



Sports practices to strengthen the leadership of Indigenous Women

Research and Documentation Report coordinated by FIMI and produced by Jenny Chicaiza and Ivonne Gaona

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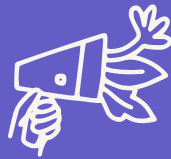
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Introduction



The history of colonization of Indigenous Peoples has left its mark on so many aspects of the lives of Indigenous Peoples and Women. In the current cultural reconfiguration and re-contextualization of community life, there are different elements that can contribute as strategies for the survival of the Peoples and the emancipation of women. Thus, sport, long conceived as a male physical and recreational activity, offers possibilities that were unthinkable in previous centuries.

The purpose of this paper is to study the link between sport and the formation of leadership and the empowerment of Indigenous Women. It aims to answer the question of whether conventional or traditional sport, through practice and specific contextualization, can strengthen the leadership and empowerment capacities of Indigenous Women in Asia, Africa and Latin America?

Three specific objectives have been outlined to guide the research:

- **To identify experiences of traditional and conventional sports carried out by Indigenous Women in different cultural and community contexts**
- **To know the context in which they are practiced and the settings within which these sports are developed**
- **To visualize the incidence of individual and collective sports in the lives of women, in the possibilities of personal growth, empowerment and leadership.**

We approached the reality of the communities through a qualitative approach, conducting virtual interviews in mid-2021 with ten organizations of Indigenous Women or working directly with them in the line of sports and Indigenous Women's rights. The unique virtuality imposed by the circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic has been challenging and at the same time has allowed contact with such distant organizations established in the Americas, Asia and Africa.

In the analysis, we found elements that demonstrate the importance of sport for Indigenous Women in various aspects. Sport contributes to developing leadership skills and strengthening their empowerment. This affirmation can be seen reflected in the way in which Indigenous Women have gained spaces for the practice of sports, how they have interpreted these spaces as ideal for meetings, reflection and advocacy. They have also been able to configure the space as a means to generate income for their economic autonomy. In this context, sport promotes access to rights for Indigenous Women and is valued based on the physical, mental and spiritual benefits it provides, which strengthens relationship skills, teamwork, perseverance, among others.

This study is divided into three sections. The first presents the theoretical and methodological setting that develops the concepts related to sports and the empowerment and leadership of Indigenous Women, as well as the methodology used for the research. The second section presents

the analysis of the findings, putting in dialogue the interpretation of the theoretical setting with the voice of the interviewees, and the third section develops the conclusions, answering the question that served as a thread for the research.

The work is carried out in the setting of the alliance between the International Indigenous Women's Forum (FIMI) and Women Win (WW) organization, both committed to the struggle of women to achieve visibility and social equity.

In this sense, FIMI, through the AYNI program and in alliance with Women Win, has financed sports projects for organizations that promote leadership and the rights of Indigenous Women, recognizing that sports have physical, mental and spiritual benefits in the lives of individuals and peoples. This research is thus carried out as a way to contribute, from the experiences of the organizations, elements that allow to explain the relationship between the practice of sports and the strengthening of leadership and empowerment of Indigenous Women. In this setting, the aim is to promote the visibility of the opportunities that sports bring to women in different ways (cultural, spiritual, rights, economic, etc.).

1. Theoretical and methodological framework



1.1 Theoretical Framework

1.1.1 Sport and games

Games which appear to be a purely recreational activity are loaded with fiction and symbolism (Lavega Burges, 2010). They also allow for the participation of people of all ages and genders, even though some may be considered to be exclusively for women, others exclusively for men, or for both. Only some games may later be considered as sports.

Sport is a game that has gone through a process of formalization and even institutionalization, and has been recognized as such by society and sometimes by international organizations such as the Olympic committees. It involves the development of physical activities subject to certain rules and requires certain skills and training. It can be carried out as a game, as competition and collaboration. According to the European Committee, recognized by the Olympic Committee, "Sport means all forms of physical activity, which through casual or organized participation help to express or improve physical fitness and mental well-being, foster social relationships or obtain competitive results at all levels" (BBC NEWS, 2017).

There are differences between what is considered a game and a sport. Unlike games, sports tend to be institutionalized, involve more serious competition and have less flexible rules, especially if they are played at a professional level.

1.1.2 Conventional sports

In this work, we call conventional sports the activities known as sports by the dominant cultures. These sports are the ones widely recognized worldwide. According to the Encyclopedia of World Sport (Levinson & Christensen, 1999), soccer and basketball¹ are the most widely known and played sports worldwide and are of British origin. Among the most popular conventional sports worldwide that have been adopted by Indigenous Peoples are soccer in Latin America and field hockey in several African and West Asian countries, according to the interviews conducted with 10 organizations that promote sports in these continents.

Several authors who have studied in indigenous communities (López and Segura [2012] as well as Velazco and Tombe [2010], both quoted by Tunubala Ullune [2014]), report that conventional sports are taking the place of traditional sports, as a result of globalization. They also point out how the cultural practices of an indigenous community indicate a need to articulate them with universal knowledge.

From this perspective, sport can also be a way of knowing the other and their interculturality. Marshall Sahlins claims that "globalization [...] has not destroyed the world system in communities, rather it has energized it" (Perugachi, 2018: 83). The integration of conventional sports in indigenous communities is dynamic: communities can take ownership of the activity by reinterpreting it based on their culture and ways of life. Perugachi also highlights how the appropriation of sports is also different between indigenous men and women.

1.1.3 Traditional dances

For this work we want to specify that we refer to traditional dances and games as the physical, ludic and recreational activities transmitted from generation to generation in indigenous communities. These activities may be in the process of recovery or may be practiced regularly to this day, for social cohesion, physical exercise and spiritual connection.

Dance is an ancestral activity, which in indigenous societies is linked not only to bodily and aesthetic skills and expressions, but is also linked to the spirituality cultivated by the people who practice it. However, it meets the requirements of the description of a sport, since it requires a physical challenge, specific skills, rules to be followed and training. In indigenous societies we can find dances that can be practiced according to different contexts, some sacred and others for recreation and community sharing.

For the Peoples and Nations, dance, more than artistic movements of the body, is a language of spiritual connection of the human being with Mother Earth, with the spirits of the ancestors, with the tutelary spirits and the gods of the world. In this context, dance is a human prayer through the movement of the body (PAHO, 2021). Dance strengthens individual and collective expression; it is the cultural expression of a community. It increases the confidence and self-esteem of the dancers, provides flexibility, resistance and muscular strength, and also reduces stress levels and depressive states (UEC, 2021).

Dances are an activity with a lot of symbolism, developed jointly by men and women. The Guaraní peoples differentiate between two types of dances, one considered sacred and the other festive. The sacred dance is not a sport but an expression of spirituality; it involves movement of the body to pray. The festive dances are accompanied by stories, songs, requests, which express the feelings of the group, an example is the *koti'u* of the Ava Guaraní.

In Africa, dance is an activity intrinsic to indigenous life and culture. According to Abbe (2007: 3) quoted by Adesina Adegbite (2010) "dance is always a serious matter because it is religion in a form of self-expression and in a communicative sense and it is also social, because it is an integrative part of life". Although dance is an activity of both men and women, on this continent, it is probably the most recognized physical activity for the female gender. Lavega Burguez (2010), considers that activities such as games, dances and sports have much in common, while a game or a particular dance can also be considered as a sport depending on the society in which it is practiced.

1.1.4 Traditional games

SSalvador (2021) considers that the notion of "sport" is not respectful of indigenous populations or their territories, as it does not incorporate the conceptions of games and rituals that belong to these Peoples. The author suggests that the respect and valuation of the different Peoples should also involve the inclusion of their games as sports. In 2015, the first World Games of Indigenous Peoples were held in Brazil. Some indigenous games socially and institutionally recognized as sports were included in these Olympics, along with those conventional sports practiced by Indigenous Peoples. Some of the games considered as Olympic disciplines included canoeing, "tug-of-war", archery, running, javelin throwing, swimming; while blowgun shooting, head ball game (or Xikunahati) and trunk race, among others, were some of the "more exotic" games (Walter, 2015).

The debate around the inclusion of traditional games in the concept of sport should be analyzed in depth with the holders of this knowledge, especially because of the existence of physical activities that for Indigenous Peoples have the objective of integration and social cohesion, spiritual connection with deities, etc.

For Ruiz and Hernández (2016), Indigenous Peoples' games are community events in which, at a collective level, they can show their most ancestral ludic manifestations and make themselves visible to others about their ways of life, their customs and their culture. They conclude that the concept of Indigenous Peoples' games is articulated around the categories of culture, union, dialogue and knowledge.

The approach of the Indigenous Peoples' Olympics in Canada, inspired by the World Games which began in Brazil (Méndez, 2017), shows the importance of the union and culture categories in the conception of the indigenous game. The objective of the event was precisely "to unite the best athletes in the world and to recognize and keep alive the culture of these peoples". During the Olympics, dialogue and knowledge were not minor categories, as the space allowed to expose problems, exchange worldviews and analyze the importance of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Undoubtedly, Indigenous Peoples' games are an expression of their culture. However, for Salvador (2021), as already mentioned, these cultures can incorporate new sports practices by adding critical elements to traditional conceptions. The author considers that, in the case of soccer, cultures have been able to infuse it with new meaning, with a criticism of colonialism and racism.

