to all the Indigenous women, protagonists and survivors of these struggles and to express solidarity for the Indigenous human rights defenders who are prosecuted, imprisoned and even killed in various countries for defending the rights of their peoples.

We recognize Indigenous women's courage and leadership. They are not alone.

Five strong effective social movements in the last decades accompany their struggles: the human rights movement, the women's movement, the Indigenous Peoples' movement, the peace movement and the environmental movement. These movements have had a sustained relation with the UN over the decades and a global impact. Indigenous women symbolize the meeting point of these international social movements.

Let us not forget that advocacy at international level is an extension of our citizenship from the national to the international level. Since states and non-state actors also act internationally and take decisions that will affect our lives, we, as active citizens that want to shape our own lives, also follow these processes internationally. We become international actors and influence decisions as well. This is people's advocacy.

Resistance, persistence, resilience, vision for life: four words that embrace Indigenous women's struggles. Indigenous women are telling their own stories and creating more just societies with their many visible and invisible acts that sustain life every day. They continue to uphold a fundamental principle: DIGNITY

The words of the Guatemalan Indigenous leader, our sister Rigoberta Menchú, who received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1992, resonate in the lives of many:

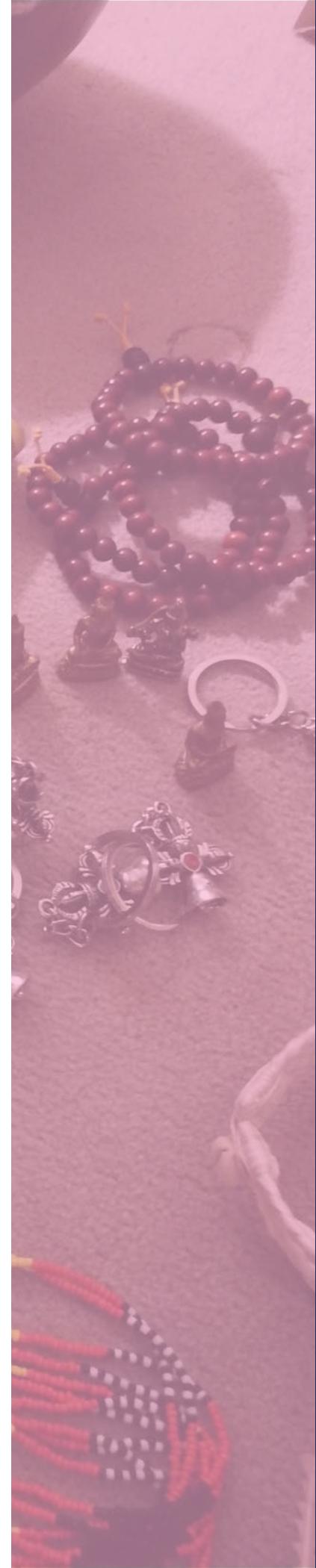
"What I treasure most in life is being able to dream. During my most difficult moments and complex situations I have been able to dream of a more beautiful future."

As our sister Myrna Cunningham, whose vision led to the creation of the Global School says: "this means being like an artisan who weaves, paints, and combines various materials to create a work of art", and that is how she understands facilitation, as the art of sharing, learning, and teaching.

The journey of FIMI's Global School has been inspirational and will continue being so as more Indigenous women join in.

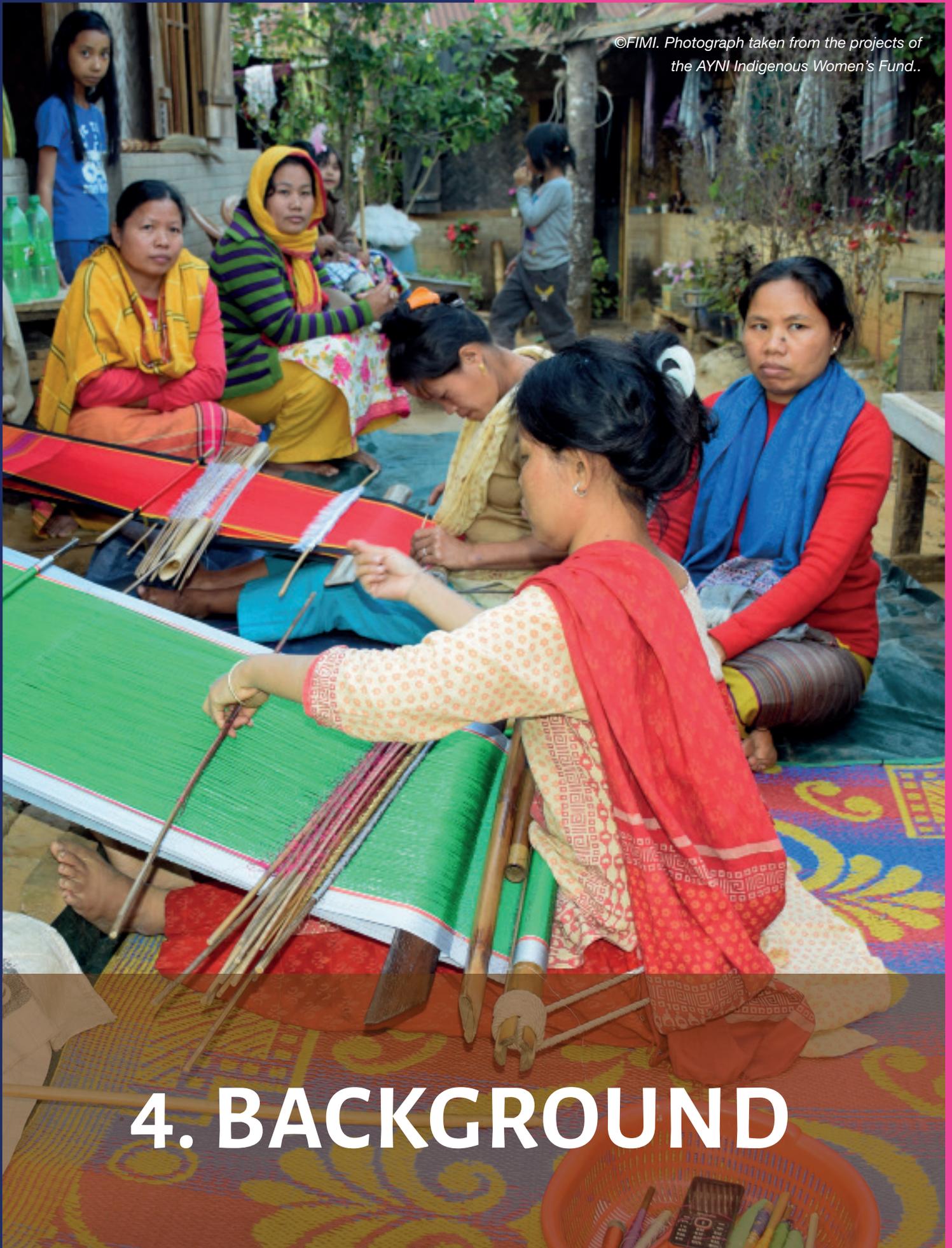
Elsa Stamatopoulou

*Director Indigenous Peoples' Rights Program,
Institute for the Study of Human Rights, Columbia University.*



©FIMI. Photograph taken from the projects of the AYNi Indigenous Women's Fund..

4. BACKGROUND



The International Indigenous Women's Forum (IIWF/ FIMI by its acronym in Spanish), *is a global network of indigenous women that articulates local, national, and regional organizations in Asia, Africa, the Arctic, the Pacific, and the Americas.*



The FIMI's mission is to bring together women leaders and human rights activists from different parts of the world to coordinate agendas, build capacities, and develop leadership roles. The FIMI encourages the participation of indigenous women in international decision-making processes, ensuring the consistent and substantive inclusion of the perspectives of indigenous women in debates that involve human rights."

It has a work plan divided into four strategic programs:

- 1. Political participation and advocacy,*
- 2. Capacity building,*
- 3. AYNI, the Indigenous Women's Forum; and*
- 4. Research and emerging issues.*

The FIMI believes in learning by doing and in the cross-fertilization process between practice

and theory. Access to more information enables effective participation, and through such participation, capacity building is strengthened. Consequently, it reaffirms that empowerment and leadership can be acquired through the implementation of a process that combines participation, capacity building, and organizational strengthening.

Per its mandate for capacity building and leadership strengthening, in **2013 it launched its training project, the Global Leadership School of Indigenous Women (EGLMI, for its acronym in Spanish)**, specifically, the International Program on Human Rights and Advocacy Strategies. The program has a duration of one year, with the objective of strengthening capacities, knowledge, and leadership of indigenous women activists and leaders from various regions of the world, so that women leaders may have the strength and wisdom to have an impact at different spaces around the world in favor of the lives of indigenous women. The School was conceived of as space for training and learning by doing, in which women leaders begin to understand the meaning of global advocacy, which allows them to see how their recommendations and input turn into recommendations of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, so that they may provide important input on resolutions of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), or the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

Likewise, one of the motivations for creating the leadership school, on the one hand, was to promote actions in favor of indigenous women after the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which was during the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995.

On the other hand, it was also created to benefit the indigenous women of the communities as they are aware that they are bearers of ancestral knowledge, are the main reproducers of their peoples' cultures, and

contribute to their continuity and resistance; however, these women had no visibility. Therefore, it was believed that the School could help out in providing visibility to these contributions of indigenous women.

Participants in the initial experience were **21 women leaders** from different socio-cultural regions: Africa, Asia, the Arctic, the Pacific, and the Americas. In summary, the program is developed in three phases. For the purposes hereof it is explained below:

Virtual:

this first phase consists of online learning through a virtual platform, with a duration of three to four months.

Face-to-face:

the second phase consists of attending intensive seminars for a week at the United Nations headquarters, as well

as at Columbia University, through its Institute of Human Rights. Likewise, at this phase, women leaders participate effectively during the first week of sessions of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and meet with high-level United Nations officials.

Implementation of advocacy plans:

the third phase consists of the execution of Advocacy Plans, created by the participants, at the local, national, and/or regional levels linked to the global agenda of the Indigenous Peoples' movements.

With improvements based on the results of the first experience, the following year in 2014 the FIMI implemented a second edition, wherein 25 indigenous women from various countries from the same regions mentioned above



©FIMI. United Nations entry, participants of the 5th edition of the GLSIW. New York City.



©FIMI. During the opening of activities, the 5th edition of the GLSIW. New York City.

participated. Likewise, the corresponding training terms were included according to the designed methodology. In 2015, the School created mechanisms for the participation of 27 participants from different peoples of the world. Through the development of three training terms, the School was growing and expanding the great network of organizations that make up the FIMI.

Upon completion of each edition of the EGLMI, more new indigenous organizations and leaders were brought together by the FIMI as a global network. It strengthened alliances with Columbia University, United Nations agencies, cooperation entities, and other actors. Women graduates of the first editions joined together with other women activists, built alliances, and continued influencing in other settings, being convinced to continue practicing complementarity, reciprocity, and ancestral knowledge. They also legally incorporated their organizations, speaking out in an organized and strategic

manner. Additionally, they formulated projects, accessed other funds, and/or continued to search for various resources. They still had more dreams, but they were clear about the fact that no matter how local their struggle might be, there were still more women with the same cause in other parts of the world.

Furthermore, former participants took on technical tasks of the FIMI, which in turn grew and expanded its networks to other countries that were included for the first time, such as some Pacific islands: Micronesia, Guam, Papua New Guinea, and Vanuatu; even though long-distance coordination with some leaders for their in-person participation in the School was difficult. Regarding the technical team, they were greatly satisfied with the work carried out; at a distance, they witnessed the projects carried out by the women leaders. Some former participants returned to the Permanent Forum on their own and met with the FIMI team in this and other settings. They were grateful for the changes they experienced after participating in the School.

In this context, the FIMI held the fourth and the fifth edition, in 2016 and 2018¹, respectively.

It is worth mentioning that from 2015 to 2018, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations agreed with the FIMI to lead the EGLMI with the aim of strengthening the capacities and knowledge of indigenous women leaders regarding food security and human rights. At this time, during three editions, the School implemented national programs in: **Peru, Bolivia, India, Philippines, El Salvador, Panama, and Paraguay.** In the last edition, it led these programs in four socio-cultural regions: **Mesoamerica, South America, Africa.** and Asia, wherein leaders from various Indigenous Peoples and countries took part. In the different training levels, a total of **230 indigenous women participated.**

At the end of **the 2018 edition**, a total of **120 women leaders** from 41 countries from various socio-cultural regions had participated in the School, resulting in a network of achievements and improved learning.

The objectives had been widely achieved: providing visibility to indigenous women and helping them speak out at the international level due to the role they play in their cultures. So, it was necessary to tell about the fruits reaped by the School through a plan on how to compile the stories of the women leaders, focused on recording the voices, experiences, challenges, personal changes, and individual and collective hopes of their participation in the School. At the same time, it would be a good time to read in retrospect about the successes, improvements, and pending tasks of the work accomplished; and—why not? — to reinvent the most emblematic program of the FIMI.

In this work, former participants in the training process helped out with interviewing some of the women leaders. Subsequently, each story was put together to tell how dozens of indigenous women have joined hands to move

forward towards worlds with less inequality, where cultural diversity may belong and each People may have continuity and develop themselves according to their own decisions.



*The collected stories will state—
based on the leaders' words—
what the training program
represented for their work and
collective purposes, as well as their
journeys. They will also expound
on their resistances, satisfactions,
references, and utopias.*



©FIMI. PUnited Nations entry, participants of the 5th edition of the GLSIW, New York City.

1. In 2017, the International Program did not take place

MYRNA CUNNINGHAM KAIN

A wise, indigenous, Miskito woman, who has traveled along long flat and wide roads with strong and sure steps, in her tireless and committed struggle to defend, exercise, and demand the exercise of her rights, those of the women and Indigenous Peoples of the world, from a holistic and comprehensive point of view. She recognizes that the Miskito are a border people resulting from national governments, and due to the imposition of borders they have been divided between Honduras and Nicaragua.



©FIMI. Photograph provided by Dr. Myrna Cunningham.

Myrna studied Public Health, is a physician by profession and a defender of rights by her own conviction. Throughout her life, she has assumed different responsibilities in her country, related to the process of building autonomy in the regions of the Caribbean coast of Nicaragua. She contributed enormously to the building of a multi-ethnic State that in 1987 acknowledged for the first time the collective rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Afro-descendant population that inhabit half of Nicaragua as a country.

In recent years she has worked at the regional and international levels, promoting —from her vision about life and the world— the rights of Indigenous Peoples, especially concerning education, health, autonomy, and territorial rights. In this journey and work, women, Indigenous young women, and Indigenous people with disabilities have been an important focus due to their contribution to their work, experience, and knowledge towards a better quality of life for all.

During her childhood, an event marked her life. Myrna lived in a banana monoculture area, which determined the diet and productive activities of the communities. Since they only had one production item, child malnutrition increased dramatically. During this period, boys and girls got used to eating only bananas, since they did not have other foods to complement the necessary nutrients to ensure a balanced diet.

Entonces, según ella, un pueblo que quizás Then, according to her, a people which had perhaps been engaged to fishing, hunting, and nomadism, began to settle around the churches and banana collection centers, which encouraged her interest and determination to be trained and educated on the issue of health. One of her objectives was to find answers to health conditions and consequently understand the situation that brought about poor health services. Additionally, she lived near what was the first hospital, a place where autonomous regions are now located, which was only 10 kilometers away from her home.

These events marked Myrna's life and made an impact on her leadership as a woman in the defense of life, the rights, and the territory of women and ancestral peoples.

A gathering of knowledge: the emergence of the Global Leadership School of indigenous women

For Myrna, who already had a leadership trajectory and accumulated experiences and knowledge throughout her journey, it has been important to open new paths and build bridges so that women continue advancing their knowledge and their exercise of individual



©FIMI. Photograph provided by Dr. Myrna Cunningham.

and collective rights.

One of her challenges has been promoting training and advocacy spaces for indigenous women. It has been from this that she has proposed the idea of the creation of the Global Leadership School, which has been sponsored by the FIMI.

For her, the spirit of the school focuses on developing the capacities of indigenous women who are leaders in different parts of the world, so that they may have the strength and wisdom to influence in settings around the world. From her point of view, the idea of promoting a training space for and belonging to indigenous women arises from the identification of women who have already had experience as activists at a global level in their communities and countries, with a certain

degree of knowledge and interest in specific issues, but mainly in understanding how these issues affect the lives of indigenous women in their territories. In this regard, she says:



*“The school first puts these women in contact with each other because the first role of the school is to put them together on a virtual platform; but then, it offers them the opportunity to participate in one of the mechanisms that the United Nations has for Indigenous Peoples, such as the **Permanent Forum**”.*

Myrna came up with the idea of the Global School as a process of learning by doing, in which women leaders begin to understand what global advocacy means, which in turn allows them to see how their recommendations and input turn into recommendations of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, and later into recommendations of the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations, or even into important input for resolutions of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). She says: ***“In short, the Global School empowers women to take the voice of their communities to the international level, to influence the creation of public policies, which are later brought back to their communities so that they can advance their work”.***

Among the main motivations for Myrna to propose the creation of the Global School was, first of all, the promotion of actions in favor of indigenous women. After analyzing the adoption of the women’s platform at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing she saw that indigenous women were not

being reached.



“Indigenous women realized that either they were the ones who had to promote that something be done in their favor at the global level or else nothing was going to get done”.

She was also driven by the desire to benefit the indigenous women of the communities because they realize that they are carriers of ancestral knowledge, they are the main reproducers of their peoples’ cultures, with much to contribute in this regard; however, these facts still go widely unnoticed. Therefore, the school could provide visibility to these indigenous women’s contributions.