Regarding the practice of traditional game, Monrroy and Rodríguez (2014) consider that the value of the body is extremely important, although the authors complement that in the games of indigenous cultures "not only the body is involved, but also, and importantly, the spirit" (Monrroy and Rodríguez, 2015). Their analysis considers that indigenous cultures always paid attention to the spiritual aspects of their traditional games, associating them with divinities, establishing a clear relationship between sport and religion. Along the same lines, Toledo (2007) considers that traditional indigenous games are "corporeal activities, with ludic characteristics, and that in practice they transmit myths, cultural values and therefore congregate in themselves the material and immaterial world of each ethnic group".

Through an analysis of the description of the traditional games of the Indigenous Peoples in the Paraguayan Chaco (Kovacs, 2011a) and with the contributions of the interviews conducted in three African countries, we see that the games that involved strength and ability to use the body were traditionally masculine games, such as the use of bolas (weighted lasso), spears, bows and arrows, as well as the slingshot that launches pellets. These games were related to the masculine activities of hunting and contributed to the children's development of skills that they would require in adulthood.

The traditional games were activities of integration between neighbouring villages or measurement of strength between men from different places. Although they included specific skills that had to be developed for survival and included competition among peers, most of the time they were activities that fostered good relations among community members or between communities and villages (Kovacs, 2011 a and b).

Other recreational games that are recorded do not involve physical strength; they were used for the integration of boys, girls and teenagers, both male and female. Thus, for example, playing ball during childhood was a game for both sexes, the ball was constructed with available elements of nature; the game of clay and bone dolls was a game exclusive to Nivaclé women, games involving hand skills for handling threads and the search for hidden objects were games practiced by both sexes and especially during childhood and early adolescence (Kovács, 2011 a and b).

1.1.5 Gender and gender equality

Gender is understood as the sociocultural constructs that differentiate and shape the roles, perceptions and statuses of women and men in a society (UNESCO, 2017). On gender equality, Beltrán (2008:203) argues that "it is a two-way avenue: it has advantages for both women and men". The author argues that in order to propitiate this equality, we must build equitable relations between both sexes in the public and private sphere; in other words, it is not only intended that women are valued and treated equally in the public sphere, but also that men's work in the family and domestic sphere is valued.

Duarte and García (2016:138) state that gender equality means that "women and men enjoy equal status and have equal conditions for the full realization of their human rights and their potential to contribute to political, economic, social, cultural development and to benefit from the results".

UN Women states that "Gender equality does not mean that men and women should be treated as identical, but that access to opportunities and the exercise of rights should not depend on a person's sex". In this sense, it considers that gender equality "starts from the recognition that historically women have been discriminated against and it is necessary to carry out actions that eliminate historical inequality and shorten the gaps between women and men" (UN Women, 2015).

1.1.6 Indigenous Women

To define Indigenous Women, we will start with the concept of "indigenous". The Special Rapporteur of the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, José R. Martínez Cobo, in his 1986 study of the "Problem of Discrimination against Indigenous Populations", presented the descriptions of the concept of indigenous.



Indigenous communities, peoples and nations are those which, having a historical continuity with the pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing in those territories or parts of them (...) and are determined to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories and ethnic identity as the basis of their continued existence as peoples, in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institutions and legal systems." (United Nations, 2004)

The author considers that, from the individual point of view, an indigenous person is understood as any person who belongs to these indigenous populations by self-identification as indigenous (group consciousness) and is recognized and accepted by these populations as one of their members (acceptance by the group).



From the complexity of what constitutes being indigenous, we can say that Indigenous Women are shaped by the particular gender constructions of their peoples, by their socio-territorial realities and by the adaptations in relation to the dominant society. From this perspective, Indigenous Women “do not constitute a homogeneous group, but present a great diversity of situations, needs and demands” (ECLAC, 2013: 17).

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) states that Indigenous Women are subjects of rights, protagonists of change and of their own development (IACHR, 2017), highlighting that Indigenous Women have played a fundamental role in the struggle for self-determination and that they are cultural guarantors, playing a fundamental role at the community and national level. UN Women highlights women as custodians of the traditions and natural resources of their communities, despite the fact that they constitute one of the most vulnerable and marginalized groups in the world (UN Women, 2021).

According to the ILO (IWGIA & ILO, 2020), Indigenous Women make up 238.4 million of the world's population. Worldwide, Indigenous Women have stated that they “face multiple discrimination, unequal pay, violence and harassment, limited access to health services, lack of recognition of their land rights and limited participation in decision-making that affected their lives” (IWGIA & ILO, 2020). Likewise, the report “Indigenous Women's Rights 25 years after the Beijing Declaration” produced by the Regional Observatory on Indigenous Peoples' Rights (ORDPI) of the Fund for the Development of Indigenous Peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean FILAC and UN-Women reveals that “the political participation of Indigenous Women remains limited in community settings and in the state and local political system” (FILAC, 2021). This reflects that Indigenous Women find themselves in a structural situation of discrimination in various social and institutional spheres.

1.1.7 Indigenous Children and Youth

According to Art. 1 of the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child, a child is defined as “every human being under the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier”. The Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, EMRIP reveals that “Indigenous children face obstacles to exercising their rights, such as marginalization, racism and structural discrimination, lack of adequate housing, poor health and education” (EMRIP, 2021:4). This mechanism argues that “indigenous girls face additional barriers, including those related to the right to education and health, and disproportionately high rates of adolescent pregnancy, which are often attributed to underlying causes such as lower education rates and harmful practices such as child marriage” (EMRIP, 2021:4).

IWGIA (2020) states that 45% of Indigenous People in the world are between the ages of 15 and 30 and are considered young people. According to this international NGO, indigenous youth currently face significant challenges, including marginalization, migration and early motherhood, so it is essential to support their demands for participation through permanent mechanisms (IWGIA, 2020). It is also true that indigenous youth inherit the responsibility to protect and conserve their traditional lands, resources and sacred places, however, many of them are physically and psychologically separated from their traditional culture and life, so special assistance is needed for them to recover and conserve their cultural heritage, inseparable from their lands (OHCHR, n/d).



1.1.8 Empowerment and leadership of Indigenous Women

To understand the meaning of empowerment, often used vaguely (Rowlands, 1997), starts from the premise that we must first understand the concept of power and therefore describes these four forms: power over, is the power that subtracts, someone obtains more power by subtracting from another, it is an oppressive power; power to, is a power that does not subtract, but adds, for example, the power to motivate or inspire others; power with, is a collective power, it is the recognition that the whole is greater than the sum of the individuals; and power from within, "which is a power that arises from a unique spiritual force" (Rowlands, 1997:13). These last three forms of power have to do with generative power, and embracing that kind of power is what promotes empowerment.

In terms of empowerment itself, Rowlands recognizes three dimensions: personal empowerment involves the development of the inner self, confidence in oneself and one's capabilities; relational empowerment involves the ability to negotiate and influence the nature of relationships; and collective empowerment involves working together to achieve greater impact and is based on cooperation rather than competition.

Regarding the empowerment of Indigenous Women, in studying the protagonism of Indigenous Women in Latin America, Palomo Sanchez (1999) emphasizes the leading role played by women in the indigenous movement that has risen up against the colonizing power that governs to the present day. Their participation in these movements has allowed them as women to achieve: "1) Their process of visibilization to become subjects, 2) their sense of identity between ethnicity and gender, their condition of discrimination within their peoples, as well as with non-indigenous society. 3) Their construction and deconstruction of powers: the empowerment of Indigenous Women."

According to this author, indigenous groups have demonstrated their empowerment by calling it autonomy; one of the ways in which, as a people, they have struggled to achieve this autonomy is what coincides with empowerment. However, Indigenous Women continue to demand their rights both outside and inside their communities, they demand gender equity, access to education, training and denounce "uses and customs that in many cases lead to a denigration of women's dignity, to intra-family and community violence [...]" (Palomo Sanchez, 1999:5).

FILAC (2021) defines the empowerment of Indigenous Women "as a process and not an activity or project, which includes an individual dimension, but

above all a collective one, and must start from the recognition of the power that women already possess". Empowerment is also approached with a focus on capacity building for the enforceability and exercise of rights (Manos Unidas, 2018). Indeed, the processes of empowerment of Indigenous Women "are crucial to address situations of violence, rescuing the practices and beliefs that they consider positive and challenging those that they consider harmful" (ECLAC, 2013: 133).

Regarding female leadership, Pulido Rivera (2014: 273) argues that it "is intimately linked to the idea that women need to satisfy a double need: to be able to fulfill themselves in the family and work fields, without having to give up either of them". The author mentions that women face problems in developing their leadership, among them violence, criticism and stereotypes.

A study by Prieto (1998) considers that gender relations, sexual division of labour, gender roles, the way decisions are made at home and in the community, affect the construction of female and male indigenous leadership. The author suggests that the construction of a different leadership by Indigenous Women can only be possible if the issues of gender inequalities are open to discussion and collective intervention, considering that these issues have not been discussed in depth in the family and community context for the consolidation of female leadership.

While indigenous leaderships are considered to be linked to individual characteristics, they are also linked to "a social history of struggle for access to power, for challenging practices and beliefs and for transmitting that experience to subsequent generations" (ECLAC, 2013: 135). Radcliffe (2010: 343) argues that indigenous female leaderships have had to overcome the "domestic biases and disadvantages of being a woman, the poor educational services prevalent in indigenous areas, and nationalistic and discriminatory racial configurations".

Andrea Pequeño (2009) reflects that "the current leadership of Indigenous Women [is] significantly associated with access to educational processes". The author highlights women's education as one of the new sources of power and basis of female authority. Along the same lines, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, ECLAC, shows that the growth of female indigenous leadership is linked to processes of education, project management, participation in organizations and in spaces of national and international political representation, with emphasis on demands for redistribution and recognition (ECLAC, 2014).

1.2 Methodological Framework

The paper has a descriptive and analytical qualitative approach, with an intercultural dialogic approach. The first chapter, called Theoretical Framework, was built mainly from the bibliographic review of concepts related to the objective of the consultancy; among them, the notions of traditional games, sports, Indigenous Women, empowerment and leadership have been developed. Some of these have been put into dialogue with the findings of the research to reinforce the approaches.

Within this consultancy we have set ourselves the objective of exploring, through in-depth interviews with indigenous leaders from different continents, the relationship between sport, leadership and empowerment of Indigenous Women. To this end, we started with the following research question: Does conventional or traditional sport contribute to strengthening the leadership capacities and empowerment of Indigenous Women in Asia, Africa and Latin America?

For data collection, in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted through virtual meetings. For this purpose, key actors were selected and their work was focused on strengthening the leadership and empowerment of Indigenous Women through sports.

This selection was made in the following way:

- 1. Through a review of projects presented in the 8th call for grants from the Ayni Indigenous Women's Fund of the International Indigenous Women's Forum (FIMI). Projects selected for the grant and projects that, although not selected, are interesting in their approach and coincide with the focus of this consultancy work. Eight projects were selected in this review: 3 projects in Africa, located in Rwanda, Cameroon and Uganda. 2 projects in Asia, located in India and Pakistan. And 3 projects in Latin America, located in Colombia, Ecuador and Bolivia.**
- 2. Through a recommendation made by Women Win, a project in Guatemala was selected, considering the organization's work with a focus on sports, leadership and women's empowerment.**
- 3. Through recommendations from researchers, an Indigenous Women's soccer project in Paraguay was selected for this interview.**

Below is a summary of the 10 organizations and projects that participated in the in-depth interviews:

Country	Organization	Indigenous Community	Source	Project
Rwanda	Turwanyubukene (Fight against poverty)	Turwanyubukene	FIMI Funded	Development of the traditional village folk dance and song "INTWATWA" in the village of KABAGOROZI.
Cameroon	Mbororo Social and Cultural Development Association (MBOSCUDA)	Mbororo	FIMI Funded	Empowerment of indigenous Bororo women through sports.
Uganda	Women Advancement Initiative (WAI)	Buzonco	FIMI not Funded	To empower women and girls through soccer to end teenage pregnancies and early marriages in Kasese District, Uganda.
India	Samajik Seva Sadan and Indigenous Women's Forum Odisha	Junags	FIMI Funded	To strengthen community resilience towards gender-based violence and empowerment by reviving and promoting traditional games and sports.
Pakistan	Children Education & Social Welfare Society (CEWS)	Khosts, Bloches,	FIMI Funded	Initiatives for the empowerment of Indigenous Women through capacity building, ICT training and economic empowerment.

Colombia	Association of Indigenous Councils of the Department of Meta ACIM	Sikuani, Jiw and Wananos	FIMI Funded	Cultural and Indigenous Peoples' meeting of the Indigenous Peoples of Mampiripan Meta.
Guatemala	AMA Association	Maya Qeqchi'	Referred by Women Win	Promotes and encourages leadership, democratic participation, access to comprehensive sexuality education and economic development of adolescent girls, women and youth.
Ecuador	Ambi Grande Community	Imantag Village and its 10 communities.	FIMI Funded	Strengthening of traditional sports, typical of the Imantag people, in order to generate autonomy and balance of women's time inside and outside the home.
Bolivia	Aymara Women's Youth Centre Cohana	Aymara of Pucarani	FIMI not Funded	"Dignified Women in skirts to the playing field."
Paraguay	Guarani Women's Club Committee	Ava Guarani	Choice of the researchers	Ava Guarani Women's Commission, whose purpose is to set up a community sports centre for Indigenous Women.

The organizations participated in the interviews with the following key actors: the legal representative of the organization, the coordinator of the project related to sports, leadership and women's empowerment, technicians of the organization and athletes or beneficiaries of the project. We highlight as a finding that 50% of the organizations are led by women and almost all of the selected projects have a woman as a leader. It is worth mentioning that we were able to talk to 9 athletes or project participants.

To develop this work, we started from the recognition that the study would allow us to approach many cultures with diverse worldviews. This reality required rigour and flexibility, especially for the recognition of the conceptual categories of study. The interaction took place in what Boaventura de Sousa Santos calls "border zones" (de Sousa Santos, 2005), which enable a space for consensus, understanding and/or translation of what is foreign. As for procedural care, interactions occur in contact zones "where different life worlds, normative, practices and knowledge meet, collide and interact" (de Souza Santos, 2005: 181). The interviews were conducted in three languages: Spanish, English and French. However, especially in Africa, women communicated in their ancestral languages, which required additional interpretation. Beyond the linguistic fact, this brings us to the situation of the translation of knowledge and wisdom as stated by de Sousa Santos (2005). For the author, intercultural translation is a theoretical-methodological proposal that must consider epistemological and procedural care. This translation operates at a metalinguistic level and requires specific skills so that, in these contexts, it is possible to identify common concerns, complementary approaches and contradictions, which is the aim of this work.



A not minor peculiarity is the fact that all the interviews were conducted virtually, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We highlight as an advantage of this methodology, the opportunity it provided to meet with several actors, in different spaces and with a limited budget. It is also necessary to recognize that exclusively virtual communication has made it difficult to some extent to develop a relationship of trust between researcher and interviewee that would have been possible with face-to-face interaction, as well as the approach to the field of study, for the development of participant observation.

This virtual intercultural relationship has been one more challenge in the challenging world of relationships between cultures and languages, with which we encode and decode. We have resorted to a dialogic approach (Demellenne, Caballero & Gaona, 2019) seeking to have a conversation that leads us to the understanding of the subjects' communications, recognizing the pluriversity of the concepts addressed and the historical particularities of the different contexts. Subsequently, we have conducted a general discourse analysis taking into account the aforementioned particularities, to finally focus on the findings related to the research objectives.

Based on the interviews and the data collected, the second chapter aims to be a fusion between the interpretation of the authors and the voice of the key actors interviewed (Denzin, N. y Lincoln, Y. 2012). Finally, a chapter of conclusions is presented, which aims to answer the research question, the general and specific objectives. The chapter is developed on the basis of the main findings.

2. Analysis



2.1 Why sport? Sport and traditional games as a “hook”



“Through sport you can achieve great things”

(Aymara Women's Youth Center, Bolivia, 2021).

The organizations participating in the research consider that sport is a hook for building new processes within the community. Since sports take place in the public sphere, it is an opportunity to make women and their individual and collective rights visible. In Cameroon, the promotion of sports for women is a strategy of the Mboscuda Organization to promote women's participation in new spaces:



Most of the time, women had a secondary role, they accompanied their partners, they assisted them in sports meetings, women took care of the men and the hens [...] the main objective of the project that we proposed to FIMI was to build awareness among leaders and traditional authorities on the importance of encouraging women to participate in sports

(President of the Mboscuda Organization, Cameroon, 2021).

The Ambi Grande community in Ecuador proposes a sports project as “an alternative to value culture and tradition”. Although the project proposes to develop conventional games such as soccer, they also propose to rescue their ancestral community games, on the one hand, to preserve an important part of their culture and, on the other hand, to make themselves visible as a living Indigenous People.

“ **This People is not part of the 18 Peoples and 14 Nationalities [legally recognized in the country], for this reason we are looking for alternatives to show that we exist, live, speak our language and have traditions”**
(Viviana, Ambi Grande Community, Ecuador, 2021).

“ **The project contemplates three months in soccer and indoor and the rest we will include chaskis and other traditional games of our people such as camote and cogidas, which requires strength and intelligence. If we want to rescue our culture, what better way to do it than with joy, which enriches us as a community”**
(Viviana, Ambi Grande Community, Ecuador, 2021).



The Ambi Grande sports project is also seen as a starting point to move towards “something more”. They link these ideas to long-term projects. Within the organization, expectations for the future are created and new leaders are encouraged to take the lead. The Ambi Grande community in Ecuador proposes the development of a women’s soccer championship as part of its project. Although they consider that carrying out the championship will be an achievement, they also maintain that this will be a starting point because they want to “reach something big”, to be known for being pioneers in the field and for other communities to learn from this experience, which reflects a strong institutional commitment. They visualize the creation of a Women’s Network to support the project and the construction of a memory that collects their knowledge linked to their traditional games, to leave a legacy and open a path. Here the value of women as possessors and transmitters of knowledge is highlighted.

“ **We have been immersed in and working for culture with conventional and traditional games. We want a women’s network [...] we want this group to be self-sufficient. We have not focused on writing, but we can do it [...] we can say that the Imantag people play like this. Other villages can say, “this is how we have learned how to play”. Tomorrow we are going to be old and it is a way of leaving a legacy, so that it is not lost or dies with our grandparents, and it is there that women play an important role because they have that knowledge.**
(Viviana, Ambi Grande Community, Ecuador, 2021).

In this same sense, the Association of Indigenous Councils of the Department of Meta foresees that their sports project will allow them to build a filmic memory that documents the process of cultural valuation, empowering and recognizing women as an “axis of historical transmission”. “Women have the knowledge, they transmit and generate knowledge, for example through the elaboration of costumes for dances, elaboration of instruments for music” (Diana, Association of indigenous councils of the department of Meta, Colombia, 2021).