Based on her sense and expertise, the philosophy of the Global School contributes to providing indigenous women visibility in the creation of public policies from the international to the local level. In the promotion of a dialogue of information, that is, each one of them, from their own experience, could share their knowledge and insights in order to use a fundamental tool, such as advocacy, at different levels, making sure to emphasize the importance of understanding when one assumes the commitment to advocate since it is only achieved through dialogue. She points out:

“One cannot advocate solely through confrontation”.

Myrna affirms that part of the school’s spirit also consists of the systematization and documentation of how women have contributed to conflict resolution and the

importance of their role in continuing to support this action. A decisive argument was to consider that, although progress has been made in the recognition of collective Human Rights of Indigenous Peoples and those of women, there is still a huge gap between the acknowledged rights and their practical implementation, which, according to her, can only be achieved if these rights are translated into procedures, policies, programs, and a budget. So, the school seeks to contribute to all of this.

She also remembers the different things that happened to create the Global School. She states that once the FIMI was created, different meetings were held to define the programs that were going to prioritize from the perspective of indigenous women. For this reason, from the beginning, they decided that indeed it was obviously an organization created for political advocacy. It was important to achieve greater participation of women at the global and regional levels, with the ability to dialogue with various actors and influence them. Therefore, they considered the necessity of developing these capacities in women.

The first steps consisted of the creation of a first academic committee, for which the FIMI convened a meeting of more than 30 indigenous and non-indigenous women in Mexico. In that meeting, they analyzed and discussed the idea of the Global School, such as in what ways the school would be accredited, the courses that would be taught, and what their content and organization would be. The result of this meeting served to bring about the first curricular offer of the Global School.

During this phase, it was essential for her to communicate to the attending women the spirit in which the Global School was thought to be promoted: a space for the training and advocacy of indigenous women, ensuring that everybody understood its importance for women leaders around the world.



After this, it was necessary to search for resources to start the school, so the FIMI approached different cooperation entities and international donors to obtain resources, which was successfully achieved. With this, the School was opened. In this phase, the necessity of a person for academic leadership was identified, so a coordinator was appointed and the group of women for academic advising was reduced, which from the beginning played an important role in the selection of students and the monitoring of what the graduates do when they return to their communities.

From the beginning, Myrna was aware of how important it has been to have important contacts to become strategic allies in a politically **important process for indigenous women as part of the FIMI**, such as Lea Mackenzie and Mónica Alemán, who in that period played a predominant role in the management of the School.

She also recalls the valuable advice and accompaniment of Ana María Enríquez, through Vivian Stromberg from UN Women, who supported the proposal from the beginning, because it allowed her to confirm her work in favor of indigenous women. Finally, the first donors, such as the Channel Foundation and other Dutch organizations



©FIMI. During the FIMI Leadership Award ceremony, 2013. New York City.

which, in their role as cooperators, believed, agreed to, and contributed to the necessary resources to make this dream and project a reality.

From Myrna's perspective, the development and management of a process such as the Global School, for the strengthening of advocacy capacities of indigenous women, implied challenges, difficulties, and strengths, including the fact of having built strong alliances, for example, with Columbia University, which made a high-level academic endorsement possible, so the role of Elsa Stamatopoulou was fundamental; likewise, the mechanism for selecting the participants, ensuring that they came from networks and responded to organizations and groups of

women and young women of Indigenous Peoples; and the combination of the virtual stage, with the face-to-face stage in New York, as part of the teaching-learning process.

For her, it has been valuable how the concept of learning by doing was applied, which has been fundamental for the participants; as well as the fact that it is a course offered in different languages, which is a great strength.

Además, menciona que la mayor debilidad Also, she states that the greatest weakness in the process has been to ensure that the participants can enter the virtual platform, considering that the issue of virtual education continues to be a challenge for Indigenous Peoples since they have no conditions or

resources to access the platform. This is something that still needs to be worked on so that both women and men have access and can make use of these tools.

Experiences, challenges, and dreams in building leadership for indigenous women at a global level

Myrna, as a wise woman, has traveled various paths in the defense of women's and Indigenous Peoples' rights, as an interlayer of dreams and realities for herself and indigenous women, has made an effort throughout her life in encouraging the fulfillment of her goals. In this journey, she identified that women must strengthen their capacities. For this reason, she decided to promote the school for leadership training, in which she has been one of the main facilitators. It was also a rewarding experience because she would learn and relearn together with the leaders.

She is also satisfied to be a facilitator of an intercultural course with students from

various parts of the world, which has been challenging, mainly because of the virtual follow-up. Regarding the in-person part, the use of a methodology that facilitates the dialogue of information as a two-way process—due to the importance of recognizing a large amount of knowledge in women—has been a challenge. However, she managed it through facilitation, so that they can share their knowledge, systematize it, and present it in projects and truly learn how to use it on the international stage.

For her, this means being like an artisan who weaves, paints, and combines various materials to create a work of art, and that is how she understands facilitation, as the art of sharing, learning, and teaching.

A challenge, according to her, has to do with the follow-up part that must be done with each one of the students from the school itself; that is, how to ensure that once they get back from the training process—after being selected as part of regional networks—they can contribute to strengthening these networks.

For her, if something is making progress, it is because it responds to changes, that is why she deems important to rethink some aspects



of the school, such as trying to link training more with global processes —for example, since the SDGs will still be in force for the next 10 years, the students need to be clear on how to link them in specific processes in their regions— and ensuring that, upon their return to their countries they can take actions to achieve the progress of these objectives with an Indigenous focus.

For her, it is necessary to focus more energy on CEDAW, and obviously, on using Indigenous procedures and mechanisms, but also all of the existing ones as procedures, treaties, and United Nations bodies.

From her point of view, the school has great significance for indigenous women leaders as it represents a huge aspiration, mainly because they need to gain visibility; they want each of their processes, programs, and contributions to be recognized; as well as

the fact that it opens up an opportunity for them to link them to the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, placing them in networks with a huge number of important international contacts with whom they can advocate.



“The students of the school highly value the possibility of connecting with other women leaders from other parts of the world from whom they can learn and share”.



©FIMI. During the 2013 FIMI Leadership Award ceremony. New York City

Main lessons

During her leadership journey, Myrna has woven lessons adding different colored threads to her life to continue strengthening indigenous women and their peoples. Having promoted the Global Leadership School provided her with new learning experiences, including the courage of North American women leaders, who have a huge burden of pain as descendants of mothers who went to schools where they were strongly mistreated. The fact that they feel confident in making their accumulated pain of so many years known is a way of bonding with all of them. She also spent time with women leaders from other parts of the world, who dealt with situations of discrimination, perhaps not the same situations as the others, but they strongly affected their lives. Despite this, they stood up and moved forward with strength and power.



“It seems to me that the school is a space to build a sisterhood and it has played a role of collective healing among them”.

Another lesson has been to value how the school has managed to make known some of the collective processes promoted by women leaders in their countries, and pick up the energy and work of colleagues with different abilities, such as in the case of an Asian woman leader who has contributed to the disability network with her leadership, and the fact that she has participated in the School helped to bring the collective demands together, in addition to the individual demands submitted to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

As life lessons, she recognizes that they contribute with significant elements for her individual and collective growth, which she greatly appreciates.

Myrna’s life story is a lesson in itself, her inner being as a leader, and a woman who builds bridges, overcomes obstacles, and leads the way for other women. It allows us to understand the importance of her existence, her presence on this earthly plane, a space in which she has created an opportunity for many generations of indigenous women leaders in the world, sowing seeds to achieve different ways that that specific, individual, and collective rights as indigenous women and those of their original ancestral peoples are recognized, respected, and vindicated.

She is an indigenous leader who, by her work, commitment, devotion, and dedication, has contributed to the respect and acknowledgment of the existence, history, and lives of the women and Indigenous Peoples of the world.

©FIMI. Victoria Tauli Corpuz, Former Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples with participants of the 3rd edition of EGLMI, New York City.



Life stories:

**INDIGENOUS WOMEN LEADERS FROM
THE ARCTIC, NORTH AMERICA, AND THE
PACIFIC**

LAURA VUKSON

A strong indigenous woman leader and possessor of knowledge and wisdom passed down from generations of grandmothers and grandfathers. An indigenous woman is one who defends the beliefs and traditions of her people.



©FIMI. Photograph provided by participant Laura Vukson, 4th edition of GLSIW.

Laura, with the identity of an indigenous people, is a weaver of life, dreams, and challenges, a leader who has pressed forward with firm steps to defend her rights.

She was born in Ontario, Canada, and belongs to the Tlicho people, which gave rise to her being and cultural principles that support her life practices. At 38 years old, she is a mother of two children, whom she gave names in her traditional language because it means a lot to her and her family since part of their indigenous culture is preserved through them.

Her mother is a residential school survivor, an education system that benefited families living in certain areas. She comes from a mixed family. Her father is European and her mother is indigenous; however, she proudly assumes her indigenous identity.

She remembers when she was eight years old and was ashamed of being indigenous due to the strong racism in the city, which had been etched in her memory for a long time and marked part of her growth. Teachers, artists, or musicians who used to teach at the school were not indigenous, so it was difficult for her



as it caused her to deny who she was. She believed her identity was not good because it did not favor her at all; on the contrary, she was discriminated against.

Having lived in a social context where indigenous people represent a minority, living in conditions of exclusion was a complicated situation. Despite this, she managed to identify herself as part of an ancestral people that have survived racism.

Leadership as an indigenous woman

Laura's leadership began from the time she recognized that the Tlicho people can move forward in the defense of their identity as a people as well as of all the individuals who belong to them. It was confirmed when she was appointed project coordinator for the annual meeting of peoples held in Toronto, an event attended by many people where she realized the great power that peoples have. Furthermore, she realized that she was capable of managing and directing many things, even though she was only a private student.



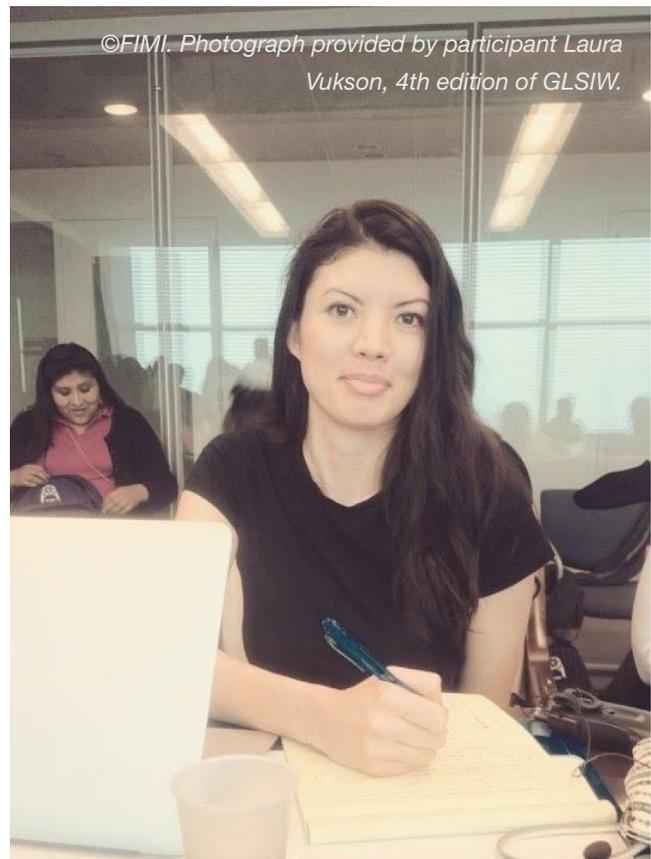
The road has not been easy for her, but fortunately, she has been supported by her family, her main allies. Her mother, who returned to school at age 50, has become her source of inspiration and motivation to resume her studies at the university, as well as her sister, a business entrepreneur, whose ideas she follows. She listens to her sister, respects her, and follows her advice, but overall her sister encourages her to believe in herself and to press forward.

She also identifies her partner Joseph, who encourages her when needed, taking her by the hand to continue on her path of leadership. She remembers attending a leadership meeting where she realized the importance of having a teacher; she believes that she is still in search of someone. She admires Cindy Blackstock, a woman who has fought for various issues, who is a public figure in her country. So far, they are the mentors with whom she identifies herself. She believes there is still a long way to go, but she is sure she will find leadership examples to follow.

At this time, her leadership has been focused on indigenous youth and artists, taking into account that, from her perspective, they show great potential as leaders with their dynamism and enthusiasm. Being director of a training center has allowed her to send indigenous artists to remote communities in Canada, where they hold workshops for children twice a year to restore the values of their culture.

For this reason, her support has been focused on strengthening the abilities of young people who can work with other young people, as well as artists who, from their different types of art, can communicate and teach cultural principles to youth.

One of the constants in Laura's life is learning; therefore, when she heard about a training program for women that was being created by the International Forum for Indigenous Women, she was very interested in it. Her



Her participation in the Global Leadership School

motivation was based on the fact that one of her dreams since childhood had been to go to the United Nations and be with other indigenous women to share and learn from them.

Fortunately, she was able to enroll in the Leadership School and participate. It allowed her to continue learning and fulfill her childhood dream.

In this training space, one of her most valuable experiences was participating along with other women leaders in a play about an indigenous woman who spoke out, which helped her to understand her leadership mission. Going to the United Nations with all of the participants was like going together with her own sisters,

even if they were from different communities in the world. This experience made her reflect on the need for creating ties among women to strengthen each other and influence others.

One of the tools presented during the Global School was the advocacy plan, which meant a lot of effort for her because it took more time for her to understand a plan packed with a lot of information. Such experience allowed her to understand that advocacy is a process, which must be worked on as a collective to solve a problem that is affecting the majority.

After she participated in the Leadership School, she decided to impart her new knowledge to the community as it is a closer place for her to address and understand their problems, so sharing her knowledge with them has greater value. She is planning to promote a larger space with other communities, which implies more effort and time. However, she believes it is necessary because she has realized that nobody wants to talk about their problems, even though they should be made known to improve the situation. She points out:



“It’s necessary to get in touch with other communities and share our problems and ideas to improve our lives. I was able to bring those ideas to my community”.

For her, it has been important to put into practice the skills learned, such as coordination, through which she managed to get a job as a program manager for artists, an opportunity for helping to strengthen their self-esteem, assisting in cases of mental health and the fight against suicide, with very high occurrence rates in the communities. With this opportunity, it has been possible

to integrate other groups, institutions, and sectors in the promotion of actions to deal with these problems.

Laura believes that knowledge is a means for strengthening leadership skills. One of her main lessons learned was understanding the importance of establishing association mechanisms with like-minded organizations, to facilitate the identification of solutions to real-world problems to establish sustainable solutions. In this respect, she states:



“A huge lesson for me was learning to associate with these organizations, something I never did before”.

For her, being part of the Global School has been priceless because it allowed her to learn about the rights of indigenous peoples and be more aware of the importance of working for the causes of her people; that is why she stopped working for non-indigenous people, identifying the need to contribute more among her native people.



Individual and collective dreams

Her greatest dream is to find her voice and make it be heard by others, speaking out about what she thinks, believes, and feels, and that is what she has started to do with the help of her children. At the collective level, she hopes that the project in the communities will be sustainable so that they become self-reliant people and put forth their own resources toward moving forward. With satisfaction, she states:

“I found my voice with my partner, my friends, and my family”.

As a leader, Laura recognizes that it is necessary to pass on experiences and knowledge to the new generations. Today she wants to pass it on to her children, so that they become men who are capable of loving, recognize who they are, and when they go out into the world they can feel proud of themselves, of the identity that they possess, and have enough confidence to face the world, and embrace their culture with its ways and traditions.

She is sure about the importance of working hard for women by holding workshops led by others, as well by as getting involved in other settings such as the women for climate change summit, in which her family and her community are participating, thus representing more effort for her. However, she is willing to be included because she is aware of its valuable opportunities for women and indigenous peoples.

Laura’s leadership has been about understanding how the confirmation of her indigenous Tlicho Dene identity and that of women have been intertwined in her life

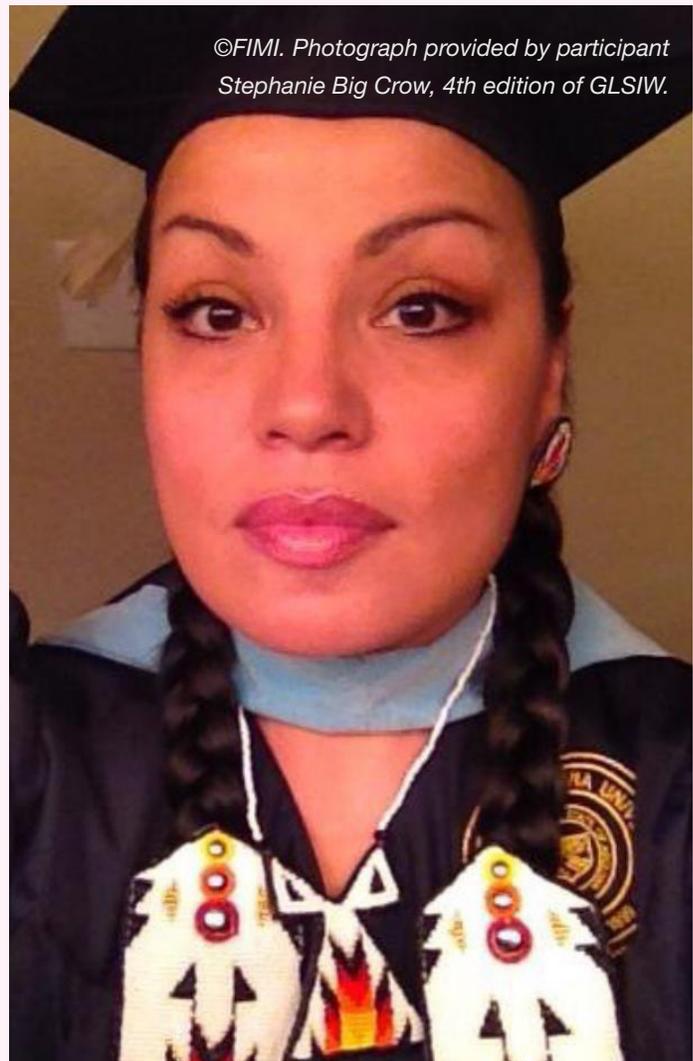
experience within her family and community, endeavoring to advance the recognition of both identities as part of her diverse and integral being.