Sports projects are also considered as a strategy to establish channels of dialogue between wise grandparents and present generations. For example, a sports project that combines ancestral and conventional games is proposed as a strategy to unite the generations and promote inter-learning between these two groups.



We want to recover the practice of ancestral Aymara sports such as the totora reed raft race, swan making, but we also include soccer. With this we want to unite two generations that are in the community, young people and wise elders

(Lucinda, Aymara Women's Youth Center, Bolivia, 2021).

The Aymara people believe that the sports projects will make it possible to rescue ancestral games practiced exclusively by women. Unlike this organization, most of the organizations interviewed, especially in Latin America, do not refer to games that have been practiced by women. The organization considers that sports were denied to indigenous Aymara women, due to the reproduction of stereotypes and the inclusion of patriarchal dynamics in their communities.



We are trying to recover ancestral sports practices of women; grandparents tell us that women used to participate in raft races. We want to recover these sports so that women can participate. To this day, the women of the sector perform, develop the rafts. Women also participated in cycling, as well as in the spinning top game, the wool rope competition, but now they have been totally relegated

(Lucinda, Aymara Women's Youth Center, Bolivia, 2021).

On the other hand, sport is also a hook for organizations to educate and train; the recreational component motivates people to participate. The AMA Association of Guatemala incorporated a component called "sport for development" as part of its strategic plan. Although the component proposes soccer practice for girls and teenagers, it also proposes as a line of action education and training in rights with a focus on prevention of early pregnancy and sexual violence of girls, teenagers and young women. According to the testimonies, the programs contributed with life skills and improved attitudes and behaviours.



We took advantage of the time available at school and we see that sport has a positive impact on girls [...] Sport is a hook for young girls who do not like to participate in training activities, they say we go to AMA because we play. Sport has allowed them to integrate more, to participate more, to feel confident in their bodies [...] It is rewarding and shows that sport works and that they are not only taught to kick a ball

(Leslie, AMA Association, Guatemala, 2021).

For the WAI organization in Uganda, sport plays a similar role, it is used as an anchor to raise awareness of the rights of women and teenagers and promote a better quality of life. They do this through motivational conferences, dialogues on women's rights and the opportunities that exist to seek a better future. Likewise, the organizations CEWS of Pakistan and Samajik Seva Sadan of India state that they see sport as a healthy and interesting motivational activity for the formation of groups and have therefore incorporated it into formal and non-formal education programs aimed at the empowerment of women and the promotion of rights.



Yes, we have launched many sports projects at the grassroots level for the benefit of Indigenous Women, specifically associated with health, skill development, formal and non-formal education, awareness about nonviolence against Indigenous Women [...] we are focusing on the empowerment of women with respect to health, education, awareness about the importance of immunological protection and so forth.

(Malik, CEWS, Pakistan, 2021).

Through sports, organizations draw the attention of women so that they can participate in training workshops with a focus on preventing teenage pregnancies and early marriages, despite the fact that they may be culturally and socially accepted.

“

Early pregnancy used to be part of the culture in the distant past. Girls used to get married at a fairly young age, the girl was raised to reproduce and marry. Today that is no longer part of the culture, I wouldn't say it is [...] Through sport we were able to get them [girls] out of their homes to come together, acquire skills and for us to teach them.

(Adult woman, Uganda, 2021)

Incorporating the practice of sports is also aimed at fighting violence and diseases such as drug addiction and alcoholism. Sport has been attributed with the capacity to integrate youth (Kowi, 2006), promote physical and mental health and improve social behaviours. Based on this vision, communities raise the need to develop sports projects:

“

We incorporate the topic [sports] through agreements with cabildos (open council meetings), a concern expressed to us by the councils [is that] youth and children at this time present drug addiction problems, there is also intra-family abuse, violence due to the presence of the illegal armed group, constant displacements, violence against women. The concern is to provide spaces to improve emotional health and strengthen young people and children through sports and culture.

(Diana, Association of indigenous councils of the department of Meta, Colombia, 2021)

In Bolivia, women consider the space of the "field", or stadium, not only as a place to practice sports, but also as a meeting place, a place for learning and self-knowledge, where they can express themselves with other women, share ideas, experiences and ask for advice to solve problems that arise in the domestic space, especially those related to domestic violence. Thus, sport is a space for building solidarity networks that provide confidence and security to express themselves and denounce their reality.

“

If we women keep quiet, how can anyone know that I am experiencing violence. Maybe a meeting is necessary before [sports practice] to talk about what is happening to us, how we can get out of this, where I go, who I tell, they are sisters who sometimes don't have family, they are far away, they don't know who to ask for help. These meetings help us to socialize that they are not alone. We are closed, many families say why do you have to talk, what happens at home stays at home, you have to keep quiet, little by little the silence is being broken [...] When we get together, it is useful to express ourselves.

(Lucinda, Aymara Women's Youth Center, Bolivia, 2021)

Projects linked to sports serve to strengthen the defence of territorial rights. The Association of Indigenous Councils of Meta in Colombia affirms that the sports project they implement has been useful for the defence of the territory, as it creates a space to develop "mingas of thought" within the framework of training processes. The context of these communities is complex as they face the effects of the armed conflict with the only tool that strengthens them, unity. The organization is built on the basis of spaces for democratic participation and decision-making, which strengthens their capacity for mobilization, advocacy and political participation.

“

In the territory there is a presence of illegal groups. The community is united and focused on the same objectives; we are all looking for governments to make us more visible and support us to minimize the risk of forced displacement of communities. We have Indigenous reservations that take them out of the territories and end up at the head of the municipality with nowhere to go. When the government sees that the community is united, it pays more attention to us.

(Elizabeth, Association of indigenous cabildos of the department of Meta, Colombia, 2021)

We see then that sport can serve as a hook for various issues. For example, it enhances training processes in women's rights and contributes to the development of life skills for intergenerational dialogue.

2.2. Gender stereotypes. Barriers to the practice of sports

Over the centuries, stereotypes and prejudices have been developed and have limited the participation of women in the practice of sports. Back in the games of ancient Greece, the gods were assigned the masculine qualities of strength and vigour and the goddesses the traits of beauty, sexuality and passivity (Gallo, 2000). Nowadays this coincides with what we find in Africa, where Ali Mohamed, an internationally recognized sportsman, expresses that sports such as horse riding and archery cannot be practiced by Mbororo women because they are seen as sports that demand a lot of strength.

“**So, as I said, horseback riding and archery, those are not activities for women, probably because they are strong sports, they demand a lot of technique, strength and so on.**

(Ali, Mboscuda, Camerún, 2021)

Both the Middle Ages and modernity marked a path of privileges for men. Technological development and industrialization privileged men, leaving women on the sidelines. In the 19th century, the Victorian image of femininity associated with delicacy, elegance and submission limited women's sports practice, which, on the contrary, was associated with strength, endurance, speed and independence (García, 1994 quoted in Gallo et al., 2000). Gallo distinguishes three myths that emerged during the development of modern sport: "sports masculinize women; the practice of sports is dangerous for women's health; and women are not interested in sports and when they do it, they do not perform well enough to be taken seriously".

The end of the nineteenth century and the entire twentieth century were characterized by the growth of women's participation in different spheres and the increase in movements demanding to improve women's living conditions. These spaces undoubtedly contributed to breaking old paradigms, demystifying, for example, women's participation in sports (Gallo et al., 2000). The discourse that has constructed and continues to construct gender roles

has not only defined the material and symbolic predominance of the male gender (which in sport is no different), but has also delimited, at the same time, the prevailing spheres of action in the division between the public and the private (Binello et al., 2000).

In the case of women, imaginaries and stereotypes sentence them to the private sphere, condemning the possibilities of "going beyond". Culture plays an important role, as it defines what is socially approved or denied within the "normality" of a group and what defines being a "good woman" or not. Some of the stereotypes that mark this dynamic are reflected below.

In the community environment of Indigenous Peoples, there is a large number of stereotypes that reinforce the idea that it is not women's place to practice sports. It is considered that women should not practice a conventional sport such as soccer; however, the organizations, with the exception of the Aymara communities in Bolivia, do not evidence the existence of traditional sports that have been practiced exclusively by women, possibly due to the still existing conception that Indigenous Women are not skilled in sports. It is therefore up to women to win spaces by demystifying the imposed role and breaking stereotypes, a difficult task in the public and private spheres.

“**It still exists. It is a reality that cannot be easily changed. While young women are breaking the stereotype, older women are still marked by reinforcing the stereotype barrier. We want to generate behavioural change through this project.**

(Lucinda, Aymara Women's Youth Center, Bolivia, 2021).

"[...] the male chauvinist position is that women cannot do it. It is demonstrated in the championships that women can" [...] Within the family there is sexism, they want to put women below them".

(Monica, Aymara Women's Youth Center, Bolivia, 2021)

In India, there are taboos on physical activities that women cannot perform. Crossing these limits implies receiving punishments, which are socially and culturally approved.



A woman or girl who touches a fishing rod is considered a bad woman. Likewise, women are not allowed to climb on the roof of a house when it is being built and they are also not allowed to plant in the fields, this is considered taboo in some communities. So, when I see that women are playing field hockey at the international level, I see that they are an example of what could never be done before.