She is a defender of culture, life, and rights; a leader who has taken advantage of her knowledge and education from the Global School as tools to continue contributing to her people with wisdom and strength.

STEPHANIE BIG CROW

The indigenous woman, by her generic nature, represents a genetically and linguistically diverse nation.

She is part of a tribe and preserves the values of her people.



©FIMI. Photograph provided by participant Stephanie Big Crow, 4th edition of GLSIW.

Stephanie, an indigenous Oglala Lakota woman who practices her indigenous language, is a woman leader empowered through her rights, which she demands and exercises with courage and wisdom.

She was born in South Dakota, the United States of North America, among a people who have historically fought to preserve their cultural practices and values amid their indigenous territory, in a social and political context where her people faced extermination.

In her youth, she grew up on the Red Pine Indian Reservation, located in the confines of the state of South Dakota. By studying history, she came to understand that the reservation

system was designed to assimilate or eradicate the rough American Indians, which has been very hard for her. During that time, she saw how her people fought to conserve their land.

She remembers that during her history class in the fourth grade of elementary school, her teacher usually used the term Indians to refer to the indigenous population, as determined in the discovery of America. She asked her teacher what she meant by an Indian as she defined herself as an Indian. In response, the teacher replied that such a group of people no longer existed. At that time, her teacher's response confused her about her identity, since she and her family had always identified

themselves as Indigenous Peoples.

From that time on, the events that marked her childhood and youth had an impact on the social, spiritual, and economic areas of her life, thus strengthening her position as an indigenous Lakota woman.

Leadership in the defense and vindication of Lakota identity

For Stephanie, leadership has been a mechanism for defending her identity, to be respected and recognized. At age 21, she became aware that she could not allow her country, with a system full of greed and repression against her people, to dictate her own existence as a Lakota woman. It made her stronger and more determined in assuming her role as a leader. She states:

“

“I told myself to stop allowing this country full of greed and power to dictate my own existence as a Lakota woman”.



©FIMI. Photograph provided by participant Stephanie Big Crow, 4th edition of GLSIW.

The circumstances that propelled her leadership role and capacity began on the reservation at a very early age. As she grew up, she realized the injustices against her people, causing her anger and helplessness. She was bothered about how the world saw her, for her physical appearance as a marginalized Lakota female. A society that discriminated against Indigenous people for being different was part of the racist system.

This marked the beginning of her leadership, in the determination to defend and fight for assuming and practicing her indigenous identity, of which she has always been proud.

To do so, she has relied on allies, such as her grandmother and father, who taught her values and life practices to guide, sue and conduct collective lawsuits, which allowed her to regain strength and move forward in the defense of her people. She was also supported by the leaders of her community who verbally passed on social norms and spiritual values that have become a part of her identity as a Lakota woman.

During her journey as a leader, she has been able to single out her maternal grandmother as an example and role model of an indigenous woman. Her grandmother invested time in explaining to her why society was the way it was and challenged her to confront inequality and assume her role and identity as a Lakota woman. Her grandmother taught her to protect, not only herself, but also her culture; to preserve, transfer, and pass it down to future generations. She says with emotion:

“My grandmother sang me a song about what it means to be Lakota, that I should be strong because of the generations that come from them and the power that they had”.

The presence of her grandmother had a big impact on her identity as an indigenous woman and the strength of her leadership, teachings that she carries with her in her struggles and efforts today.

Stephanie has focused her leadership role on the educational and health system within her territory, and in general, on breaking up that oppressive structure that has tried to assimilate them as a people through Western culture. She has made some progress, focusing on explaining how the economic situation in the United States is sized up, as well as its effects on the Lakota population.

Her existence has been determined by recognizing how important the values and principles of her culture are, as a benchmark and basis for leadership and authority, which are defined by natural law and the spiritual roles that outline the ways of being a woman in their society. For example, the Lakota women’s fortitude, which enables them to foresee unfortunate circumstances that may or may not affect their people, has become part of their many skills, since their power to predict the events of their village comes from their feminine energy.

Another set of valuable principles important to her include generosity, honesty, and humility as the basis for her role as a leader. These principles are also inherent to men but are stronger in women, who the latter need to maintain their responsibility to stay connected to their ancestors and future generations.

Stephanie has been a perseverant woman to achieve her objectives. She has been in the search of spaces to strengthen her skills and leadership mission. Before managing her participation in the training program of the International Indigenous Women Forum (FIMI), she had been studying the historical and cultural situation of her people, which helped her to identify the depth of her ancestral roots and move forward in maintaining the strength of her people.



Global Leadership School: inspiration and struggle for Lakota Women’s rights

Later on, she applied to the Leadership School, which represented an enormous possibility to learn about the rights of indigenous peoples and women.

During her participation, she gained valuable experiences, such as watching the video of John Washburn who represented the

International Criminal Court Program, which allowed her to understand how Indigenous Peoples can use international mechanisms to defend their rights in their communities, and establish relationships at the international level that allow them to improve their situation as Indigenous Peoples. This experience gained alongside other women leaders



encouraged her to continue preparing herself, learning, and knowing to strengthen her leadership and confirm her efforts to work for her people.

The implementation of a successful advocacy plan allowed her to address a specific issue from what she knew about the reality of her people and of the community with which she was working. The approach consisted of restoring the Indigenous protocols that existed within the language of the Indigenous ancestors, which had disappeared due to the difficulties in having a general vision of what Indigenous practices or protocols look like within their tribal nation. She was also interested in delving into the impact of colonization and how the dominant society prevented the members of the communities from observing the contextual construction among their people.

This plan meant more than just complying with a training requirement at the Global School; it was also a commitment to herself and her people. It meant the possibility of promoting a strategic action and vindication of their collective rights.

For this reason, she strengthened her commitment to work within the communities and strengthen the forms of community organization themselves, from constitutional reforms to the promotion of mechanisms for the revitalization of their language, as well as identifying the legal framework related to the property rights of genetic materials of the people of their communities. She has also supported the establishment of a framework system to stop multiple oppressions, designed based on the cultural norms of Indigenous Peoples.

Despite the progress in these actions, she deems necessary to get involved in other issues, such as health and education, but mainly in the human rights of women and Indigenous Peoples. She is interested in continuing her efforts to reaffirm the use and application of some concepts

that are part of her culture so that they can be normalized by society as a whole.

She feels satisfied because she has become successful academically due to her management and knowledge of property rights and her understanding of the international framework as a result of her participation in the Global School. With this achievement, she managed to attend the Law School and focused on property law, as one more space to promote her fight against today's colonialism that continues oppressing her people.

One of her main lessons learned as a student at the Leadership School was to be able to apply genetic property rights as being part of the domain of Human Rights, in terms of biogenetics, also extended to biodiversity and the protection of traditional knowledge, related to the exploitation of natural resources, as valid arguments for the defense of land, territory, and life, included in the collective rights of her people. She explains:



“What I learned raised the level of thought in my subconscious mind to a space and time where I understand things better. It was a powerful lesson that motivated me to continue learning”.

She learned about international conventions and mechanisms that helped her to support her approaches through different terminologies to redefine and reposition the legal framework

existing within her own tribal government. For her, the use of this covenant framework has been extremely valuable as it has allowed her to promote a paradigm shift in the thoughts of her tribal leaders, who respect her work, the integrity of her actions, and her leadership role as a Lakota woman. In her own words, she states:

“What I learned has helped me a lot and contributed to a personal and spiritual acknowledgment of the earth and the human journey among my people”.

Individual and collective dreams

Since the beginning of her leadership, she has claimed to be a dreamer of changes, which today she affirms to have achieved through the use of strategies with her partner, family, and in her community. One of the most important collective changes is those promoted in the legal framework, based on the very existence of the people that will benefit future generations.

She dreams of becoming an indigenous woman who represents her people, giving back with work that she has achieved and learned. Collectively, as a mother, grandmother, and aunt, she hopes that her role as a leader contributes toward using all of the entities necessary to create. She is grateful to the FIMI for helping her bring about various changes through her training.

She needs to pass on her own lessons and experiences, which is why she has taken the initiative to educate her children and husband so that they can see reality differently, using mechanisms in defense of the rights of Indigenous Peoples. She has also contemplated including young people. In her advocacy work, she currently advises young people, emphasizing information about the defense mechanisms of human rights, with a comprehensive and collective view and from a global perspective.

After learning more about the history of her people, she developed an integrated vision of their problems by using culture and international laws, learning to decolonize what she was taught at school and unlearn the concept of exclusion against her people that the system had created, and replace that with learning about who the Lakota really are, understanding in depth their history and worldview. One result of this change is that now in the university there is a tribal professor, and that is already a great step in the right direction.

She promoted a school break course at schools called “Unlearn and decolonize,” which consisted of students visiting historical sites and spiritual healers, from whom they learned about their culture. Something surprising was that at the end of the course the young people were moved and cried excitedly for having met older and wise women and men who had accumulated all of that knowledge and shared it with them.

Stephanie’s story means traveling in shapes of different colors as an indigenous Lakota woman, with her own life, and from her identity. She has defended and vindicated her culture; maintaining, valuing, practicing, and writing it in her own language and experiences.

As a leader, she demonstrates that when the common good is sought from the recognition of the knowledge and principles of the elderly, the expected changes can be achieved to have an inclusive society; respectful of the specific and collective rights of women and men from a people that has an ancestral wealth of spirituality, with wisdom and determination.



THERESA JOHN

A strong, wise, sure woman who possesses the cultural knowledge and values of a people that ensures the progress of the community in knowledge and environmental protection, and who is connected with spirituality.



©FIMI. Photograph provided by participant Theresa John, 2nd edition of GLSIW.

Theresa John, a Yupik Eskimo woman, is a wise leader and protector of life in all its manifestations and respectful of the values of her people.

She is from southern Alaska and belongs to the Tuktu Bay people, as part of the Yupik Eskimo culture. At 63 years of age, she considers herself an indigenous woman with knowledge of the cultural principles of her People. She is vigorous in the demand and defense of her language, history, and respect

for the elements that support the existence of her community and territory. She needs to stay interconnected with others, the environment, and spirituality because her existence is sustained through them.

She grew up in a traditional home. She was educated by her tribe, where knowledge was based on the community level. It allowed her to maintain strong family ties. Her parents taught her to value herself and her community and encouraged her to have thoughts and life

practices for the benefit of all.

She recognizes that her country has been going through some cultural changes, such as the loss of their language and profound traditional practices, that is why it is necessary to provide local and ancestral knowledge and prepare children to become better leaders of tomorrow. She is concerned about the increasing social problems, which require finding ways to solve the effects they have on people. One growing phenomenon is the rate of suicide cases, which did not occur before but are currently being committed in very high percentages, representing a danger to society. Faced with this issue, she is willing to work together with other sectors to help minimize this situation.

Leadership for her is a means to bring about changes that can improve the situation that is affecting a certain group. For this reason, in her role as a teacher, she promotes

Leadership as an indigenous woman

indigenous knowledge, teaching, and the importance of understanding the knowledge of her Indigenous Peoples from that position.

Her objectives are that students recognize the richness of their peoples' worldview; understand the importance of living in harmony; work together to connect and relate with each other in a space to celebrate their spirituality; as a beginning that allows them to identify themselves from the energy of wisdom and balance, and find ways of communication to make strategic changes, promoting better services and dignified life for people.

She recognizes the exercise of her leadership this way, focusing on the restoration and preservation of the Yupik Eskimo culture, to

which she belongs, honors, and respects.

Her grandmother became her role model. She used to tell her stories of her ancestors, passed on her cultural values and a deep understanding of her identity as an indigenous woman. She proudly states:

“

“My grandmother was an example of being successful and hard-working”.

Her grandmother was an example of someone who practiced the ways of an indigenous woman and was her source of inspiration in sustaining and undertaking her leadership.

So far, her leadership has focused primarily on the university level through the support of a group of indigenous people from Alaska, who have organized and gotten together at annual meetings to address their problems and identify solutions. She also supports the Indigenous Doctorate program, ensuring that students obtain indigenous knowledge, becoming directly involved in the planning of rituals in the region, during which they congregate among peoples to perform traditional songs and dances, which contain profound messages of unity, harmony, and justice.

Being part of the Yupik Eskimo people, she identifies representative symbols of authority and leadership as part of its culture, including ceremonies and rituals in which they make sure that all those who make up the community get involved, from children to the elderly; who, through songs, prayers, and dances, take up the values of respect and responsibility that must be assumed as leaders or authorities in the community.



An intangible and powerful value in their culture is spirituality because it is profoundly powerful for the exercise of leadership, complemented with the use of language. Both support the acts of those who have a role of authority or leadership within the community, which are elements of ancestral knowledge that she honors, respects, and practices.





Participation at the Global Leadership School

For Theresa, it is important to strengthen leadership and protect Indigenous Peoples, which is why she considers it necessary to be trained and obtain new knowledge so that she can share it. When she heard about the Leadership School, she found the opportunity to achieve this purpose, so she applied to participate. She states:

“We come from communities that loved us and we grew up appreciating each other, respecting our environment. We must work to connect and help each other live a good life, that is why training is valuable — so we can achieve that”.

Her participation at the Leadership School allowed her to have valuable experiences, such as having a deeper understanding of how leaders around the world are working day and night to protect their peoples and defend their rights. Those leaders have been able to stand up and be the voice of those who do not have it. This made her reflect on the strength of leadership, as a way of making the demands and proposals of the peoples be recognized.

Upon her return from the Global School, an important commitment for her consisted of sharing what she had learned with her people, one of her contributions as a leader. She organized training days with the Alaska Native group, raising people’s awareness about the causes and effects of crime rates, which are too high in her country. As a result, she managed to make the community understand that, faced with this problem, it is necessary to protect women and other groups such as children and Indigenous Peoples, who are more vulnerable to experiencing an episode of violence. Also, she promoted the application of tools that she learned to use during her training so that they could take advocacy actions to change a difficult situation, for



©FIMI. Photograph provided by participant
Theresa John, 2nd edition of GLSIW.

society to be well-organized, responsible, and a defender of the right to life.

She has also promoted coordination actions that she considers opportunities to continue supporting her people, with employees who work in the educational system of Alaska for indigenous people, taking into account that they are also from the same people. They address issues that affect the living conditions of the population and that will cause negative effects on future generations in the long run, such as their way of eating, dressing, and loss of their traditions.

For her, promoting the participation of other sectors in her actions undertaken to strengthen the culture and rights of her people has been one of her priorities in her leadership. With satisfaction, she states:



“I have been proactive. I have learned to identify my experience and ability to acquire knowledge, which has been valuable at the university level and in the service of my people”.

For this reason, she has focused on the restoration and practice of the Indigenous language in the hope of continuing its dissemination everywhere through joint work alliances, through the implementation of the culture revaluation processes that she has directed.

She firmly believes that knowledge and learning can become wisdom when put into practice in the service of others. Her participation in the Leadership School allowed her to verify this. Therefore, she recognizes that part of the knowledge acquired in the School process has been to understand that everything is holistic; that is, her language, traditions, and cultural practices. It has been relevant in the exercise of her leadership because now her vision goes beyond the understanding of how indigenous knowledge systems have a high degree of reciprocity and comprehensiveness.

At present, she has managed to implement culturally transcendental university courses, which have allowed her to demonstrate how ancestral knowledge of her culture can contribute to public policies, development, and knowledge of oneself. With this, she has challenged the established training frameworks so that the university can use what is appropriate for students. With these actions, some changes have been established, challenging the traditional training system, promoting new ways of teaching and learning,

with a comprehensive and holistic view of life and knowledge itself. She states:

“At school, we acquired a lot of invaluable knowledge, wisdom, and tools that opened another view of knowledge and its value for life”.

Individual and collective dreams for life

The journey of her leadership has allowed her to confirm that knowledge and experiences acquired are the basis for training others and promoting changes in them and their environment, which was originally her dream. Now that she can elaborate her syllabus, she is trying to implement and share what she has learned with her colleagues at the university, to whom she has announced that being part of a global network, such as the International Indigenous Women Forum (FIMI), broadly opened her view of the meaning of knowledge and its transference to youth to create awareness, and the importance of its use to promote changes in people’s lives.

Her dream is to continue making a difference in the world to say that she is a defender of indigenous rights, of the cultural practices of her people, and of their way of being and living. That is her greatest hope, to become a legend in the thoughts of others, about the importance of understanding the concept of love, communication, and how to live and work together. In her own words, she says:



“I hope the message of love can flourish so that people understand the need to work hard and survive and discover the importance of unity”.

Theresa believes that it is necessary to pass on her own lessons and experiences, which she has started to do with her younger sister, providing her with advice, guidance, and training, becoming mentoring her in whatever she does. Theresa shares her insights accumulated throughout her life with her sister so that they are not lost, and together they are developing tools to not leave other people behind and to pass on that knowledge to them so that they share it with other leaders and their families.