(Verónica, Samajik Seva Sadan and Indigenous Women Forum Odisha, India, 2021).

In this regard, it is worth visualizing the influence of colonization on the transformation of social practices. We see that generally during childhood and early adolescence Indigenous Women could “play” some ball games, hide and seek, with coconuts (Kovács, 2011 a and b). Also in India, they have shared the same experience. Previously, during the early age, girls and boys could do recreational and sports activities together, they could swim, cross the river doing competitions, there were also other traditional indigenous games that were practiced together, children of both sexes, that was perfectly approved by the community. Over time this has been disappearing, even deepening the lack of joint sports between men and women, from an early age.



When we were little boys and girls, we used to play together. We used to swim in the river or in some lagoon. We used to cross fast-flowing rivers, we did it as a challenge or as entertainment. Then, boys and girls used to bathe together, we used to have swimming competitions and other games played in the water. Now we don't see that happening anymore.

(Alma, Samajik Seva Sadan and Indigenous Women Forum Odisha, India, 2021).

Even today, playing a sport still calls into question a woman's femininity. It is not uncommon to hear expressions such as “machona” (masculine woman) or “tomboy” directed at girls or young women who play sports such as soccer in the communities.



Some time ago, including my mom, my grandparents, they used to tell me, why do you have to go to the field, you must be a tomboy, why do you have to go play, why do you get together with men, that's not for women, that's for boys. Sometimes moms come to mention that [sports] is not for women, that you have to dedicate yourself to weaving, what we do, you have no reason to go out or do other things that other people do.

(Monica, Aymara Women's Youth Center, Bolivia, 2021).

Some religions, such as Islam in Cameroon, have contributed to establishing restrictions on women's access to certain freedoms, including sport. Due to the work of human rights and women's rights organizations, resistance to the restrictions imposed by religion on women is currently being perceived. The perception is that very slowly women are gaining space in sports, although there are numerous difficulties.



Today, some people still believe that playing soccer is against Islam. But now things are also changing, we are even improving the place of women in society, because when you are educated at least you can understand that women can also have a very important role in society.

(Amadeu, Mboscuda, Camerún, 2021).

Fuller (1995) argues that the colonial and patriarchal heritage in Latin American countries left a system in which the feminine and masculine categories were organized in separate but complementary spheres: women at home, men on the street. Women “queens of the home”, men protectors of the outside world (the political and economic spheres), providing sustenance, claiming authority over the family. These categories make the social division of labour strict and indisputable.

From this perspective, sport is constituted in the public sphere and therefore is not a practice that would correspond to women, since, by imposition, they are just responsible for their household. The practice of sports is assumed as the abandonment of the home and is linked to laziness. Changing this vision in the male gender, even when there is talk of gender equity, continues to be complex.

“ We have it deeply rooted that women have to be at home dedicated to the family and it is complex that women want to go out to do sports, society does not normalize that women go out and want to do sports, they characterize us as lazy, idle, carishinas women, these are derogatory ways that stop us from doing sports. We talk about gender equity, it is a discourse, but we do not put it into action in the territory.

(Viviana, Ambi Grande Community, Ecuador, 2021).

It is also considered that the care of children corresponds exclusively to women. In order to practice a sport, women are forced to ask their partners for support, but if they do not offer their “solidarity”, women “have to go with their children and it makes it difficult for them to practice” (Viviana, Ambi Grande Community, Ecuador, 2021).

Transcending from the private to the public constitutes for women an experience that can be described as renewing and could even become questioning (Borja, 2014).

For Gallo et al. (2000), history shows how the incorporation of women in sports allows them to recognize themselves as social subjects, to become involved in processes of change and in the rupture of old myths. Women's soccer represents a form of social empowerment of women. In this case, sports are aimed at the struggle for gender equity and resistance to male power, while at the same time creating new meanings of being a woman, broadening their horizons and projection. It allows their affirmation as social subjects, they go beyond the limits established by the patriarchal culture and despite the difficulties this represents, they gain new spaces and create other discourses on sport, the body and the gender perspective (Gallo and Pareja, 2001).



Aysha, from Cameroon, talks about the difficulties she had to overcome to achieve her dream...

In the beginning it wasn't easy. On the contrary, it was very difficult, the first people I had to convince were my parents. First I had to face them because it was difficult for them to see their daughter start or want to start in this path of sports, that was not well seen. I had to face my parents, it was a time when I was in school, I was still studying and I was young. I talked to the coach, to the teachers and finally to my parents.

I had to impose myself and show a lot of strength, tell them firmly that I wanted to do that, that was a very important decision I made because it implied going against some norms of a conservative society, people still keep that vision that it is not well seen that a girl so young begins to practice this type of sport. They think that there is a dignity that has to be preserved and that it is not compatible with that kind of freedom, because I had to travel and I had to go alone. People questioned that, they said that it is not right for a girl to travel alone for this type of activity.

This path I took has been very important for me, it has permitted me to get to know other cultures, to deepen my knowledge of the world, to develop my personality better. Travelling and meeting people helped me to interact with other cultures, to think in a broader way and to be able to express my ideas better



2.3 Sports and dance: Gender empowerment and leadership

Sport inspires women to conquer rights that were denied or made invisible either by their own culture or by the ideas imposed by colonization. Female sports leadership emerges in the struggle against “old” stereotypes that have been established and naturalized for women. For example, the image of women as the only ones “responsible for the home” has been established. This responsibility limits spaces for recreation; these spaces have had to be appropriated and earned. Women exercise their leadership competencies in the domestic sphere, deploying “negotiation skills” to balance time for the home, to influence sports and to act in other spaces that can benefit the community and the family.



Como mujeres nos han dicho que tenemos que estar dedicadas a la casa, los hijos, los terrenos. De a poco vamos a ir sembrando la idea en los esposos para tener los espacios que por derecho nos corresponden. En algunos casos nuestras parejas no tienen la culpa, las mujeres no nos hemos dado esos espacios y necesitamos equilibrar el tiempo.

(Viviana, Comunidad Ambi Grande, Ecuador, 2021).

The development of sports projects and related processes allows the strengthening of leadership skills. These skills can be put into practice in any space, be it work, personal or social. The leadership competencies that are developed in the sports field can be effectively put into practice in different areas of life. The Indigenous Women who lead the sports project in the Ambi Grande Community in Ecuador, consider that the leadership that women exercise in the sports field has allowed them to gain strength and self-confidence with a view to advancing to council leadership and public governance spaces from where they can contribute to the community.

The AMA Association of Guatemala shows that the girls and adolescents who participated in its sports and training programs have developed skills to relate to their peers, to motivate and manage. In addition, they were empowered by the benefits of sports practice, beyond stereotypes. There is also evidence that the participants have strengthened their body confidence, their aspiration to participate, get involved and continue to practice independently. The organization believes that those who are part of the training processes at a given time will be able to replicate, continue and sustain the programs for new participants, with expectations of forming new leaderships.



We have indeed been able to see that sports develop leadership, for example, we have seen that there are girls who support their classmates so that they can participate, they talk to their parents about the benefits of sports, and we see how they develop leadership, take initiatives and motivate.

(Jacqueline, AMA Association, Guatemala, 2021).

In the case of the young women of the Guarani Women's Club Commission, the young women who initiated the soccer club project led this process, even opposing the traditions, considered “restrictive” in the community. Their main motivation was to create a recreational space for Indigenous Women, and from there they began a process of raising awareness in their families.



We had to go and talk to the mothers so that they would let their daughters participate in the club [...] until now many families believe that women have to be at home and that it is a waste of time for them to be playing on the field, they are afraid that people will see them in a bad light [...] I had to take responsibility for the girls who joined the club in the eyes of their mothers.

(Tania, Guarani Women's Club Committee, Paraguay, 2021).

Although it is not easy to get the space to practice sports, once achieved, women also manage to rebuild these spaces in the context of their personal and collective empowerment. Over time, society values this fact. For example, there is the case of Ashia who decided to play handball and had to face many barriers to achieve what she wanted to achieve. Seeing her fight with great determination to achieve her purpose served as an example for other women of her age. Her sister comments about her:

“ **She has been an example for the girls in the community, an example of fulfillment, of development as a woman and a model for other girls to follow. Why? Because she participated in different events, in conferences and then this makes the woman more autonomous and more capable of doing what she wants**”
(Ashia, Mboscuda, Cameroon, 2021).

The Association of Indigenous Councils of Meta considers that female leaderships exist but that they are not known and the few that are known are not valued. They consider that the leadership of Indigenous Women should be made visible, valued and strengthened because of its richness; it integrates an important cultural component and promotes integration, community and intercultural participation.

“ **The idea is to make her more visible, just as we have great figures in the West, it is to give them [Indigenous Women] the recognition that the activities they carry out are done within a governance scheme of their own community [...]**
(Diana, Association of indigenous cabildos of the department of Meta, Colombia, 2021).

From the organization, it is argued that the leaderships that are being consolidated in the sports field can be strengthened from the knowledge and experience of women leaders who are in the political field. The skills and competencies they demonstrate can contribute to consolidating strong leaderships, with a purpose in any field.

“ **In several Indigenous reservations, there are governors, women who lead communities and have been reelected for doing a good job. The idea is to strengthen women's confidence that they [women involved in sports] can also play a role within their community and at the national level.**
(Elizabeth, Association of indigenous cabildos of the department of Meta, Colombia, 2021).

The organization shows that another clear way to strengthen women's leadership in sport is training, to which they show a strong institutional commitment.