Despite the progress made, she believes that there is still much to be done. Education and a better system are needed to improve people’s lives. Also, work should be done to prevent young people from committing suicide, to seek mechanisms to counteract climate change, and thus prevent families from migrating elsewhere, leaving behind their lands. Her commitment to promoting positive changes on these issues continues and she hopes to have more allies to achieve it.

Theresa’s leadership is linked to the deepest sense of her being Indigenous, demonstrating that her struggle to contribute to humanity — called to unite and complement each other and continue making efforts for a better life for all of those among her people— is possible.

Throughout her journey as a Yupik Eskimo woman, she has been reaffirming the cultural and spiritual principles and values of her people, which support and give sense to her collective leadership geared toward the service of the community from a holistic and comprehensive perspective, of respect for life and collective rights of women and their people.



©FIMI. Photograph taken from the projects of the
AYNI Indigenous Women's Fund



Life stories:
**INDIGENOUS WOMEN LEADERS
FROM ASIA**

ROMBA' MARANNU SOMBOLINGGI'

We are indigenous women. We practice and comply with tradition, culture, local wisdom, and customary law. We preserve and protect natural resources.



©FIMI. Romba' Marannu and Martha Ntoipo, GLSIW 2nd edition.

Romba is a Toraya woman leader who renews the spirit of her ancestors to vindicate them in the fight and vindication of their collective rights.

She was born in the city of Rantepao, Indonesia, where she learned about the values, practices, and traditions that are part of people's lives. She comes from a family that maintains cultural practices and local knowledge and is respectful of the traditional rules that govern her people.

She is the president of the Indigenous Peoples' Alliance of the Archipelago (PEREMPUAN AMAN), an organization committed to increasing the capacity and participation of indigenous women in the decision-making process, and it also promotes the promotion of policies at the community level to guarantee protection and compliance with the rights of indigenous women. As chairwoman of the National Executive Board of AMAN, she is responsible for promoting issues related to indigenous women and preparing the program



©FIMI. Photograph provided by Romba' Marannu, GLSIW 2nd edition

for the development of capacities in decision-making processes and political advocacy. Likewise, she conducts mechanisms of active negotiation, lobbying, conflict resolution, and other activities to guarantee the recognition and assistance of indigenous women when dealing with the defense of their territory.

When she was a child, her grandmother and grandfather invited her to travel, which allowed her to become acquainted with various places and their cultural elements. She remembers that the purpose of the trip was to visit the regent's home, attend celebrations, and, on many occasions, if people had problems council meetings were held, during which they let her play around or asked her to sit down and listen to the conversation while her father offered a solution, depending on the type of situation that needed to be resolved. As she was little, she did not understand;

however, she somehow understood that that was leadership. She proudly says:

"I am grateful to come from a family of a community leader".

When she was in primary school and secondary school, she actively participated in all of the activities, as well as those at the church and of the group of scouts.

Romba started her leadership path as a volunteer in activities held by indigenous peoples in Toraya and later worked as a technician of the indigenous organization staff. She actively engaged in various social actions in indigenous communities. As a result, she became a representative of indigenous women

in different forums where they discussed the situation they were dealing with.

Leadership as an indigenous woman in favor of community development

With this experience, she was entrusted with the position of representative of indigenous peoples, especially women. Meanwhile, she was responsible for the customary women's office and task force in AMAN, South Sulawesi. Later, she was elected president of the Toraya indigenous people through traditional assemblies. During the first indigenous women's congress, she was elected president of the women's committee due to her contributions for their benefit, which opened up the possibility for the indigenous women's community to appoint her chairwoman of the board of the Indigenous Women's Association of the Archipelago by the Sulawesi region, PEREMPUAN AMAN.

These new positions and roles implied much more responsibilities and requirements that demanded a stronger and more determined leadership role, especially in the meetings where she was asked to chair and/or act as spokesperson for the discussion group which she was working for, launching a debate on the reality of women and indigenous peoples. With satisfaction, she states:

The progress in Romba's leadership has been based on the support and assessment processes with her community from the beginning, giving priority to her work with indigenous women.

“

“The main engine, of course, is the experience and knowledge I have obtained, the personality I have developed due to the learning process, thanks to the support of my family”.

Getting to this point has been possible thanks to the support of Sombolinggo, her father, Denupa Rombelayuk, her mother, and also Yosni, her husband, as her first allies. They have helped her to stay firm in her leadership mission. They have represented her strength to move forward. They are wise, protect her, and are always present when there are problems in the community. She cheerfully states:





©FIMI. Group photo of GLSIW 2nd edition.

“

“I have an extraordinary husband. Once, when I was ironing clothes, he complained and said: ‘I need my wife to become something. She must develop more of herself out there. Don’t just stay at home.’ Those words gave me strength”.

The fact that her husband is also a representative of indigenous peoples has been helpful because sometimes he has also led and guided her with example and attitude, especially after having to fight with representatives of civil society.

She believes that what she has achieved so far is thanks to the example of other indigenous women and leaders. One of them is her mother, Doña Denupa, a wise woman and a role model of perseverance and solidarity, who shared knowledge with her, taught her how to think and act, and about the values and actions emanating from each person, and how she as a leader recognized the knowledge of the traditional elderly among her small town. She also identified Hermina Pasolang as a source of inspiration.

At a national level, she admires Aletha Baun’s from East Nusa Tenggara, while at the international level, Vicky Tauli-Corpuz and Myrna Cunningham, from whom she has learned a lot about their walk and acts in favor of the indigenous peoples around the world.

Romba’s leadership has mainly focused on indigenous people and women. For

example, when the proposal for implementing a regional regulation for her people called “ranperda” was discussed, she ensured that its approach included the reality and needs of indigenous women, and contain mechanisms to increase their participation and enhance their capacities.

Part of her Toraya culture recognizes tangible symbols that represent authority and leadership, including the name Tongkonan, which comes from the term “tongkon” which means “to sit.” The Tongkonan house is the governmental center for the Toraya community, that is why it cannot be privately or individually-owned because it is the ancestral inheritance of each family member or their descendant(s).

The Tongkonan house not only operates like a traditional house but also is considered a mother according to their culture; while Alang Sura, which is the building where the rice is kept, is considered a father. The Tongkonan and Alang Sura houses line up in front of each other because they are seen as a married couple. The Alang face south, while the Tongkonan faces north.

This philosophy raises the idea of duality, of the encounter between the feminine and the

masculine, as a principle of harmony between one and the other. Therefore, for their people there are three types of houses: Tongkonan Layuk, the highest place of authority that is normally used as a place of government; Ekamberan Tongkonan, the house of a family member who is authorized in local traditions and custom; and A'riri Batu Tongkonan, the house that only belongs to regular people.

As intangible symbols from the way of understanding creation and the world, they consider the Aluk Sanda Pitunna, which conceives three elements of life and the universe that coexist together and intertwine in each other, growing from small to large. These elements are called: Tallu Lolona, mainly Lolo Tau (the human), Lolo Tatanan (the plants), and Lolo Patuon (the animals / the stars). The rules of use and custom associated with the relationships of the human with nature are called Lolo Tatanan and Lolo Patuoan.

These symbols and values represent for her the worldview of her Toraya identity, which allows her to understand that nothing in the universe is isolated or separate, but rather is linked to each other and they interrelate in harmony seeking the balance of life. What gives meaning to being an authority and leader in the community, Romba recognizes



©FIMI. Photograph provided by Romba' Marannu.



these principles as the basis of the duty to be and to act.

Romba identified with the struggles and demands of indigenous women, so being part of the Leadership School was an opportunity to continue contributing to that demand for support. Consequently, she was able to apply for the recommendation of the Asian Indigenous Women's Network, AIWN, and with the support of PEREMPUAN AMAN. Her main motivation was to increase her capacities and take advantage of the experience of other indigenous women around the world.

Global Leadership School to Empower Indigenous Women

During her training at the School, listening to the stories of indigenous women from other parts of the world and understanding the political situation of indigenous peoples,

especially that of women, was a significant experience. From this, she understood that they are in different situations and similar problems. She understood how they have been able to face challenges and situations throughout history and despite this, they continue to move forward.

Acquiring knowledge from indigenous teachers and facilitators who are experts on the issues, as well as learning with them and participating in the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, was an important experience that she carries with her. She explains:



“Studying together, sharing with indigenous women friends from all over the world gave me extraordinary experience and knowledge”.

As a leader, it has been important to continue contributing part of her experiences and acquired knowledge. At the local and district level, she has been involved in the preparation of draft documents with clear approaches to indigenous peoples for advocacy processes for national policies and mechanisms for the defense and protection of indigenous peoples in the community. Currently, together with her organization, Romba has generated a regional regulation for the recognition and protection of the rights of indigenous peoples in the Regency of Toraya del Norte. Also, the regional regulation proposal of “Randerpa” toward the recognition and protection of the indigenous peoples of the District of Tana Toraya. She maintains a constant struggle for a position of equality with the government and religious institutions in the Regencies of Tana Toraja and Toraya del Norte, so that the terms Tallu Batu Balik are recognized; which means the pillars in the community as elements of authority.

At the national level, with her contributions and trajectory, she has managed to remain as part of the board of directors of the PEREMPUAN AMAN national council, because, as indigenous women, there is still a struggle to be included in the plenary meetings. In the international arena, she has managed to be one of the speakers at the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues at the UN, on behalf of AMAN and PEREMPUAN AMAN, speaking about the movement of indigenous peoples in

Indonesia.

After she participated in the Global School, she broadened her perspective regarding coordination mechanisms, making the most of the opportunities for managing funds, both in the regions and in national spaces. Actions that have been achieved, relying on the position she holds as president of AMAN, as the first woman president of the Toraya Regional Board.

One of the most important lessons learned during her participation in the Global School has been about advocacy processes, which prioritizes identifying change strategies toward problematic issues that affect the majority of the population. She has been putting this into practice in the organizational spaces in which she participates and has the possibility of directing.

Individual and collective rights

One of her dreams has been to enable indigenous women to make their own decisions for themselves, their families, their communities, and the organizations in which they are involved. At the collective level, its ideal is that indigenous peoples can be sovereign, independent, and be given dignified treatment in all areas of life, as subjects and holders of collective and individual rights.

With the accumulated knowledge and experiences, her commitment is to pass them on to those around her. For this reason, she confirms her work with the women of the organization, with the leadership of the indigenous peoples, sectors from which she has also learned during all of this time. With determination she affirms:



“Wherever there is an opportunity, I will take that opportunity to pass on what I know”.

She considers it important to continue strengthening the women leaders who she has supported as an association of indigenous women in her region. She has been addressing topics such as indigenous women and politics, as well as economic development through the implementation of training strategies from the community, so that women can increase their knowledge, share experiences, invite them to get involved in community activities, and motivate them to dare to speak in public.

Romba’s life story has been about knowing how leadership becomes a life conviction, evidenced in the different stages she went through supporting and backing up the demands of her people, and especially those of indigenous women. It has been about understanding what it means to be part of the Toraya identity, which gives it values and cultural principles that are based on the worldview of its people, such as the meaning of Lolo Tatanan and Lolo Patuoan, which is to

weave the link between humans and nature, and that consequently takes on new meaning as a woman practices this in her life.

Her leadership trajectory allows us to see that training is a learning space, like the Global Leadership School, which has been a valuable tool that has been strengthened to continue from the different spaces in which it participates in promoting the rights that indigenous women possess and deserve, such as the fight for the defense and conservation of their territory, which as peoples they demand and vindicate at the community, national, regional, and global levels.





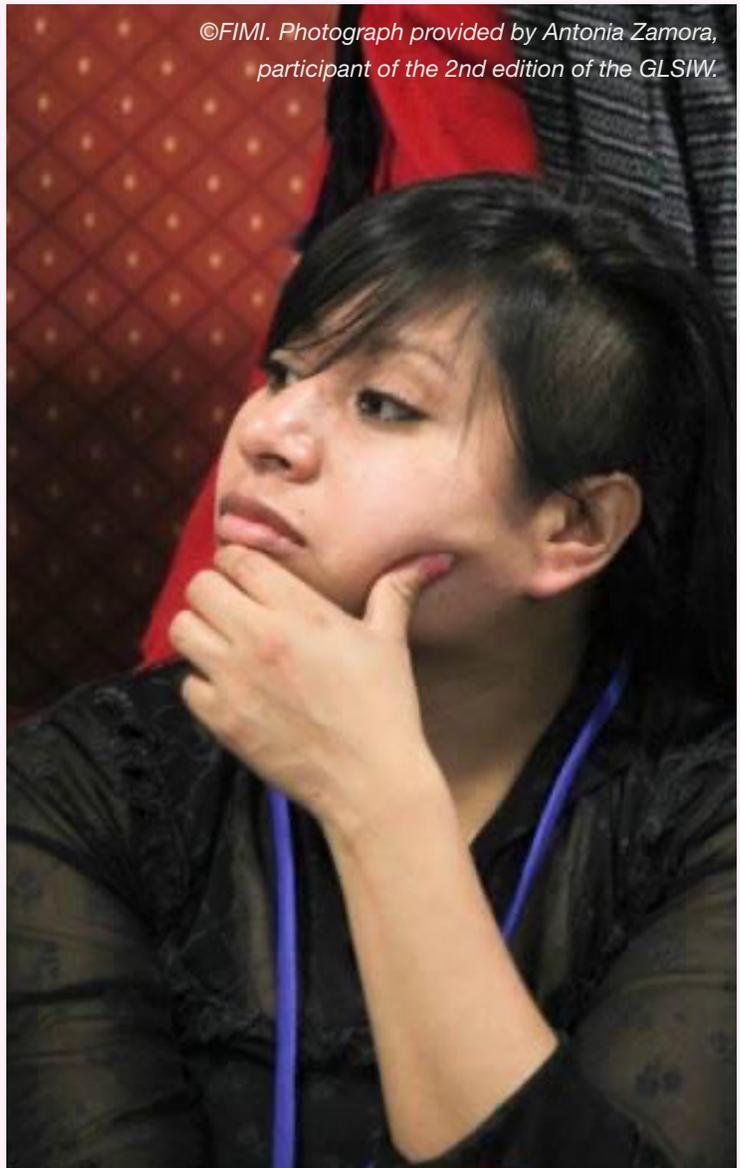
©FIMI. Photograph taken from the projects of the AYNÍ Indigenous Women's Fund.

Life stories:

INDIGENOUS WOMEN LEADERS FROM LATIN AMERICA

ANTONIA ZAMORA GARZA

A young Nahuatl Tlaxcalteca woman who tries to insert herself into the academy from her own cosmogony, weaving her two identities, first as a woman and then as an indigenous person.



The fabric of Antonia's life, a coming together of her history and identities, is the journey to know her origin, land, culture, and the Nahuatl people. It is to feel in San Francisco Tetlanohcan, a city in the Mexican state of Tlaxcala, a place where her roots as a woman and an indigenous person are based.

At 31 years old, Antonia feels proud of the gender, indigenous, and generational identities with which she identifies, because

they sustain her existence and being. She assumes her empowered feminine Nahuatl Tlaxcalteca being among the Tetlanohcan people, who have given her her origin and culture and have allowed her to see the importance of showing that young people are defiant. This is why she says:

“For me, they are two identities that meet or intertwine. First, as a woman, and then as an Indigenous person. I was built to be a woman since I was born, but came to be an Indigenous person with my own cultural practices, with a different identity”.

Antonia comes from an Indigenous peasant family of Nahuatl parents. Tlaxcaltecas of the Tetlanohcan people, which means: **“on the stony ground of the prickly pears”**. She studied for a Bachelor’s Degree in Psychology at the Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, Mexico, an academic training that has allowed her to work at the Center for Attention to the Indigenous Migrant Family of Tlaxcala, in the area of economic justice and productive projects. Also, she has accompanied the Herbalintzi Women’s Cooperative, for the revitalization of the use of medicinal plants. In these organizations, she has carried out tasks as an external promoter in workshops on women’s rights, processes of the revitalization of culture, accompaniment of women’s groups, and serving as a link with other organizations.

Memories of her childhood come to her mind, which was marked by two important events: One, her mother was a victim of abuse by her father, which aroused in her a feeling of anger at not being able to do anything about it, causing arguments on several occasions with her father. The second fact was the arrival of anthropologists to her community, who helped her to realize and observe that in her Tlaxcalteca

town they had different cultural practices that other peoples did not have, which allowed her to value the principles and symbols of her culture.

Leadership as community-building and by the collective

From Antonia’s point of view and experience, leadership is not an individual act, rather it is a collective action and is built based on “we,” which goes beyond the Western term of a leader and has a meaning based on



©FIMI. Photograph provided by Antonia Zamora, participant of the 2nd edition of the GLSIW.



©FIMI. Participants of the 2nd edition of the GLSIW.

community building. Under this philosophy, she narrates with a face of satisfaction that from the beginning of her leadership journey she and other colleagues had been promoting a summer course for girls and boys on the rescue of their culture. Through the recording of oral histories and the use of a camera, the children approached the grandmothers and grandfathers of their communities, asking them about their past life, activities, and practices, as well as asking them to speak to them in their Nahuatl language. In this respect, she states:

“That summer course was very nice and rewarding because the boys and girls who are now teenagers were able to reflect on the culture of the community”.

She started a Nahuatl grammar course to revitalize the use of the language, in which course 15 people participated, including children, adult women, and young people. It was an intergenerational experience and very valuable for her because she started as a popular educator. Subsequently, she worked on a project on youth migration called “How do we see ourselves?” in which the situation of migrant youth in the United States was analyzed. Parallel to this, she promoted another project, a cultural exchange in which a group of women of Tetlanohcan origin created the traditional carnival dance that was presented in the United States. In her own words, Antonia states:



“This work allowed me to become acquainted with other places, interact with other people, learn about the problem of migration, the rights of the migrant, hold roundtables in the community to reflect on why there was so much migration and the role of men and women from economic and social standpoints, as well as on the role of the State”.

During this period, public events and meetings of Indigenous youth were organized under the community leadership approach using arts and culture, to problematize the issue of youth in migration as a growing problem in their town, taking advantage of art as a tool for imparting knowledge.

Consequently, she recognized that these processes could not have been achieved without the presence, company, and mutual support of women and men who she sees as allies and accomplices. She acknowledges her sisters who have accompanied her throughout her life, her aunts and uncles, and at times the support of her father and brother. Among others, she mentions Manuela, a close friend with whom they started several projects. That is why she states:

“My allies of the collective women utopia are those with whom we worked on issues of gender and women’s rights. They still have a special place in my heart”.

On this journey, Antonia has a list of people she has met and has accompanied her on her journey, such as academics, researchers, and supportive families so that she might finish her studies at the university. Likewise, she identified other types of strategic allies, among them the organizations with whom she has developed an important bond, a kind of safety belt to protect herself and be mindful that, if something happens to one or the other, they will be there for each other as a group to show solidarity. She also identified political actors, for management mechanisms and international organizations, such as the FIMI, which has been important support.

For her, community leadership is built from having examples on how to be a leader, that is why she invokes her mother as a woman, who has been decisive in positioning her on the topic of women and indigenous women, due to her daily practices. Her mother carries on a silent struggle to continue fulfilling her mission as a midwife, knowledge she inherited from her grandmother during childhood. Her great-grandmother also represented an example of perseverance and respect. They were first women of whom she became aware and from whom she took on a political position in life. In Antonia’s words:





“

“Just like my mother, there are many women, who live as in silence, in the corner, in oblivion, resigning themselves to a privately assigned place. I now reflect on it as an academic and as a woman who has read and studied, what she had been, my first role model, and that it is important and very good to recognize”.

She also recognizes Rigoberta Menchú, Commander Ramona, Tarcila Rivera, Myrna Cunningham, and Teresa Zapeta because they have given her another perspective on how to speak out and act politically. At the same time, she remembers Lidia, a Mixtec woman, persevering in her struggles.

As a young leader, she has focused her leadership on the matter of rights of migrant family members at the Community Center of her municipality. Also, with groups of women in various municipalities concerning the use of medicinal plants based on the beliefs and knowledge of their peoples. She has currently decided to work with groups of indigenous and non-indigenous women on embroidery,

a typical art of the communities that has been disappearing. The importance of the restoration of the art of embroidery leads to the reconstruction of history, as well as the recognition of the codes belonging to the Nahuatl Tlaxcalteca culture.

The loss of practices and symbolic elements of culture due to urban influence in their municipality is evident. With concern, she mentions that when talking about ancestral authority there are no longer any role models, there is no longer a community committee, which was made up of older men who guided the order and organization of the people.

That is why it was determined that the values that remain be restored and that they be passed on by grandmothers and grandfathers to the present generations. For her, the mountain represents something strong and she recognizes it as a powerful reference of authority that shows how there can be transformation, from the perspective of care and protection. This element of nature is of great significance to its Nahuatl Tlaxcalteca culture and is the living presence of the power of her ancestors, and that is why she links it with the sense of leadership.

Global Leadership School, a space for reflection and action regarding the situation of indigenous women

With an entrepreneurial spirit, she applied to the Global Leadership School. One of her main motivations was to meet women from other parts of the world so that together they could reflect on the situation in which women

and Indigenous Peoples live; as well as having tools for the advocacy processes that she was promoting is her organization. Likewise, with special interest, she sought that the process provides her with knowledge and experiences to work at the community level on issues of indigenous identity, revitalization of the language, gastronomy, the use of medicinal plants, and traditional healing methods.

Undoubtedly, the learning space of the Leadership School provided new knowledge and significant experiences for her. One of those experiences was when at the end of school, she had the opportunity to reflect on how indigenous women had no visibility, which allowed her to understand that their main space for advocacy is in their territory, affirming the need to continue working provide visibility for and position the reality of indigenous women in all areas and spaces in her municipality while taking advantage of the existing mechanisms at the international level.

The implementation of the advocacy plan represents a political tool that allows for defining actions for changing inequality issues that Indigenous Peoples are dealing with. She titled her advocacy plan: “Space, territory, and culture: Indigenous youth between the past and the present,” which was intended to create a space for dialogue and exchange of knowledge and intergenerational experiences around Indigenous Identity, and the various forms of interaction concerning culture among indigenous peoples, Nahuas, under the principle of creating a healthy, harmonious environment, respectful of diversity and cultural practices of ancestral peoples. As a result, Antonia states:



“

“For me, it is not just a matter of letting indigenous peoples carry out their practices, but rather that these practices be valued and understood by others who do not consider themselves Indigenous”.

For her, it was essential that the Mexican Government assume its obligation to promote and disseminate activities to provide visibility to native cultures, learning about them, revaluing and preserving them, and that the proposals contained in her plan be an initial step to later be followed up on by the municipal presidency. Unfortunately, this was not possible because the municipal president did not grant her the necessary resources to implement the advocacy plan.

The lessons that Antonia learned present possibilities and opportunities to contribute, that is to say giving and receiving knowledge acquired at the community and local levels.

The fact of not having been able to implement her advocacy plan was like being in debt to her people, as she felt that she had a great commitment because of what she had learned and experienced during her participation in the Leadership School. This is why years later, with the desire to try in some way to give back the knowledge she had learned, she and a mestizo female peer decided to work together with a group of women on a needle and cotton embroidery project, which consisted of circles of dialogue to resume the oral tradition, the ancestral knowledge, and values of their people; a way of reconstructing the historical memory of the community through embroidery. In this regard, Antonia says:

“Yes, I see myself doing things for my people. I like it. As they say, my navel is there because my advocacy is buried there. The root of what I am is there.”

Antonia assures that collective advocacy action not only means an opportunity to forge alliances but also to join together with more women who are doing community work. It is gathering with other leaders that can add value to the support fabric for women and youth.

Therefore, making alliances with other women for the implementation of the embroidery project has been a very valuable practice of coordination and joint management. In this way, a principle to make it possible was ethics; that is, taking actions based on their meaning, which supports all advocacy action.

With great certainty and satisfaction, she recognizes that she gained many insights during her participation in the Leadership School, which marked her life because they allowed her to obtain new knowledge, discover the unknown, and reconnect with ideas and thoughts that she had been weaving. One of her most significant lessons learned has been about interculturality and interethnicity, which she defines as complex and rather rich knowledge. Likewise, reflections and interaction among all of the participants and facilitators regarding the issues of women and Indigenous Peoples are lessons for her life experience that she affirms and remembers every day, as well as getting closer to and meeting indigenous women from other parts of the world and from the space provided by the FIMI, whom today she considers her as sisters because they have gone through the same situation and have similar principles of life.

Challenges and dreams for achieving a fair society

For Antonia, every training process —when it has a real and true meaning— implies changes that she defines as breakpoints. An important change resulting from training is that now she can see more closely the reality of the indigenous women around the world, which is so similar to her own reality and those women of her people.

From Antonia’s vision, dreams are a result of lived realities, experiences, and lessons learned. On a personal level, one of her dreams is to continue with her academic training to be an excellent professional who uses her knowledge in the service of others, reaching other spaces and not to let her fight come to an end, so that she may raise her voice in the face of any injustice. At the collective level, she dreams of creating a place in the community where all people can pass the time in their old age in a dignified and happy way.

One of her challenges is to continue being an activist in organizations, making demands, and presenting proposals for change, so that, from now on, it will not be necessary to undertake more struggles and there will be a just society as a result.

For her, learning is so valuable that she cannot keep it all to herself. It must be passed on to those around her. Initially, she sees in her family a space where she wants to pass on what she has learned and share her experiences of struggle; another sector is the organizations with which she works. In her journey, she has identified new training needs, such as strengthening organizations with mechanisms for managing resources and funds, taking into account that this is a very difficult task.

Becoming acquainted with Antonia's young leadership is to understand how a collective struggle becomes a principle and commitment in life. It is to understand how the teachings and experiences of the political participation of other indigenous women come to life in her leadership. Her story is an apprenticeship for other women and young people to continue opening paths and overcoming obstacles.

It is to recognize the importance of having their own training spaces, such as The Global Leadership School, an open door of individual knowledge that becomes collective knowledge, which gives support and strength in promoting mechanisms for the exercise of their rights as women and Indigenous Peoples.

As a Nahuatl Tlaxcalteca woman, Antonia teaches us to understand that all new lessons become alive to the extent that they are useful and revitalized in the service of others, being respectful of each other's identities and having the purpose of creating a fabric made of knowledge without losing the sense and spirit of the ancestral peoples.



INDIRA AZUCENA VARGAS GUATATUCA

Fighting against this world, this very unequal and unfair society, has strengthened me as an indigenous woman, because we have a territory, a cultural identity, our language, clothing, and our worldview, which makes us strong as women and peoples.



©FIMI. Photograph provided by Indira Vargas, participant of the 5th edition of the GLSIW.

In the province of Puyo, the municipal seat of Pastaza, located on the left bank of the Puyo River in Ecuador, in a place full of meaning due to its history, cultural diversity, and the cordiality of its people, lives Indira, whose life journey story leads us to know the dreams, joy, successes, and challenges of a Kichwa leader.

She is 28 years old and a Technician in Agroecology and Ecotourism. She proudly

states that her community is the headquarters of the 11 Indigenous nationalities of the Ecuadorian Amazon, which is why she is a member of the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of the Ecuadorian Amazon, (CONFENIAE, for its acronym in Spanish), a regional organization from the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador at the national level (CONAIE). She is presently responsible for the technical support area in

the CONFENIAE communication department, for the circle on the empowerment of women's rights and the revaluation of indigenous identity. She is also the student coordinator of the "Colectivo Retomando Raíces" (Reclaiming our Roots Group). She says that during her time in School she was discriminated against by her classmates who always made fun of her for having a different ability. That experience made her stronger, have higher self-esteem, and stand out despite the prejudices of society. She states:

“

“My motivation to continue in the process of struggle has been that the fact that I am an indigenous woman and have a physical disability. It shaped my mindset and my way of coping with this society to allow me to press forward”.

For her, this is a constant struggle with the society, which she perceives so unequal, unjust, and discriminatory. Since her childhood, she has seen how her parents and grandparents have fought to defend their cultural wealth and territory, which is still a source of collective struggle for the survival of peoples against the large extractive companies with all of the violations of human rights that it has historically implied. She states that indigenous women are connected to the land, air, water, sun, and rain since they are part of a territory that has given them cultural identity inherited from their mothers and fathers who have passed on their language, clothing, and worldview. In this regard, she says:

“We, as women, have a very important role within our Indigenous territories because we are connected to the land and water, and that creates this connection with the jungle and the Pachamama where we cultivate, where we sow to produce our food”.

Leadership as the strength to deal with inequality and injustice

For Indira, in the face of a state system that promotes racist and discriminatory societies resulting in inequality and exclusion, leadership is strength, power, and resistance; that is why it has a profound meaning of perseverance and loyalty. In her own words she says:

“My leadership process has taken place before such an unequal and unjust society, which makes me join with organizations to learn about the existing rights in our constitution, rights included in international treaties in order to empower myself, have the knowledge and tools to defend to my people”.



©FIMI. Activities during the national training program, New Delhi, India.

She recognizes that being a leader has allowed her to learn and move forward with better self-esteem, become a strong woman, a representative of her community, capable of working together with other leaders who have encouraged her to be the voice of women and youth, a voice that has been speaking out for proposals in the defense and exercise of their specific and collective rights. It has not been easy for her to achieve this as she has had to deal with difficulties and limitations that she could not have experienced without her mother, who has been her main ally and accomplice. She explains:

“

“My mother has been closed to me. She has taught me to press forward, be able to develop despite my disability, and I have been able to develop my autonomy as a woman”.

With light in her eyes, she states that during her childhood she saw her aunts and uncles, grandfathers, and grandmothers fighting to defend the land, acting as leaders in the organizations of Indigenous Peoples, linked to the indigenous movement in Ecuador. It

encouraged her to continue on the path of fighting for the defense of their territory, giving her a lot of strength to grow as a young leader at the national level and be part of other organizational processes.

From Indira's point of view, leadership is based on the example and guidance of other women as important role models for those who must follow in their footsteps and take in their teachings, including, among them, historical women such as Transita Maguana and Dolores Cacuango, who fought for bilingual education for Indigenous people when it was prohibited, as well as Katy Machoa, a Kichua leader of the province of Napo.

As part of her work at the local level, she supports the CONAP indigenous women's organization as the Coordinator of Pastasa Indigenous Women. At the provincial and regional levels, she works in the youth communication and leadership area in the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of the Ecuadorian Amazon (CONFENIAE). At the international level, she is a member of the youth commission of the Continental Network of indigenous women. In her own words, Indira states:



“I have been able to reach local, provincial, national, and international settings, being responsible for the organization and training of youth on issues related to the restoration of identity and culture”.

Indira's commitment to promoting leadership among young people is linked to her identity as a young woman, including the need for present generations and potential leaders to contribute to change the unequal and racist system with which she does not agree. She refuses to accept its regulations, institutions, and mechanisms of justice that violate the rights of her people.

For her, being part of the Kichwa people means being invested with values and principles as the basis for life and the being of everyone in her community. This is why the sense of leadership is related to the worldview, based on respect, reciprocity, and solidarity that govern an authority for everything that exists. This is a philosophy of life that has allowed them to resist and demand their collective rights and the defense of their territory as nationalities. Indira states:

“Kichwa leaders must respect our principles according to our worldview, such as our community life and ancestral peoples' laws”.





Global Leadership School: a training tool to position ancestral people's rights

Obtaining tools to strengthen her leadership has been a challenge for Indra because the training spaces for indigenous women in her country have been very limited, so participating in a learning process such as the Leadership School has been a privilege and a great commitment to the organizations she works with and supports. Obtaining new knowledge, learning about other realities, new

organizational processes, and other places have been her main motivation, so as to have the means to strengthen women and youth organizations in her country.

She recognizes that this is a space of constant learning from which she has obtained significant experiences, one of which is that she was the only young leader from Ecuador. Traveling alone for the first time to meet the other indigenous leaders from around the world who were strong, capable, and very experienced women marked her view of life. She explains:



“I found our way of participating at Columbia University very interesting, our process within the Permanent Forum, learning about how the UN structure works, realizing our position as Indigenous Peoples, the struggle of our Indigenous leaders and the place they have been able to obtain within the UN”.

She shared her experience that for her the English language has been difficult, most of the Latina participants do not speak it, so they felt like outsiders to some extent. On the other hand, she found it admirable that the Asian leaders spoke the English language, and she felt the energy from all of them. They also supported each other in joining forces for mutual learning. In her own words, Indira's states:

“As an experience, it was a space for me to learn about other struggles, redefine our demands as women at the international level, and learn how our rights are positioned as Indigenous Peoples”.

During her training at the Leadership School, she implemented an advocacy plan as a working instrument to take actions in favor of the women of her organization and community to provide them visibility. It was a process that allowed her to understand that advocacy goes beyond activism, it must be under the definition of strategies aimed at making significant changes in the lives of women and peoples. At the local level, she has promoted new leadership roles of young women capable of creating proposals within the organization, resulting in generational interaction among adult peers and joint organizational actions, through which they recognize that each one of them contributes to the organization based on their experiences and knowledge.

An important result at the regional and national levels is the visible participation of young women in international spaces and becoming acquainted with the organizations committed with the defense of the collective and individual rights of Indigenous Peoples.

With satisfaction, she states that after she participated in the Global School she was appointed as the leader's right-hand woman in the women's organization of her province. A significant achievement was participating in coordination and management as she could put into practice what she had learned and apply the tools in strategic advocacy spaces. She explains:



©FIMI. Activities during the Mesoamerica regional capacity building program of the GLSIW, Guatemala City, Guatemala.

“Participating as a consultant in the projects review process of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), in conjunction with the FIMI, and contributing to strengthening the ECMIA youth organization are great achievements that helped me to put what I learned into service”.

Her participation in the Global Leadership School has been a key step in her life, training and strengthening her leadership. On one hand, it allowed her to learn about political and social issues and processes unknown for her; and, on the other hand, unlearn colonial practices that did not correspond to her Kichwa being. She states that in the face of the economic crisis in Ecuador, which affects dramatically the Indigenous Peoples of the Amazon, she has promoted that women’s and mixed organizations in her region become empowered by ILO Convention 169, an international instrument about which she learned during her training at the School and which she considers invaluable due to its clear content, and valuable arguments based on land rights and self-determination of ancestral peoples.

Dreams are part of life, and according to her,

Individual and collective dreams and challenges

they have different dimensions that converge as they are fulfilled. From the collective point of view, her dream is to continue working jointly with women, in ways so as to be fair and avoid suspicions and apathy that may arise at some point among female leaders; and to break the racist and patriarchal system that excludes women and generates competition and rivalry among one other, resulting in an imbalance in organizations. At the personal level, her challenge is to continue betting on the organizational processes, dealing with the government through sound tools, increasing her knowledge and being able to support her people and community, as well as to continue participating in advocacy spaces in the local and international spaces and become a historical role model for future generations.

She firmly believes in children and youth because they are the present of her country and they must give continuity to the work of their predecessors, leadership roles of women and men who are now examples in the struggle for the defense of their rights as ancestral peoples.