“ **We want to provide more support to the Strengthening Programs for women, so that leaderships are strengthened, the gaps are closing more and more, they are given participation and they must be strengthened so that there are not two but more leaderships, this is achieved to the extent that we can prepare and empower them.**
(Diana, Association of indigenous councils of the department of Meta, Colombia, 2021).

Since sports generate greater empathy in girls and teenagers, and considering that these activities together with training processes contribute to the consolidation of leadership, it is essential to start with these methods from an early age, so that they can be allowed to evolve and reinforce the processes over time. It is also important to ensure the sustainability of the projects over time. The consolidation of these issues will depend mainly on the commitment of the organizations, communities and Indigenous Peoples

Within the context of the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the AMA Association of Guatemala, in its eagerness not to leave the girls with whom it was developing training processes alone, developed interactive training sessions through videoconferences, handed out workbooks and developed a bilingual radio soap opera, involving parents and family in the teaching-learning process.

The school can be the place that allows and enables spaces for knowledge of rights and also the place that contributes to the reproduction of gender inequalities. In this sense, in Cameroon they have commented that this is a place where women learn and recognize their talents, in several areas, including sports. One of the sportswomen stated that the fact that she went to school was a determining factor in discovering her talent and strength.

“**When we entered school we discovered our talents, and there are very talented girls. When I started going to school, I began to discover my aptitudes because, for example, I can do several things, I can play, run, play soccer, so I can do different activities. When we women enter school, we see our talents and we can discover that we are real athletes.**

(Ashia, Mboscuda, Cameroon, 2021).



We can analyze women's empowerment through sport using the concept of power developed by Rowlands (1997). A group of women athletes develop collective power (power with) in order to strengthen themselves as women and as a team (power to) and to inspire other women and the community (power from within). This power relationship can be seen in the organizations working on sports projects with Indigenous Women in Paraguay, Bolivia, Ecuador, Guatemala and Colombia.

“**We started with the FIMI leadership school in 2016, thanks to the support of the school we were able to install the topic [women's soccer] and achieve. There I learned what advocacy is, it was not easy, people did not believe in us [...] I had to go after INDI [Indigenous Institute of Paraguay], the APF [Soccer Association of Paraguay], the FAO to help us go to the championships [...] even my mother did not believe, sometimes our parents bet against us, they said we were going to lose, that was very painful [...]**

(Tania, Guarani Women's Club Committee, Paraguay, 2021).

Sport empowers women to the extent that, through it, they are able to exercise their rights on equal terms. It is also linked to the pride of belonging to a team, to the determination involved in defending the team and the identity that has been built. Tania from the Committee of the women's Guarani Club, comments on the pride she felt when her team won second place in the 2018 Disney Cup competition, a competition that is not only among women from Indigenous Peoples. She proudly tells us, "they brought the cup, they won second place in soccer, in the whole Disney competition, and it was not only a competition between indigenous clubs, it was an international competition that included non-indigenous people". We find the same sense of belonging and pride in the expressions of members of Samajik Seva Sadan from India.

“**Right now in the Olympics it is happening, three young Indigenous Women are participating, and the vice captain of the indigenous field hockey team is also from Orisha, from our district. Also in archery, there are two indigenous girls from our state, and those from our neighbouring states won the gold medal.**

(Member of Samajik Seva Sadan and Indigenous Women Forum Odisha, India, 2021)

Indigenous women's participation in sports empowers other women. Indigenous women arouse admiration and pride in indigenous sportswomen and men. This is what one athlete relates about the participation of a female Mboscuda runner.



I don't know much about her, but we were so proud and so happy to see her run so well in the international competition
(Ali, Mboscuda, Cameroon, 2021).

The presentation of dances or performance in traditional dances also develops feelings of identity pride. In Cameroon, dance skills are related to life skills. Dance is seen as a space that allows women to develop skills to lead groups.



I would say that there are Indigenous Women leaders who are good dancers, because once you are good at dancing, you necessarily become a good organizer [...] So if I see a girl who is a very good dancer, I can already see that she is among the leaders who are controlling the dance.
(President of the Mboscuda Organization, Cameroon, 2021).

Cultural identity can be strengthened through dance. The pride associated with dance has motivated presentations at national and international level and sharing this knowledge with others empowers women.



There are different dances [...] there is one called Kua and with this they were able to present shows at an international level, they took their culture to many places, to show who they are and what they do, [...] They do this dance because there are people who know and handle these instruments well and want to transmit this knowledge, in this dance there are specific songs. It is the women who are in charge of this project, they dance, they sing and they are always there in the focus of the project.
(FAP member, Rwanda, 2021).

The leadership skills acquired through sport and related processes are transferred to other areas of social life and can be made visible in different spaces. The empowerment of women allows the search for and conquest of spaces through awareness of the situation of inequality. The pride of belonging to a group, the capacity to defend that group strengthens the empowerment of Indigenous Women.

2.4 Sport and rights

Knowledge of women's rights makes it possible to question gender stereotypes that may be held as characteristics of the culture. As women learn about their rights, they have more opportunity to reflect on their situation and take action.

Sport is an important means of promoting and protecting women's rights. On the one hand, the practice of sports guarantees, among other things, the right to recreation, education, and physical and mental health. According to the women interviewed from Paraguay, they decided to create the women's sports club because recreation is a women's right and also contributes to many areas of life.



We were sure of what we wanted [...] in the justification we stated that soccer is an opportunity for recreation, to keep the mind busy, to reduce early pregnancy, to maintain a healthy lifestyle, to promote a healthy diet and to have a good physical condition.
(Tania, Guarani Women's Club Committee).

Additionally, through training and exchange activities related to sports, they promote the rights of Indigenous Women. This knowledge helps women overcome gender barriers.



One girl had married while still in high school. Her family stopped paying for her education because it was her father's wish for her to get married, but she loved school. Then she came to one of our events and heard the example of a woman like her, who despite getting pregnant as a teenager became a member of the school parliament. The girl decided to go back to school and is now in her final year of study.
(Adult woman, Uganda, 2021)

Poverty conditions are definitely an impediment to access to a dignified life and to the fulfillment of human rights in general, in particular the right to education, health and recreation, to the use of leisure time, beyond the cultural barriers that may exist. However, several organizations are committed to these vulnerable groups and believe that sport can be a vehicle for empowering women in marginalized contexts.

“ There is very valuable potential for sporting activities such as cricket, soccer, cycling and squash [...] but the areas where we work are very neglected and [people] lack resources and facilities. Our organization is looking for resources to benefit these women, to empower them and promote leadership.

(Malik, CEWS, Pakistan, 2021).



2.5 New sports and traditional games

The Aymara Women's Youth Center from Bolivia believes that even the practice of a conventional sport can contribute to revitalizing the culture of women and the community. Although in a sport as conventional as soccer, the masculine constitutes the frame of reference that defines the possible practices, meanings, representations and even when it is considered that the practice cannot be constituted in an alternative way and that there is no voice to question it. Binello and Martinez et al. (2000:48) propose that sport "is not about a given and permanent state, but a situation and position that must be actively earned and secured". In the case of the Indigenous Peoples, the appropriation of the practice of soccer and of the space has different nuances, this is assembled from their culture and way of life, giving it its own sense and meaning.

“ Aymara soccer was practiced with its own regulations: they played with rag or sheepskin balls, the goals were built with two stones, and they played until midnight. The sport has allowed us to resist with our Aymara language, to maintain the music, an autonomous community” “To practice soccer, nowadays the women have their skirts as uniform, we want to value the presence of the woman in skirt, with her original costume. The practice of soccer on the shores of the lake, associated with the home, is important, they are strong women because we feed ourselves with quinoa and native products”.

(Alejandro, Aymara Women's Youth Center, Bolivia, 2021).

Sport has acquired different meanings for each group, it has not only been assumed with competitive intent, the activity permeates freely in the culture and therefore can acquire other meanings, product of new symbolic universes, which in turn can be put in tension by institutionalization (Gallo et al., 2000).

Perhaps the British when they came brought this sport to the country, but it has a different meaning, it is not like western field hockey, it developed as a community game. It is entertainment, but it also has the values of the

community. Tournaments are given at different levels and the prizes can be goats, pigs, chickens... (Member of Samajik Seva Sadan and Indigenous Women Forum Odisha, India, 2021).

For the Association of Indigenous Councils of the Department of Meta, the cultural meeting of dances is important to achieve the integration of indigenous reservations and communities, it is also a means to cultivate knowledge. It is not a space for competition, on the contrary, they propose "to facilitate meeting spaces that allow the transmission of cultural tradition". In the indigenous culture, sports acquire symbolic meanings, related to their practices and ways of life. Even traditional games such as archery, blowgun, cassava grating, artisanal fishing, firewood splitting, canoeing, among others, can at some point become a competition to determine "who is the best" of the group. The Ambi Grande community of Ecuador considers that the practice of "chaski", which is currently in the process of recovery, is not aimed at competition, but at cultural revitalization. In accordance with the custom, the soccer sports championships in the province of Imbabura have become spaces of welcome for the migrants who return each year.

Even though the incorporation of Western sports into indigenous cultures goes through a complex process of adaptation, in other contexts cultural contact causes, among many changes, that traditional games lose vigour and are replaced by conventional sports. Due to British colonization in India, conventional sports were introduced and traditional games disappeared:

“ We have almost lost the [games and sports] like the ones I remember. When we were girls, we used to play games that we don't see now. Boys nowadays [...] are more interested in cricket and field hockey. (Alma, Samajik Seva Sadan and Indigenous Women Forum Odisha, India, 2012).