From her point of view, it is important to understand the new needs and demands of past and present generations. Therefore, she deems important to promote training processes about economic production and empowerment as a strategic tool to strengthen and continue betting on political and communication training systems from the worldview of her Kichwa people, based on the ancestral principle of the defense of life in all of its manifestations.

The thread of the fabric of Indira's story is a life lesson because we can become acquainted with an example of leadership of a young, brave, empowered Kichwa woman who is full of experiences and knowledge, but also full of dreams and struggles. Her life is an encounter with how to give color to knowledge, to new learning that has allowed her to have participated in a training space of and for indigenous women, such as the Global School, where the being of indigenous women is valued, acknowledged, and provided visibility; where tools for advocacy are provided, aimed at strengthening their leadership and the defense of their rights as women and as Kichwa people.

IRMA DORIS PERCCA MARCA

*I am an Aymara
woman I know my
culture, my people,
I am part of the
earth, water, and
sun.*



©FIMI. Irma Doris Percca, participant
of the 4th edition of the GLSIW.

In Puno, summer is usually short, cool, and cloudy, while winter is very cold and mostly cloudless. Such a place of contrasts and cultural diversity where Irma lives. She is a leader of the Aymara people, knowledgeable, and bearer of ancestral principles that make up her identity as an indigenous woman. With certainty, she states that everyday recognition as a woman and a leader has become her banner of struggle and demand for collective rights. With experience throughout her 54 years of age, she knows that belonging to an indigenous people determines her existence and good living.

Since her childhood, she has lived in the city of Puno, located in the southeastern part of the Peruvian territory. Some memories come to her mind. When she finished School, she felt the need to work and serve as a young woman in women's organizations, which was one of the first experiences that marked her life. Since then, she has decided to continue working as a leader in the search for supporting the social causes of her people.

Leadership as an indigenous woman

Just like every Aymara woman, Irma lived the difficulties and unequal conditions of her people up close. Since then, she began to work in the communities, where she witnessed how women brought drinking water from very long distances and carried their jugs on their backs. When they returned home, they had to take care of the cattle, work on the farm, look after children, and prepare food. Despite that amount of work, they never felt tired; on the contrary, she was impressed to see their energy to carry on every day as they were pleased to know that their domestic work strengthens and supports their family.

Undoubtedly, that experience inspired her to get involved in the communities and work together with women, understanding that work at home and in the community were their responsibilities. However, their need for support was evident so that they would be provided with the resources and conditions that would somehow minimize their great effort. She also identified leaders that started

questioning this situation, realizing that leadership is born from a collective rather than an individual need.

During her journey, she has found female and male allies on whom she has relied; for example, her parents, who, since she was young, encouraged her to get involved and start working with women. She recognizes the groups and organizations in which she participates, spaces where she has found the strength to move forward, where they take their own experiences as a reference and contribution.

She has also identified indigenous women from her people who are an example of life and leadership for her. First, she named Bartolina Sisa and Micaela Bastidas, brave women, warriors who fought for women's rights, giving their lives for others and their peoples. She also mentioned Rosa Palominos, an Aymara woman who is an Indigenous communicator and represents in some way the path that led her to work in the struggle and vindication of her rights.

From the beginning, Irma has emphasized her contributions to indigenous women at the rural level, where she focused on promoting



©FIMI. Activity during the classroom stage, 3rd edition of the GLSIW.



literacy actions, especially since the majority of people in the communities cannot read or write, resulting in limited opportunities for them to access services and resources. She has also organized focus groups to make loans on business ventures and thus improve their standards of living.

Among other actions, she conducted a Diploma Course in Revitalization of Aymara and Quechua Native Languages with groups of young people, intending to restore the use of their own language as part of their identity. Also, she has been venturing into the media in her own Aymara language through the broadcast called “Wiñai Pancara,” where she has discussed the issue of rights of Indigenous Peoples and women. At the international level, she has met other indigenous leaders, specifically in 2017 through the FIMI, where she participated in very important debates on

women’s rights from a global perspective in New York City.

She also considers it important to understand how the Aymara people’s life is sustained in some way by their worldview, which represents a deep historical and spiritual value as part of that ancestral essence. The center of the being of men and women is in the Pachamama, the mother earth, who sustains, feeds, and provides them with water, air, warmth, and spirit. For this reason, according to them, the earth protects, cares for, and feeds them, and therefore defends them. From this worldview of the Aymara world, ancestral wisdom is part of the inheritance of grandfathers and grandmothers, as well as of the ancestors who have passed it on from generation to generation, taking respect as a principle and a basis of authority and leadership. Today, such values are retaken by Irma in the exercise

of her leadership, that is, returning to the philosophy of Ayni: reciprocity, which consists of understanding that just like you give me, I serve you; you help me, I support you. With satisfaction, she states:

“We, as children of our Aymara culture, continue putting the knowledge passed on by our grandparents into practice. We also have Indigenous authorities who work with great respect because they are authorities”.

Leadership School: a space for understanding indigenous women’s rights

For Irma, taking action in favor of the rural women of her people has been a life choice, that is why she is interested in finding training spaces that open the doors of knowledge that are of significant value.

The Global Leadership School was a great opportunity for her. It represented the possibility of finding answers to many questions regarding the topic of indigenous women’s rights, as well as of understanding in depth the peoples’ rights and the sense of leadership as an instrument of struggle. Her main motivation was to have foundations regarding the advocacy processes as a demand strategy and for the exercise of their rights. In this regard, she states:



“For 10 years we have been achieving our rights. No one has gifted them to us. We have achieved this through struggles”.

Being part of the School undoubtedly marked her life. Her opportunity to attend Columbia University made her realize how profound indigenous women’s rights are, and understand that they are a set of approaches that recognize the being of women as those who possess and are deserving of life in all its manifestations and fullness. Therefore, she states:



“I used to say: ‘when I finish my participation in the Global School as an indigenous woman and return to my Aymara people, I will be close to women’s organizations and share with them everything I now know about our rights”.

Upon her return from the training process, she took part in another organization of Killapagi women entrepreneurs, a new and recently incorporated organization where, from the perspective of good living and solidarity economy, they are implementing actions supported by her learning. One of her first activities was the diploma course on the revitalization of native languages, which



©FIMI. Photograph provided by Irma Doris Percca, during the implementation of her Advocacy Plan.

represents a great experience and motivation as a result of her training at the FIMI.

As part of her training process, she drew up an advocacy plan on environmental pollution abatement through the treatment of solid waste in the city of Puno. This action was intended to strengthen the knowledge of Aymara women about the impacts of climate change and the treatment of organic solid waste. For this reason, her experience in the implementation of this plan has been very important because she now has the foundations to continue developing other plans together with the women. She states:

“The implementation of advocacy plans has motivated me, as there are many problems to solve here in my Aymara culture, and we as women lacked tools to find ways to change them”.

The process also allowed her to confirm that direct contact with women in the communities enriches not only their learning but also their spirit and energy to continue in community work. For this reason, she began to organize groups of entrepreneurial women in her community, as a practice of the Ayni

principles: reciprocity and barter, which allows for understanding how deep the Aymara worldview is concerning the importance of giving back what was received.

Her main contributions are focused on organizing events for rural women's organizations in which girls, boys, and community leaders are involved in singing and riddle contests to raise greater awareness about their rights. At the national level, she works on leadership training for indigenous women, ensuring that their contributions in favor of their people be recognized. Likewise, she managed to participate in the first congress of native languages. An important finding is that the Aymara language is in danger of extinction, a situation that worries her a lot and at the same time motivates her to work more with children and youth, because in the communities they no longer want to speak the language, probably because of influence of Western cultures. Another way to ensure its rescue is her interpretation work from Spanish to Aymara and vice versa so that her language and its meanings are kept recorded.

Irma is sure that her participation in the Global School was a new challenge for her, since getting new knowledge strengthened her commitment to continuing contributing to women as well as understanding indigenous women's rights, which despite the struggles in the territories should still be promoted so that they can truly be valued. She states:



“Confirming that we are the ones who take care of the Pachamama because we are the ones who are at home, we work the farms, we raise the animals and do crafts, being part of the School made me more aware of this”.

Becoming acquainted with the existing mechanisms about the value and care of the environment and the devastating effects that climate change is causing on indigenous peoples, and especially on women, was a valuable learning experience. Irma considers that one of the greatest lessons was to strongly believe in herself, in her leadership, and to strengthen the vindication of her culture as a people.

Individual and collective dreams

Irma, as a dreamer of time in her leadership journey, has worked to achieve what she sets out to do because she has experienced it. Due to her participation in the Global School, changes transform things from the personal to the collective sense. One of them is the fact that now her husband shares the housework with her because both of them have the same rights and responsibilities as part of being a couple and a family.



In her organization she has strengthened the commitment that corresponds to her as a leader, being a guide, accompanying and assuming responsibilities just like the other members of the organization, and helping everyone understand the importance of having regulations so that everything works from the principle of Ayni; reciprocity. She sees that she has changed many things that she did not expect to. For example, being an interpreter of her Aymara culture, which is a personal achievement.

One of her main dreams is to lead an organization for rural women. She is currently working with economic entrepreneurship groups to be able to fulfill this dream. This would be a great achievement, representing the women of her people and district as an authority figure, which means trying even harder because of the prevalence of machismo within the State. She explains:

Irma believes that experiences and knowledge should promote changes, that is why they should be passed on and shared, representing a thread of continuity. One sector which she

is focused on young people, to whom she deems important to pass on her insights and experiences of what it means to be a leader so that young people stop believing that being a leader is synonymous with taking advantage of others and simply looking out for one's own personal interests. For her, it is essential to change that way of thinking among youth, that is why it is necessary to pass on the lessons to them that she has learned along her journey. She states:

“The Global School and the FIMI helped and strengthened me to fulfill part of my dreams with women”.

“

“We also want our culture to be valued by young people and we are trying to write books as it would not be fair just to talk, but rather also to leave behind facts along the path traveled”.

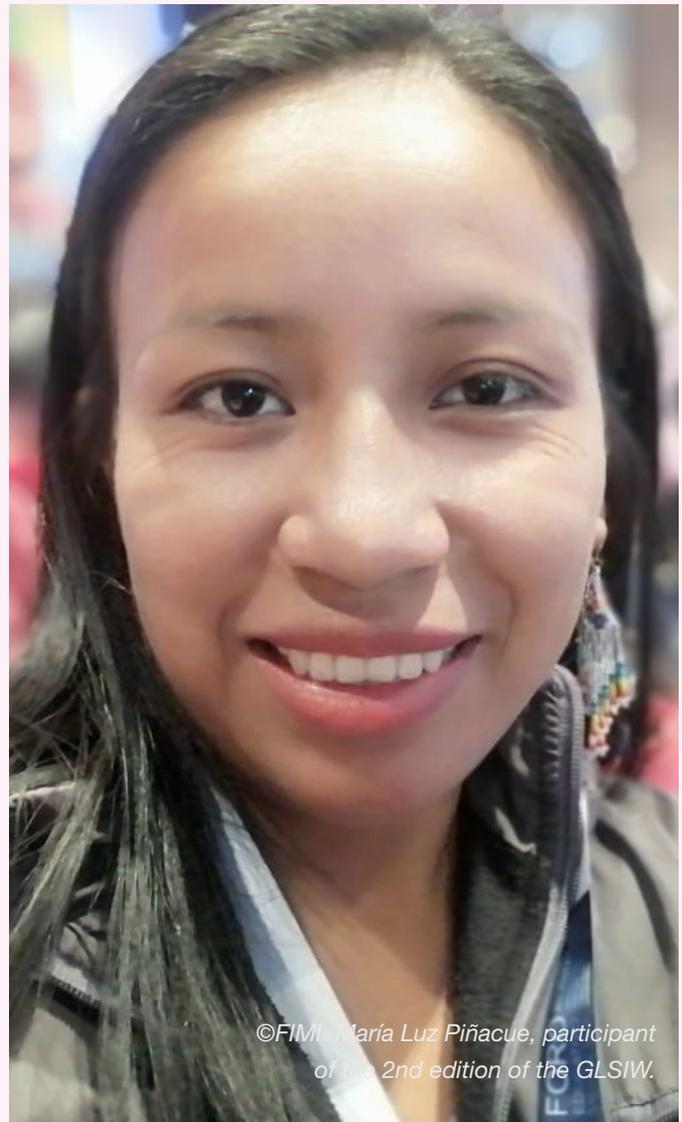
Recording the history of the path traveled is a challenge that Irma has proposed for herself, which requires time and conditions to be able to meet it, so she considers it necessary to have support to learn about the use and management of technology, which has been a bit complicated for her, but she believes that she'll be able to do it.

Irma is a living example of how women can progress from the individual and transcend to

the collective in the fabric of their leadership and in the exercise of their specific and collective rights from their Aymara identity, which she carries in her spirit and her struggles together alongside other women. She is a great role model for learning seeing as how the principle of Ayni reciprocity allows us to understand that training and experiences, such as those that she had during her participation in the Global Leadership School, become alive when they are shared, so that other women may progress and press forward. It is about understanding that knowledge represents realities when the land in which her roots as an Aymara woman are settled is not left behind, an identity that supports and determines her being as a leader.

MARÍA LUZ PIÑACUE ACHICUE

I am a woman of the Nasa People, who fights for women's rights, to make it possible for other women to empower themselves, regardless of whether they are indigenous, afro, or mestizo.



©FIMI, María Luz Piñacue, participant of the 2nd edition of the GLSIW.

The voice and story of María Luz are that of an original woman from the Nasa People, who resonates with wisdom, commitment, and strength, whose cosmogony conceives a person as the Yat: the house, shelter space, and collective construction of life; an original culture passed on to her by her ancestors and that gave rise to her Indigenous roots.

She was born on the Aboriginal Calderas Reservation in Inzá Tierradentro in Cauca, part of the Andean area of southwestern Colombia, a place enriched by mountains,

hills, and the spirit of the people. At 30 years of age, she is proud of her nine siblings, for their perseverance in the struggle to restore and strengthen their cultural identity as Indigenous people at the organizational level.

María Luz is a member of the Regional Indigenous Council of Cauca (CRIC, for its acronym in Spanish), an organization that works on mechanisms for the restoration of land on the reservations, in the defense and protection of the ancestral territory and the living spaces of the indigenous communities,



©FIMI. María Luz Piñacue, during her participation in the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

in harmony and balance with Mother Earth. In this organization, she supports the indigenous women's program in the areas of education and training for access to spaces where decisions are made, strengthening their own spirituality and the creation of a women's solidarity fund for crafts and their own production systems. She proudly states:

“Being an indigenous woman means being part of the territory; it means teach others solidarity and reciprocity with one's every action; it means being part of mother earth, respecting her, caring for her, and making real the concept of being life-givers”.

During her childhood, she lived in a small town, with the example of her father's leadership, who worked for their people. At that time, discrimination and racism prevailed, but it did not limit her strength to continue. She was also very close to her mother, who motivated her to go out, see other places, have new experiences, and study.

The presence of her mother had a great impact on her life as from her mother she inherited her cultural identity, learned knitting and her language. Her mother insisted that daughters should prepare themselves for life because at that time most women did not study; it was believed they should have a husband and go far away from the community, so studying was not a good investment. In her own words, she states:



“My mother always talked to us about the topic of strengthening and empowering ourselves. She used to tell us: ‘you have to be independent, you have to be capable women’”.

Growing up in a large family was a strength, although she and her siblings made many efforts to study, providing a chain of support for one another. The sibling who managed to complete their studies, help the next sibling, and so on, until all of them managed to finish their studies, thus following principles of mutual support.

She proudly explains that her siblings work in the educational area, in organizational processes of Indigenous Peoples, holding positions in leadership positions such as councilors, governors, and are active in the organizational field within and outside the community. She remembers that when she studied, she experienced several incidents of racial discrimination by her teachers and some classmates, who claimed that she would never hold any position because she

was Indigenous, nor would she have university degrees and work in other fields that were not suitable for her. It empowered her even more and motivated her to deal with situations that she might experience as an indigenous woman.

Leadership development as a forefront of the struggle and the defense of life

As part of her experience during her youth, she held positions at a radio station where she could listen to people and get closer to the topic of education, teaching children to follow criteria to reinforce the fact of being part of an Indigenous People; a field of work that she now considers as her strong suit. Also, getting involved in the context of the struggle of the Regional Indigenous Council of Cauca helped her to empower herself and learn about topics that have been useful for strengthening her leadership.

Leadership is an act of struggle, a means to defend rights; it is part of the spirit. This is how María Luz has defined it since she began in the organizations of Indigenous Peoples. For her, her leadership began at School, a period in which she was able to observe how indigenous students were subjected to discrimination, abuse, insults, and violation of rights, even against girls. From that time, a sense of solidarity and strength awakened within her toward those who were abused. However, she did not continue with her studies due to a lack of financial resources, so she began touring the territory where she identified different organizational and training spaces, which encouraged her to work for young people through workshops, meetings, and organizational processes.



©FIMI. Group photo in front of the UN, 2nd edition of the GLSIW.

During that period, she managed to propel her leadership under the motto of promoting actions for the recognition of young people's rights and met women and men leaders who supported and encouraged her to move forward to achieve her objectives, as well as become her main allies. Her sisters, who have been part of the process, also come to her mind, as they got to know her work up close and at the same time supported her. Finally, an important ally has been her partner, William Fredy Rivera, who has always been by her side and her two sons Jean Felipe and Cristina Rivera, who are like the engine that propels her through each of her struggles.

In the field of work, she has been supported by her colleagues Roseli Finscue, Nubia Rivera, and Bety Corpus, who have been leaders that have not occupied big roles within the organizational field but have still marked her

path by their continual support.

For her, it is essential to have women role models of leadership since they can guide her in the work of a woman leader. For example, Caciqua Gaetana, who lived in the 1700s and her journey through life manifests the struggle for her Indigenous People. In the same way, she remembers her grandmother, as an ancestor, weaver, and example of life who passed on her Indigenous being to her.

Her work approach has focused on boys and girls, who in the future will be leading changes in the communities, and women in social empowerment processes, as she kept



in mind that these sectors will leave behind legacies of respect, autonomy, and love for her culture. She currently works in primary school as an indigenous teacher. She has been involved in the field of education for 10 years and considers girls and boys as her allies because they have given her that strength and motivation to continue struggling and teaching. She states:

“

“I have gone to places where women are all silent in the assembly. They do not participate, they feel shame, they prefer that their partner or husband be the one who does the work of leading”.

She has found different strategies to approach women such as weaving, art, dance, and

gastronomy, to accompany them in their different activities and get close to them. As a result, she has managed to learn about and analyze their real-life circumstances, as well as to identify actions for change to improve their participation within organizations. Her contribution has also focused on young people, who from their vision of life are messengers of the word. With their dynamism and joy, young people can pass on what they have learned to others their age and use that knowledge so that, in some way, they feel motivated and committed to continue in the struggle for a community organization.

Luz, as part of the Nasa People, recognizes that her cosmogony contains representative symbols of authority and leadership. For the Nasa world, everything has life; for example, water and fire, which play a role as regulating entities of harmony and balance between human beings and nature. From that point of view, ancestral knowledge is collective and reflects the wisdom of the elderly. For her, her leadership must help children and young people regain the knowledge of her people, so she makes sure that they recognize how authority is given to women. In this case,

the leadership symbol is the cane, which has a very special meaning and represents the relationship with the territory, which is granted to a woman if she holds the position of an Indigenous governor, coordinator, or advisor of the organization. Likewise, other principles that reflect authority and leadership are respect, the value of one's word, and reciprocity with everything around them, with people, nature, the culture itself, and one's thoughts.

The Global Leadership School: a process of learning and reciprocity

Luz's fighting spirit has been one of her characteristics that have given her strength to continue progressing, so she has always reached training spaces through organizational actions leading young people and women, and participated in diploma courses in favor of their rights.

Putting the knowledge acquired at the Global School into practice became a path of learning. One of her main motivations was to be trained on human rights issues for indigenous women in order to return to their territory and apply everything she learned.

The most valuable experiences for her were the acquisition of knowledge about rights from an international perspective, which she was unaware of, as well as gathering with indigenous women from other cultures who are tenacious in their struggle to defend their rights and those of their peoples. Her ability to speak the English language, which is a barrier for many, but it is necessary to enter the international field and strengthen and restore the rights of women and Indigenous Peoples, had particularly had an impact on her. Without a doubt, the FIMI allowed her to refine and

confirm her knowledge of women's rights, international humanitarian law, and to obtain other tools. Therefore, she explains:



"I think that there is a 'before' and an 'after' the training school. I think I assumed things with much more maturity, with goals clearer than those I already had, and with more organizational strengthening to accompany women and children".

She recognizes having returned with more strength to her territory to promote and make a chain of learning and teaching in favor of the improvement of women's living conditions.

Being trained on issues, such as advocacy, provided a great possibility for promoting actions based on the needs of her community. Her experience in the formulation of the advocacy plan (including problem identification, causal analysis of the difficulties encountered and goals to be achieved) was interesting. She understood that when being a leader, it does not necessarily mean that everyone has to understand that the proposed topics or projects are the most pertinent and needed for the community, but

"The most important thing is to start observing what is happening in this community, what actions can be taken, and what tools can be used to do advocacy".



©FIMI. *Offering. Activities of the classroom stage, 2nd edition of the GLSIV.*

rather it is important to investigate what the real problems are in order be able to define them together as a group. In her own words, she states:

She has currently been participating in a National Educational Forum, a space where she introduced her plan, which was chosen as one of the best proposals of the department because of its approach. Her proposal aimed at creating and strengthening spaces for political, cultural, and organizational training from the indigenous women's view, with the participation of young people, girls and boys, addressing the rights of peoples. For its implementation, it was necessary to have the guidance of wise persons from the territories

of each people to decolonize thinking, unlearn and re-learn from indigenous women, and have the support of the Regional Indigenous Council of Cauca (CRIC) through its women's program.

For this reason, in the community field, her support focused on addressing issues related to rights from the practice and reality of her people so that they can be provided visibility at the national level. In the field of education, she has shown how indigenous communities are historically organizing processes from their own pedagogy, strengthening cultural identity, empowering girls and women in each field where they operate. She firmly believes that every advocacy action is linked to the creation

of alliances as a result of coordination at all levels, ensuring that proposals are intended for helping indigenous communities learn and understand about the defense of their rights from their Indigenous being.

According to Luz's experience, learning is an opportunity and a challenge to the extent that it promotes changes in the individual and a specific group. She confirmed her participation in the Global School allowed her to know how to formulate the advocacy plan and was an experience that made a big impression on her. There, she learned the way to propose change actions contained in a plan with clear strategies that respond to the problem faced by the community. It has been a significant learning experience.

Strengthening her capacities in the field of education through an alternative teaching methodology that allows her to share knowledge is something that she considers extremely valuable. Advising grassroots organizations on administrative processes for funds management and project development has become a chain of training for other leaders who have found all her insights and knowledge to be useful. With satisfaction, she states:

“

“Having learned about the importance of respecting my body, respecting others, and respecting Mother Earth, for me is a principle that a woman leader must have and that must characterize her. I appreciate this knowledge from the Global School”.

Challenges and dreams to continue changing individually and collectively

As part of her contribution to women, youth, and children's organizations, she has set challenging goals for herself to reach that must be reflected in changes from the individual to the collective levels. Likewise, her dream is to continue growing as a person, acquire new types of relationships, continue studying, learn more about other cultures, exchange knowledge, and teach others what she has learned. Her collective dream is to continue accompanying the community by teaching women what she knows, and that they, in turn, teach other women. The idea is to create a fabric of learning for sharing new experiences and continuing in the struggle to exercise their rights and care for the environment, as well as to raise awareness from their own actions toward the care of mother earth, and pass on that awareness to the organizational level. However, a great challenge for her is to promote a small company that sells fabrics, making garments with a mixture of the Nasa culture fabric with other materials, in order to consume what is produced in the community.

Luz firmly believes that she needs to pass on what she has learned throughout her life and from her training experience at the Global School, which is why she has started passing on her knowledge about the rights of women, boys, and girls of the Indigenous school, ensuring that girls now know how to value themselves, affirming the importance of valuing themselves.

Going along the journey through the life of María Luz, she shows a clear example of the meaning of the word leadership, which she makes come alive with each action that she promotes from the community to the international levels. She allows us to understand that a struggle makes sense to the extent that it promotes changes that in principle are experienced by whoever supports them, so as to convert them into collective benefits.

Her story has been mainly about the recognition of the Nasa women's leadership, which is deeply linked to their view of life and the world, where the home is the center of everything and for everyone. It is about understanding how her political training in the Global Leadership School became a strategic tool to struggle for them and all women, and of their great commitment to return to a territory to share her knowledge gained along the way, leaving colorful legacies and seeds in girls, youth, and women.



PETRONA FERNÁNDEZ OSCO

For me, a woman in the Aymara language means Suma Kamaña. For us, women mean good living in harmony with Mother Nature, with the earth, with the family, with children, with everything surrounding a woman.



©FIMI. Petrona Fernández, participant of the 4th edition of the GLSIW.

The fabric of Petrona's story is an approach to her Aymara being, a woman knowledgeable about her people and culture. She was born in the province of Murillo, on the shores of Lake Titicaca, in the department of La Paz, Bolivia. She identifies herself as a woman committed to the community, well-known among young people and girls, to whom she passes on knowledge and experiences accumulated in the course of her life.

She is 38 years old. She completed her studies in Educational Sciences during a

five-year period at the Universidad Mayor de San Andrés. She is a member of the Yanari community in the Organization of Native Communities, in La Paz, Bolivia, where she has held positions of communal authority. She has been organically linked to it, supporting the entire process of organizational, administrative, and political management. Among other activities, she is responsible for preparing reports, submitting cooperation requests to Public institutions, and maintaining relations with non-governmental organizations (NGOs). She currently is trying to restore the



©FMI. Petrona Fernández, participant of the 4th edition of the GLSIW.

textile knowledge of her community, as well as knowledge of the traditional foods prepared by the grandmothers.

With concern and sadness, she remembers when she was a child, access to education for girls and boys was very difficult in the community. However, with great satisfaction, she explains that thanks to her mother's support, she was able to leave the community and study in the city. As a result, she stayed away from her family, but she managed to get ahead in life. She states:

“I come from a patriarchal family. Women could definitely not get involved in any matter outside of the family, whether meetings or Tantachawis (that is, for us, large community meetings where roles or issues can be defined). Women could not get in. It has been one of the great setbacks that I have had”.



©FIMI. Petrona Fernández, participant of the 4th edition of the GLSIW, during the regional capacity building program South America.

Leadership as a light and guide for good living

For Aymara women who have participated in organizations, leadership is a fundamental part to lead toward the path of good living, and Petrona is part of that path on which, with firm and sure steps, she has managed to promote actions in favor of women and her community. In this regard, she states:

“Women say that thanks to my efforts, perhaps at the expense of my family, I have now been able to be, it could be said ... it is very difficult for me to tell myself that I am a leader, but yes ... actually, I am one”.

She knows that to be appointed as a leader, she needs to recognize herself, realize that her knowledge is a tool to support other women of the Aymara people. She also considers that thanks to her effort and those who have encouraged her to participate in forums and training programs in different places, she has been able to help women and girls become empowered about their specific rights and Indigenous Peoples.

According to Petrona, in the process of strengthening and shaping leadership, there are several important factors. Regarding the positive factors, she states that training, studying, learning, serving the community, and other women are fundamental; while the negative factors, such as decision-making spaces in which recognition of the indigenous women's voice and participation is difficult, it is necessary to demonstrate four and even five times harder. She proudly states that she converts these difficulties into a challenge to overcome, and believes that, thanks to her training that she has received in different

places, she has managed to overcome this situation. In this regard, she explains:

“

“Thanks to those places, those spaces, I have been able to be what I am now, very proud of being an indigenous woman, speaking my language, understanding my customs, my vision”.

According to her, developing leadership as an indigenous woman cannot occur if there are no male/female allies, who become a support and accompaniment network to advocate from this perspective. Someone very important in her life is her mother, who has always been struggling alongside her father. In her own



©FIMI. Petrona Fernández, participant of the 4th edition of the GLSIW, during the regional capacity building program South America.



words, Petrona explains:

“My mother always reminds me: you have to say this, you have to talk about these issues, about what things are being done wrong. From her, I have received knowledge about the customs, about the vision about the Suma Kamaña, the good living around you, with Alaipacha, in Manjapacha, and with Acapacha. She has been very important to me”.

She also recognizes the International Indigenous Women’s Forum as a very strong ally, a team of women who have always supported her, who have motivated her to lose her fear of expressing herself and saying what she truly thinks and believes. In the same way, she believes that for the exercise of leadership it is important to have women who are role models, an inspiration and an example of how to be a leader, how to act, respond and guide the women of their community. Likewise, women like Tarcila Rivera and Cecilia Ramírez who have managed to confront racism, classism, colonialism, and patriarchy — that is, models of the exclusionary system that have historically caused inequality and the violation of the rights of indigenous women and their peoples — give her strength to move forward.

As part of her experience, she has worked with children and young people. However, at

present, she has decided to approach and support older people to rescue their ancestral knowledge, mainly about food, textiles, and values of the people. and pass them on to young people and children.

An example of the great value and richness of the Aymara culture is the meaning of Pachamama, which is a very own and important value that is part of the being and work of women and men of her people; this is why it is a principle in the exercise of her leadership. Also, there is a set of tangible or intangible elements and symbols containing endless meanings that in some way represent authority and power to serve. In this regard, she states:

“For me, an element with intangible meaning is the Pachamama. We are based on what mother earth is, that is everything for us as Indigenous Peoples, and especially for my community; it means strength, wisdom, knowledge, food. It is a deity to whom we ask, beg to give us abundance, courage, strength, knowledge; the essence of the Indigenous Peoples is the Pachamama”.



©FIMI. Participants of the regional capacity building program South America, Santiago de Chile, 2018.



©FIMI. Closing of activities, during the regional capacity building program South America, Santiago de Chile, 2018.

The Global School: a space to learn and share knowledge as Aymara people

She proudly recognizes that she has had great opportunities to learn something new every day, so participating in the Leadership School was a great responsibility. In her own words, she explains:

“One thing that encouraged me to participate in the Leadership School is that I found a space

where I could freely talk about my knowledge, my community, my people, about the Aymara, and that is what has driven me to continue moving forward”.

Concerning her participation in the training process, she states that she has had significant experiences that mark her as a leader, such as her participation in Program on Human Rights and International Advocacy Skills in New York, where she listened to concerns and issues that Indigenous Peoples deal with, not

only in her country but throughout the world. It was also priceless to have taken courses on Human Rights and advocacy strategies at Columbia University.

Having the opportunity to meet many women who also wanted to get trained and learn about human rights, women and Indigenous Peoples, and now recognizing herself as a trainer of other women, have very valuable things to Petrona. Her training has been essential to stop repressing what she knows and what she is. Now, with certainty, she feels proud of being an Aymara woman.

The training process implied challenges and responsibilities. One of them was to develop an advocacy plan as part of the tasks during her participation in the Global School. Petrona states that in the face of a colonialist education system that has historically established stereotypes of oppression and racism, having a training space where the importance of proposing tools for bringing back ancestral principles of the Aymara culture is recognized and a learning-by-doing methodology is used, is something that she highly values.



“For me, it has been a very important experience, how to make an advocacy plan, how to propose ideas, how to formulate, what I did about alimentation, what have implemented in my community. Thanks to that, alimentation has also changed a lot in my community”.

With the implementation of her advocacy plan, she had the opportunity to coordinate and build bridges among women, community leaders, and local government, promoting

spaces where the people’s needs are put forward. Also, the mayor’s office was asked to finance resources for the purchase of products, obtaining support for three neighboring communities. As a result, this type of procedure was promoted to be carried out among other Peoples nearby, and thus the Government was forced to assume its responsibility. With regret, she comments that at the national level it has been a little more difficult, due to the racist and bureaucratic characteristics of the central government institutions, which has represented a huge challenge for her, since beyond obtaining resources she is trying to find out how the institutional framework works and what the spaces for advocacy are to manage funds and resources for the development of training workshops.

Therefore, with the experience she acquired, she developed another advocacy plan about textiles, to revalue the ways of dyeing in the communities, which allowed her to work at the national level with other departments, such as Cochabamba, Oruro, La Paz, and Santa Cruz, and thus implement her plan.

At the national level, she is training five women from different departments of Bolivia, as a member of the Timpu Network, which works for the empowerment of indigenous women. Another contribution is her providing of work tours in different communities, promoting greater participation of women, knowledge about their rights, and different mixed spaces. During the tours, she takes advantage of the knowledge provided by grandmothers and grandfathers so that she can pass that on to the new generations since she has realized that young people do not want to recognize their identity.

For her, learning is opening a window to wisdom; it is like starting a journey towards something new and unknown. This is what the Leadership School has represented for her. One of her valuable educational



experiences has been learning about the rights of indigenous women, which allowed her to recognize herself as a subject who possesses and deserves rights as an Aymara woman and as part of an Indigenous People. With satisfaction, she states:

“

“Now I am putting it into practice in my community, organizing small workshops so that they can learn about the rights that indigenous women have, either nationally or internationally”.

Challenges and dreams to continue sowing seeds of leadership

One of her main dreams is that everything she has achieved in the course of her life will have helped Indigenous Peoples to strengthen themselves, restore their ancestral principles, fight to vindicate their rights in the areas of prevention and research. That means that she must have the right conditions and resources to achieve this dream. She knows that it implies a lot of effort, seeking alliances and coordination mechanisms that she can obtain to the extent that she is aware of her skills and attitudes for dealing with adversity. She states:

“

“One of my dreams is that the women of my community empower themselves and exercise their individual and collective rights, as well as empower themselves more economically by using the native products that exist within the community”.

For Petrona, sharing and passing on her life lessons and experiences has become a challenge, which means reaching out to others, leaving a mark, and planting seeds for new leadership in girls, boys, women, and young people, which is also a commitment. In her own words, she explains:

“Passing on my knowledge to children is my great passion. I am a scientist in education and I specialized in Psychopedagogy. I work with children from 3 years and up. I talk to them about rights, about peoples, about women, about the roles—that would be my great legacy”

She also believes that a training space leads to the identification of other needs and strategies for training and educating, which is why she suggests that meetings at the national level should be held so that women leaders can share their knowledge, concerns, and ideas. This allows for the indigenous women from different regions to come together in all of their



©FIMI. During the regional capacity building program South America, Santiago de Chile, 2018.

diversity, sharing thoughts and knowledge to build bridges of support and advocacy. With special attention, she points out the need to find suitable people who speak the language of indigenous women.

This is why she assures us with certainty that to continue empowering more women, it is necessary to train or seek out bilingual women who speak the original language and Spanish as a second language. She sees this as a difficulty since the Government does not change its educational system, limiting women's access to spaces such as scholarships or other opportunities to study and learn about international rights and everything that has to do with Indigenous Peoples.