It seems that some traditional games remained in the collective memory, they are remembered, but not practiced. Among the traditional games that were practiced decades ago in India, they recall jumping rope, made of well-packed straw and tree climbing.

“ “Jumping rope was a two-team competition, where two people rotated the rope and one person from each team jumped in the middle without touching the rope. All boys and girls participated in this game. Another childhood game that girls and boys were allowed to play together was climbing a small tree, where all the children climbed the tree. One of the people would throw a stick far away and in turn, the children would come down to pick up the stick and climb back up to throw it again and we all looked like many little monkeys jumping on the branches of the tree”. (Participant of Samajik Seva Sadan and Indigenous Women's Forum Odisha).

Cultural contact and colonization eroded the practice of traditional sports in many parts of the world, but not in all corners of the world, as we see that in many places very old games are still practiced, such as chaski in Ecuador, or cassava scratching, fishing and canoeing among the peoples of Colombia. On the other hand, some of the traditional mixed games that allowed the integration of boys and girls in childhood and adolescence have disappeared, as in the case of India and Latin America. The world's best-known sports were introduced into communities at different times in history. This introduction has produced an appropriation with re-significations based on the culture of Indigenous Peoples.



2.6. Sport and community

According to Guerrero (2016), the Andean community is revitalized around the sports space. Women move the family to the public space to “play” unlike men who go out alone, that is to say, it builds relationships, with the possibility of socializing and uniting more. Women bring the concept of community to the sports space, because they congregate in the sports space as a family.

Through their empowerment and leadership, women seek to contribute to the community. According to the information gathered, the Mbororo women athletes want to inspire other women in their community and in the region. In that sense they become positive role models of their gender, giving visibility to their capabilities.

“ Thanks to sport, they feel that marginalization has decreased and with these examples people see and feel that everyone in their community is good, they are the first in something.

(Athlete translator Mbororo, Mboscuda, Africa, 2021).

The organizations that work on rights education through sport and that are led by local people know the need to generate changes at the individual level of women but also at the collective level. Sport then generates spaces for community development:

“ After 10 years of work, we will see that some families have changed, and that will be the time of the testimony, but this is what we are today. From these savings and lifestyle changes I think we could make a difference in our communities and people will stop looking at us as a lower tribe.

(Adult woman, Uganda, 2021)

2.7. Sport to reduce violence

Wara, from the Bolivian Aymara Women's Youth Center, believes that male chauvinism and stereotypes are factors that generate violence within the home. “The stereotypes that women should dedicate themselves to the kitchen and men can go out generate violence in the family and in the couple.” For this organization, the practice of conventional and traditional sports can contribute to breaking patterns of sexism and stereotypes that generate violence. “It is important that women join the field, recover the ancestral sports of their grandparents to prevent cases [of domestic violence] from increasing due to macho thinking and stereotypes.”

In this same sense, the Ambi Grande community raises its sports project with a view to reducing the worrying rate of intra-family violence in the communities, towns and nationalities. “Through this space we want to reach mediation from our families, couples, Taitas Mamas, the space is not to measure forces, it is to mediate and reach a consensus of sharing, without violence.”

The AMA Association of Guatemala has developed the process “score a goal against violence”, through which they seek to influence in the sports space to prevent violence through the empowerment of their rights, for example “during the games they broadcast radio spots on violence prevention, working not only with women but also with the general public, couples, parents, children, children in general” (Leslie, AMA Association, Guatemala, 2021). In addition, the organization offers counselling to girls, or any member of their family, who suffer from some type of violence.

In Rwanda, Uganda and India, women's projects focusing on sport and Indigenous Women's rights have had among their main objectives the empowerment of women and families to combat gender-based violence. They have stated that among the triggers and the continuity of violence is the high rate of poverty, which has a direct impact on the low schooling of women, and the lack of family planning due to the patriarchal vision that the People and its culture are perpetuated through new births.

“ We are subsistence farmers [...] more than 60% live below the poverty line, and women work under the sun [...] There are family planning problems, men do not want to plan because they think there are too few people in the community and they say they should increase the number of people who make up their community, so that the community does not disappear [...] There is very little participation in education because they do not have the means to cover the expenses involved in access to education.”

(FAP member, Rwanda, 2021).

Specifically, in India, it is very worrying how the rate of violence against women has risen and today the Orisha District is one of the red belts of human trafficking and specifically of young Indigenous Women. The economic situation is so precarious that at the age when they reach secondary school, girls drop out of school to go to the cities in search of work, which generates more risks for human trafficking.

“ Violence against women is very common in the community [...] because of migration and for various underlying reasons, there is a lot of trafficking of people and particularly of girls. So, when we saw the call from FIMI we thought that sports could be one of the creative ways to approach this issue of gender-based violence, as our district is quite well known for field hockey.

(Member of Samajik Seva Sadan and Indigenous Women's Forum Odisha)

In the contexts of severe social violence, in which some indigenous communities live; hit by poverty, exclusion and the patriarchal system, sport is proposed as an alternative and a healthy way to contribute to the reduction of violence. The creation of sports spaces generates awareness and creates a place for reflection and education on the situation of violence against women.

2.8. Sport for economic independence

For Indigenous Women, sports, in addition to being a space for socialization, where physical exercise is performed, where they learn and strengthen leadership skills, is also a space that provides opportunities to generate economic income.

Alejandro from the Bolivian Aymara Women's Youth Center comments that on weekends and holidays the women of the community prepare food with native products, to sell at the championships. For them, winning the championships is also an opportunity to generate income "if the prize is a cow, it is also an income".

Along the same lines, Viviana, from the Ambi Grande community in Ecuador, believes that because the women in her community do not have secure jobs, sports is also an opportunity to generate income. "This space is not only for sports, it opens up the possibility of developing economic activities to fulfill ourselves and develop as women, to provide for our families, even if it's just a little bread." (2021).

Considering that for women, sports is an opportunity to generate economic income, for this reason, they not only go to "play", but also organize fairs, where they can sell handicrafts and food. "Women are multitaskers, men should learn from them" (Neptalí, Ambi Grande Community, Ecuador, 2021). In Rwanda, women have a project that supports women in the practice of dances and presentations that they can perform in cultural events. The dancers are the ones who take care of all the household chores, while the men go to the forest, to hunt, to get food. For them, the income they get from the performances is very important.

“ This management will allow them to develop as women, having this position and playing the role of money manager, this will give them more power in their community. With this money they will create groups where they will help each other, the income from these dances will be for them and they will also learn to manage in the best possible way.
(FAP member, Rwanda, 2021)

In India, there is an enthusiasm to become a professional athlete, as this means getting a job to contribute to the family economy. Families have as an example that many sportsmen from the communities are hired by national clubs and get secure salaries from the state. Most of them are men, but there is more and more room for women, according to the interviewees. Before there was not so much interest from families in their children playing sports, but now there is an eager expectation that they like sports because it can mean a good income and families see that it can be a great opportunity for women.

“ For our people, sports is one of the ways to get a job [...] Now they are promoting girls to play field hockey and other sports as well, probably for the job they might get one day.
(Member of Samajik Seva Sadan and Indigenous Women Forum Odisha, India, 2021).



2.9. Sport as a means of gaining “new spaces” in the public sphere

As it has been pointed out throughout the text “Historically, the gaze on sport has been a gaze constructed from the male point of view, a symbolic arena of a publicly staged masculine ethos” (Binello et al., 2000: 33). From this position, women, through time, have had to win spaces and the space of sport has also had to be conquered. Hall (1985), quoted in Binello et al. (2000), considers that women and their sports practices appear in the fissures, joints and cracks of the dominant masculine forms.

Conquering the sports space has not been an easy task for women, the fact that it generates fear in women, and on this path, leadership has been fundamental to push the process. A Colombian leader comments that the incursion of women into sports has depended on the capacity of women to overcome fears and imposed stereotypes. She believes that winning spaces strengthens leadership; overcoming these challenges is fundamental for leadership to grow.

“ ... one of the fears is that they have always been dedicated to traditional work, to venture into these fields is not easy. Some have given themselves the space to lead, they are leaders who with guidance have managed to participate in those spaces, but challenges must be overcome to make the group of leaders grow and one challenge is to overcome fears of entering fields that were for husbands or only for men.
(Diana, Association of Indigenous Councils of Meta, Colombia, 2021).

The dispute for spaces continues in a tense situation. From different points of view, women in general have adverse conditions for the practice of sports. Even when sports activity continues to attract women, they continue to be discriminated against in different ways, for example, when they are denied resources for the optimal practice of sports, since the scenarios continue to be reserved for men (Gallo et al., 2001). Although the spaces have begun to change due to the presence of women, it has required from them, determination for the game and a frank attitude of struggle.

Borja (2014) considers that women are beginning to gain that space and claim their rights from below, breaking stereotypes, appropriating public space and the practice of sports. Viviana, from the Ambi Grande Community in Ecuador considers that these changes must begin at home. She believes that with time “they will see, without exaggeration, that these spaces also belong to women; other generations will promote and normalize spaces for women.

The development of leadership skills has been key to not “ask for the spaces that belong to men”, but to take the space that corresponds to them on equal terms.

The process remains a challenge. In some cases, women have to start by overcoming their shyness:

“ Through sport we have helped women to socialize with other people in public, to learn to lead and to speak in public, which was not the case before, because locked in their homes they were not in the place to have the courage to speak in public.
(Adult woman, Uganda, 2021).