By the look on Petrona's face and her joy for continuing contributing and moving forward together with other indigenous women like herself, we can confirm that the journey through her life story has presented challenges, dreams, learning opportunities, and knowledge. It also invites us to continue working in the promotion and defense of the rights of women and Indigenous Peoples and to continue strengthening themselves from their different organizational spaces. It allows us to understand how significant it is for an Aymra woman from Bolivia, what she has learned in a training space such as the Leadership School. Now Petrona Fernández is an indigenous woman that is safer, more courageous, and capable in dealing with the system, without fear and with tools to make changes and empower more young women, girls, and boys among her people.

CECILIA RAMÍREZ PÉREZ

Cecilia's story begins with the strength of her umbilical cord, which connected her existence to this earth and after her birth, it was planted under an agave plant known as "maguey". According to the Mixtec worldview, this rite means the physical and spiritual connection of a person with the earth, where they always return.



©FIMI. Closing of activities, during the regional capacity building program South America, Santiago de Chile, 2018.

She spent the first years of her life in a community located in the Mixtec region of Oaxaca, in the municipality of San Miguel el Grande, district of Tlaxiaco. When facing the fact that the Mixtec people have a long history of migration to the main cities, including the United States, it made her question the conditions that motivate people to migrate from their place of origin to a completely different one.

Within her nuclear family, Cecilia has two older sisters and two younger sisters. Since childhood, they all have stayed together until the present, supporting each other. For her

part, her mother always was interested in them to pursue their studies, despite the difficulties. Therefore, each one of them assumed the responsibility of working and studying to have a career. She believes that her mother has been the main influence in her life decisions.

Some memories come to mind that she shares about her grandparents, who did not have the opportunity to attend school, although during her childhood there was a time in Mexico in which extensive literacy campaigns were created nationwide. They were peasants and also migrated seasonally to different places to cultivate or trade, but they always returned.



©FIMI. Closing of face-to-face activities of the 6th edition of the GLSIW. New York City.

Her mother was the only woman among several male siblings, who also had the privilege and access to study. However, due to her condition as a woman, her parents only provided her with elementary school, despite her wishes to continue studying. This fact was not fortuitous at that time, since those who did not take their children to elementary school had to be fined by the community authorities in case they did not fulfill their duty to provide elementary school education for all their children.

During her youth, she collaborated in an intercultural and bilingual program for Indigenous migrant children in Mexico City. An experience that allowed her to strengthen her identity as a Mixtec, as well as having the opportunity to share with many children, who are now young. As a result, they learned the different languages existing in Mexico and how to call them by name, because whenever they

heard the elderly speak in other languages, according to their region, they referred to them as English. This as a consequence of the education system, which maintains a structure of colonial and racist content, which still prevails today. Later on, she had the opportunity to study and obtain a degree in Political Science and Public Administration at the National Autonomous University of Mexico. She is grateful and proud of that education because the public university was a space that gave her opportunities to learn and understand new challenges.

Being part of the Global Leadership School of Indigenous Women: an opportunity to learn and unlearn

Cecilia, as a woman who believes in bettering herself, continued strengthening her capacities and knowledge, which is why she was invited to participate in the Diploma Program for Strengthening Indigenous Women's Leadership, promoted by the Alliance of Indigenous Women of Central America and Mexico. There she met Dr. Mirna Cunningham, who invited her to do an internship at the FIMI and thus help out for a few months performing some tasks entrusted to her. As a result of her good work, she was asked to continue contributing to the FIMI mission in the training program. Currently, she is the coordinator of the Global Leadership School of Indigenous Women. She gladly shares:

“

“This had been a dream I've wanted to achieve to strengthen the knowledge of indigenous women leaders”.

It has been a great achievement that allowed her to be part of a training process, accompanying women leaders around the world, who contribute effectively in global spaces, which have been maintained with much effort and struggle, such as the





©FIMI. Award of diplomas, GLSIW Asia regional capacity building program. City of Gujarat, India, 2018.

Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

De la misma manera, iniciar la implementación In the same way, the implementation of the first edition of the school implied a lot of learning, observing, and listening to those who had coordinated these processes during that phase. The orientation and instruction of Mariana López, who coordinated the FIMI programs at that time were also important.

Under her guidance and with the participation of various allies, indigenous and non-indigenous leaders, they developed the different training contents, designed for women leaders from different peoples of the world. From her point of view, the school is not only a virtual training space with a presence at Columbia University for women leaders, but it has also made it possible to expand and articulate the FIMI to more organizations with local and national

advocacy. It has been a meeting space for various women with different backgrounds, in which training is a point of intersection that has united them, providing mechanisms to build bridges of solidarity among them.

For the participants, it is a one-of-a-kind meeting space, and for many of them it has been a watershed in their lives, marking a before and after, allowing them to understand their leadership in a broader dimension of space and to realize that their battles are not isolated, since they share things in common concerning the lack of recognition of their rights and the constant violation of them.

Cecilia acknowledges that the implementation of five editions of the School has made it easier for the FIMI to identify indigenous women leaders that have contributed with technical tasks within other processes as

part of its mission, allowing them to put their abilities, knowledge, and experiences to the service of others, as well as be in contact with other leaders in international and regional spaces, in which they have brought the voice of indigenous women with proposals and demands for the fulfillment of their specific and collective rights.

She also recognizes that one of the challenges is to work remotely, link, and connect women leaders from various parts of the world to meet and share during two intense weeks in New York, which means a greater effort in terms of logistics, communication, and response to conditions according to the different contexts to which they belong. Actions from which they have learned, as well as other circumstances they have overcome such as language or internet access.

In addition, she believes that the school has contributed minimally in providing them with tools that strengthen the indigenous leaders' mission, from their communities, in their countries, and at a global level in their tireless struggle to position their rights to land, territory, health, education, peace and justice; the right to the continuity of their language and against discrimination, racism, and climate change in the first line of defense; and supporting them to continue working to build improvements from the local to the global level and vice versa, ensuring a good standard of living for their peoples. In her own words she says:



“In a world of broad inequalities, I am inspired by all the women leaders who have participated in the FIMI’s School. Without a doubt, after 5 editions I trust and believe in what I do”.

Today, for her, it is gratifying to have 40 life stories of indigenous women and leaders, in which it is possible to understand how the School strengthened, united, and gave them tools to continue effecting immediate and long-term changes. They are dealing with challenges to lead the progress of their Indigenous Peoples at a global level, from the community and national levels in their countries. From her experience, the Global Leadership School has always renewed its processes in each edition to improve its content and methodology, and thus respond to the conditions, interests, and identity of the participating leaders.

Cecilia’s life story has made it possible to understand, from the inside, a woman’s conviction of assuming a different identity, marked by shades of different colors, which add strength, empowerment, and wisdom to her leadership. It is a journey where she has met many indigenous women, who have shared lessons and insights with her through their own experience, and have strengthened their conviction to work with and for indigenous women in the demand of their specific and collective rights.

Now, as the coordinator of the Global Leadership School, she is aware of her mission in this process: to provide women with new learning opportunities from the International Indigenous Women's Forum, a space for organization and advocacy at a global level, which makes it possible to plant seeds of additional knowledge and wisdom in each participating leader, who in turn will sow seeds in the lives of other women in their communities, provinces, and countries. Cecilia is an example of an indigenous leader and professional woman, who, from her Mixtec being, integrates and balances her various roles with dedication, commitment, and determination.

©FIMI. . Photograph taken from
the projects of the AYNI Indigenous
Women's Fund.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Through the stories told by indigenous leaders from different parts of the world, it was possible to learn about their struggles, insights, experiences, examples, conquests, successes, mistakes, and dreams. Figuratively, the threads of their lives weave a fabric of stories that describe a journey in the defense of their rights as women and ancestral peoples, allowing us to see how the project of the Global Leadership School of Indigenous Women strengthened their leadership personally and collectively. The main conclusions about the 40 stories told are set forth below.

Identity and origin, determining factors in the being of women leaders

Their stories tell about the lives of women who assume different identities from the recognition of their being, integrality of values, principles, symbols, and elements that are part of the history, culture, knowledge, and ancestral practices of their peoples. They are creators, carriers, transmitters, protectors, and supporters of this set of values and life systems, based on worldview and spirituality, linked to divinity as something intangible but visible in people, the universe, and natural goods, which gives strength, power, and wisdom to the being of each person and their original Peoples.

The female being with whom each leader arrived on the earth plane is deeply intertwined with the earth, water, and natural resources; as givers of life, providers of everything that inhabits the universe; that is why, from their identity as women from different Peoples, they conceive an intimate connection with everything that gives and nourishes the

meaning of life in the universe, which has its origin in the ancestral roots that for centuries and generations have been transferred and inherited to them and their peoples, by their ancestors, grandmothers and grandfathers, wise men and women. From the transmission of cosmogony, science, philosophy, spirituality, knowledge, values, and practices, of which they are now part and that they also pass on to the new generations based on the culture of life.

The place of birth of each leader was based in territories and Peoples from Africa, Asia, the Arctic, Latin America, North America, and the Pacific, regions of the world inhabited by ancestral Peoples, with diverse cultures, languages, knowledge, and rich biodiversity, which have given sustenance to their existence; territories with history and realities that have directed the life of each one of them, and today are being strongly threatened by the impacts of climate change.



Decisive relevant events in the lives of those women leaders

The stories and lives of women leaders have been influenced by events that intersect the impacts of racism, discrimination, exploitation, patriarchy, and exclusion; historical and current oppressions determined by the existence of monocultural and oppressive governments, which did not recognize (to date, in some countries, they are not yet recognized) the rights and identity of indigenous peoples and women. As a result of these systems, they have been victims of wars, repression, displacement, historical and current dispossession; facts and history that they have to go through due to constant violence. They have survived in conditions

of poverty, illiteracy, lack of basic public services, food insecurity, and poor health conditions. They have dealt with conflicts such as persecution and criminalization, human trafficking, exploitation of natural resources, and the dispossession and depredation of their territories.

These stories told about the strength, wisdom, and resilience of indigenous women dealing with these colonization actions from the spirituality and knowledge of their ancestors, families, and peoples. They showed how over the last 70 years, the number of women trained spiritually, energetically, humanly, politically, and academically, in social and legal disciplines, has grown. With these tools, they have gained greater strength to care for, defend, and demand their rights as women and as Indigenous Peoples.

Indigenous women's leadership: a banner of struggle and defense for life and rights

The women leaders' stories told about how leadership is understood and developed from the perspective of indigenous women, understood as a mission and a principle of life, which is transformed from individual actions to collective movements, which makes it possible to revitalize and contribute knowledge, capacities, abilities, and experiences in an intergenerational way, so that they can influence in an organized way in different areas against the situation of inequality and historical and current oppressions that women and peoples are facing.

Therefore, based on their experience, being a woman leader is a banner of struggle, power, and resistance in favor of life and the defense of her specific rights, such as the right to a life free of violence; the rights to political

participation, education, comprehensive and integrative health; ownership and control of their own resources, so that their voices and proposals are heard and taken into account in public policies, plans, programs, projects, and budgets of the States.

Furthermore, in their leadership roles, they speak out about the demand for their collective rights, such as the right to own land, water; the right to live in their territories as owners and protectors of mother earth, and of all the natural assets that belong to it. To a large extent, the main demand of women leaders is their right to self-determination. It is that Peoples and communities choose and protect their territories and learn how to use the natural assets that derive from it. Their leadership proposes other alternatives, contrary to the invasion and exploitation of transnational companies. It is a life action turned into a political demand for the transformation of the reality that the States have imposed and forced them to maintain. However, with the strength and wisdom of their ancestral cultures, they have resisted and are willing to continue moving forward along wide, flat, and clean paths.



©FIMI. Group photo, participants of the 3rd edition of GLSIW, United Nations Headquarters, New York City.

Today, leaders are contributing to the compliance with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the enforcement of actions contained in the Beijing Platform for Action, including recommendations of these international mechanisms that governments have committed to implement, but have failed to do so. Indigenous women leaders, as politically active subjects, are following

up with these governments, promoting the inclusion of their approaches in the laws and government policies, in particular those referring to women and Indigenous Peoples.

Global Leadership School of Indigenous Women: a gathering of knowledge

Women leaders have found that strengthening and building collective knowledge is synonymous with weaving learning and capacities, which provide their leadership with new tools and skills that they put at the service of other indigenous sisters and their Peoples. In their stories, they stated that having participated in the training process at the Global Leadership School represented an opportunity to grow, a place for a gathering of knowledge, learning, and wisdom. Fellowship through virtual and in-person sessions with sisters from different peoples of the world allowed them to understand and reaffirm the importance of their struggles and resistance in demanding a dignified life.

A training, learning, and unlearning process from and for indigenous women contains a deep meaning that strengthened their identity as indigenous women and leaders, which fortified their sense of collectivity, joint work, and coordinated support with other organizations and networks. This space also provided them with knowledge and management of international instruments, and the importance of their application for the defense and demand of their individual, specific, and collective rights as women and indigenous peoples.

They asserted that every advocacy action must be linked to the transformation of problematic issues experienced by indigenous women, their communities, and peoples on the assumption that this is a strategic tool to establish actions that respond to needs according to people's current circumstances, knowledge, and resources. For women, advocacy is synonymous with working together, making alliances, and building bridges of support: it means transforming issues into proposals and actions into the change towards a better standard of living.



©FIMI. Exhibition of cultural pieces, regional capacity building program South America, Santiago de Chile, 2018.

Challenges and dreams: a new cycle in the development of leadership

Today each woman leader who participated in the 5 editions of the Global School of Leadership asserts herself as a promoter and defender of individual, specific, and collective human rights. They continue demanding the fulfillment of their rights, but mainly, they suggest and carry out actions to exercise them from their different identities, latitudes, cultures, and contexts.

Dealing with the State is still a challenge, as well as strengthening their participation in political processes at the national, regional, and international levels to occupy positions of decision-making, in which they can advocate by promoting plans, public policies, and legislation in favor of indigenous peoples and women; contribute to the building of peace in their countries so that they may have a good quality of life as peoples; and continue encouraging generations of young leaders who have the strength, power, and wisdom to go keep fighting and not allow themselves to

continue losing their identity.

They dream of being free from violence in societies in which they can speak without being discriminated against for being indigenous women, as subjects and holders of collective and individual rights; living as autonomous Indigenous Peoples and with dignified treatment in all their areas of life; replacing fear with freedom, exchanging dependency for empowerment, replacing silence with a collective voice; achieving a world free of discrimination, where skin, gender, and any other form of discrimination is eradicated.

They are indigenous women leaders who designate themselves as multipliers of changes and transformations in order to dignify the lives of women and ancestral peoples. They are weavers of dreams and realities, transmitters of knowledge, know-how, vindications and struggles, from their being and actions with strength and determination.



©FIMI. Group activity during the GLSIW Africa regional capacity building program. City of Nairobi, Kenya.

6. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to give a special and affectionate thanks those who have done the Global Leadership School of Indigenous Women for five editions.

Our deep thanks to:

✿ ***Tamal Pais for your full trust and collaboration.***

✿ ***Institute for the Study of Human Rights, Columbia University for always opening the doors.***

✿ ***The Secretariat of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues for its contribution to the implementation of each edition of the IWGLS.***

✿ ***The Regional Networks that articulate for the existence of FIMI.***

✿ ***The organizations of indigenous women from the six sociocultural regions of the world for your persistence in the struggle of our rights.***



©FIMI. Exhibition of cultural pieces by GLSIW participants, New York City

Thanks to all the participants for your cooperation, efforts, perseverance, endurance, wisdom, reciprocity, constancy, teachings, responsibility, commitment and conviction. For creating and recreating better worlds. Thank you for sharing your stories, for telling us your dreams, learning and entwining your hands among diverse cultures, invested with symbols and ancestral principles, that as leaders make alive with your implementation and by transmitting them to the current and new generations.

Thank you, ancestors. Thank you for your centuries of resistance.

These stories are your harvest and also seeds for those who come.

“The Global School empowers women to take the voice of their communities to the international level, to influence the creation of public policies, which are later brought back to their communities so that they can advance their work.”

Dr. Myrna Cunningham, ideologist and advisor of the IWGLS

“Studying together, sharing with indigenous women friends from all over the world gave me extraordinary experience and knowledge”.

Romba’ Marannu Sombolinggi, Toraya, Indonesia

“It’s necessary to get in touch with other communities and share our problems and ideas to improve our lives. I was able to bring those ideas to my community”.

Laura Vukson, Tlichó Dene, Canada

“We, as women, have a very important role within our Indigenous territories because we are connected to the land and water, and that creates this connection with the jungle and the Pachamama where we cultivate, where we sow to produce our food”.

Indira Azucena Vargas Guatatuca, Kichwa, Ecuador

“The implementation of advocacy plans has motivated me, as there are many problems to solve here in my Aymara culture, and we as women lacked tools to find ways to change them”

Irma Doris Percca Marca, Peru, Aymara

“I think that there is a ‘before’ and an ‘after’ the training school. I think I assumed things with much more maturity, with goals clearer than those I already had, and with more organizational strengthening to accompany women and children”.

María Luz Piñacue Achicue, Nasa, Colombia

“One thing that encouraged me to participate in the Leadership School is that I found a space where I could freely talk about my knowledge, my community, my people, about the Aymara, and that is what has driven me to continue moving forward”.

Petrona Fernández Osco, Aymara, Bolivia

“We come from communities that loved us and we grew up appreciating each other, respecting our environment. We must work to connect and help each other live a good life, that is why training is valuable — so we can achieve that”.

Theresa John, Yupik Eskimo, Alaska

Global Leadership School of
Indigenous Women eBooks



Use an application or install the
QR reader of your choice to read
the code.