“ We have even had one of the girls elected prefect of Namunga Primary School, she was able to campaign for that position, she stood up and talked to the other students until she convinced them [...] there were three of them, another girl had the confidence and when she started campaigning she was elected councillor-
(Adult woman, Uganda, 2021).

In Cameroon, for one of the athletes to agree to play professionally, she was supported by the organization, the conditions were negotiated with the parents; the athlete got married, had a child and then was able to play in tournaments outside the country. In Uganda, the same thing happens, when a woman, a young girl is going to occupy a leadership position, she needs the support or permission of the family, which is not very easy to get. This is what they tell us.

“ We had to talk to their mothers, one of them was married, we talked to her husband, to convince him to let her position herself for that leadership position, and now they are in the council, speaking on behalf of their communities and this other girl, she is running for the school prefecture. I think, if we continue with them, one of the girls will end up being a district councillor .
(Adult woman, Uganda, 2021).

Winning public spaces has been a big challenge for women and continues to be so. How these spaces are won varies from place to place and depending on the possibilities that arise. For example, in the case of the Guarani Women's Club Commission, it was the young women who had to raise awareness among their families and other families to win the space. The Mbororo sportswomen, however, needed the support of the organizations to convince their families.



3. Conclusions




This study explored, through in-depth interviews, the relationship between sport, leadership and empowerment of Indigenous Women. To this end, we posed the following research question: Do conventional or traditional sports contribute to the strengthening of leadership skills and the empowerment of Indigenous Women?

Indeed, sport has proven to be an effective tool to promote and protect the rights of Indigenous Women, build leadership skills and strengthen their empowerment, while opening possibilities to transcend barriers to their development.

This study shows the intrinsic relationship between sport, leadership and empowerment, based on the following conclusions:

1. Sport is a "hook" tool that motivates to build new processes within the community, women consider that from the capabilities they develop in sport they can "go beyond", occupy new spaces and develop in new areas. On the one hand, sport motivates the rescue and revitalization of traditional games to strengthen identity and culture, and promotes training processes in rights with a focus on the prevention of violence, teenage pregnancy, early marriages and diseases. In particular, leadership strengthens the defence of territorial rights. Considering the complex dynamics that develop during the practice of sports, it constitutes a channel for intergenerational dialogue and a space for meeting and interlearning, where women can express themselves, develop and have an impact.
2. Over the centuries, stereotypes and prejudices have been developed, limiting the participation of women in the practice of sports. To this day, in the community environment of Indigenous Peoples, there are many stereotypes that reinforce the idea that it is not women's place to practice sports. At the same time that there are few references to ancestral games that have been exclusive to women, it is considered that women are not skilled in sports. The practice of sports continues to cast doubt on the femininity of women, who are labelled as "macho" or "tomboy". On the other hand, due to the sexual division of labour, it is considered that the practice of sports does not correspond to women, since it is configured in the public space. The fact that women practice and develop public activities is seen as an abandonment and neglect of the home and children.

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3. Transcending to the public space is still a complex task for Indigenous Women, however, this challenge means for women to fight for gender equity, recreating the meanings of being a woman, the discourses on sport and the body. This experience of going beyond the limits of patriarchal culture allows them to reaffirm themselves as subjects of rights and social subjects.
 4. The development of sports projects and related processes strengthens leadership competencies such as: confidence, ability to relate, motivate, manage and replicate in an autonomous manner. It also contributes to the development of the capacity to lead, influence, make decisions, question and participate. The richness of Indigenous Women's leadership lies in the complexity of Indigenous Women as holders of knowledge and transmitters of culture; this leadership can be strengthened through the exchange of knowledge with leaders from other areas and through training. Exercising leadership in the public space makes the faces of women leaders visible and motivates more women to develop new competencies. This process can be considered a long-range process, so it is necessary to start with girls from an early age, which will depend to a great extent on the commitment of organizations, communities and Indigenous Peoples.
 5. Sport contributes to the empowerment of Indigenous Women to the extent that, through it, they are able to exercise their rights under equal conditions. It is also linked to the pride of belonging to a team, to the determination involved in defending the team and the identity that has been built. As proposed by FILAC (2021), empowerment is a process that includes an individual dimension, but above all a collective one.
 6. Sport is an important means for the promotion and protection of women's rights. On the one hand, practicing sports guarantees, among others, the right to recreation, education, physical and mental health. On the other hand, through training and exchange activities related to the practice of sports, they promote the rights of Indigenous Women. This knowledge helps to overcome gender barriers and, eventually, conditions of marginalization.

7. Culture influences the way in which the practice of sports by Indigenous Women is viewed. In some cases, the practice of sports is not valued by the culture. This fact constitutes a barrier for women, who have to deconstruct criteria under adverse conditions. On the other hand, culture and religion influence the way in which a conventional sport is adapted to an indigenous culture. These sports can be assumed from the complexity of the symbolism.
8. Women move the family to the public space to "play", unlike men who go out alone, that is to say, they build relationships, with the possibility of socializing and of becoming more united. In the sports space, women are able to promote integration and intercultural participation. Through their empowerment and leadership, women seek to contribute to the community and the community rewards this commitment, making their leadership visible and building spaces for community development.
9. The practice of conventional and traditional sports can contribute to breaking patterns that generate violence. The organizations are concerned about how the rates of violence have increased, and have become interested in generating sports spaces for reflection and education on the situation of violence against women.
10. For women, sports are a means of generating income for economic independence. The sports space is an opportunity for the establishment of businesses selling typical foods, handicrafts and other products. Moreover, the practice of sports is seen as an opportunity to develop a profession, sometimes encouraged by the state and society.
11. As some authors have stated, the sports space has not yet been fully conquered by women. Although sports processes contribute to their leadership and empowerment and through them, women have achieved great conquests, the dispute for spaces continues to be in tension.

4. Recommendations



For the construction of the recommendations presented below, a feedback process of the preliminary research results was developed. Representatives of the organizations that contributed with their knowledge in the in-depth interviews participated in the meeting.

It should be noted that the recommendations of the researchers are also presented, based on the experience acquired with the present work.

From these two sources, we highlight recommendations for future research on the topic and with a view to strengthening organizational processes related to the topic.

Recommendations for future research on the topic:

It is proposed to deepen the theme traditional sports/games, leadership and empowerment of Indigenous Women through synchronic and/or diachronic case studies, in situations that make possible participant observation in communities and face-to-face in-depth interviews.

On the other hand, it is important the possibility of developing research that is concerned with deepening on the cultural values and spirituality that traditional games and dances enclose. Considering that there is an interest in the rescue of traditional games, it is necessary to link this knowledge to the consolidation of cultural identity, giving, in this process, a central role to women as possessors and transmitters of knowledge.



Considering that within the research process it has been determined the existence of organizations with a wide experience in the development of processes linked to sports, leadership and women's empowerment, it is recommended to systematize their good practices and experiences, so that other organizations that are starting in these processes can learn from them in order to obtain better results.

New action research processes should enable processes where Indigenous Women and youth can be part of the research team. On the one hand, it would allow enriching the work methodology and, on the other hand, this presence would deepen the visions and interpretations of individual, group and community practices from the visual scheme and voice of the knowledge holders.

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended to deepen the relationship between the practice of traditional sports/games and the strengthening of the community and its values. Preliminarily, it has been determined that the game space also becomes a meeting place that reproduces "the community", a context that can be transferred in migration conditions.

Considering that the present study shows that Indigenous Peoples interpret and reinterpret, based on their knowledge, new practices, such as conventional sports. In the specific case of women, it has been seen that the sports space is reconfigured as a space for learning, meeting, intergenerational dialogue, among others. It would be interesting to explore this relationship in greater depth, especially in terms of knowing how Indigenous Peoples have been able to reconfigure "new knowledge" for individual and community benefit.

Other recommendations arising from the approach to the topic and the collective reflection

Taking into account that there are successful experiences within the organizations, the participants of the meeting, consider it necessary to propitiate spaces for the exchange of knowledge on processes that link sport and the

empowerment of Indigenous Women, in different parts of the world, in order to share and strengthen community interventions with a view to strengthening women's leadership.

It is important that processes, projects, programs that link Indigenous Women with sport for the achievement of related benefits, continue to be supported at the technical and financial level, not only to achieve visibility of the physical and sporting potential of Indigenous Women, but also to: Counteract prejudices and stereotypes that exist about women and sports, support in the conquest of new spaces in the public sphere, make visible the situation of Indigenous Women and ultimately contribute to gender equality.



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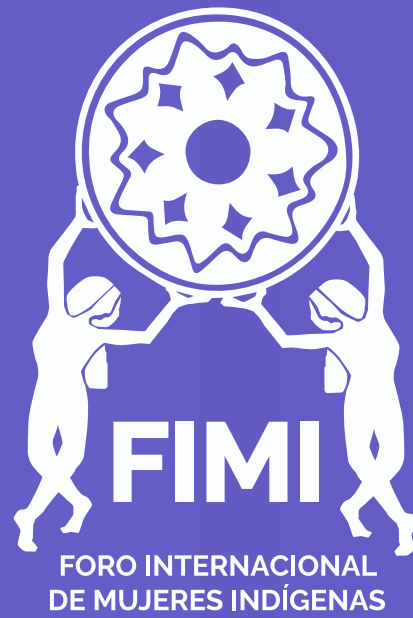
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