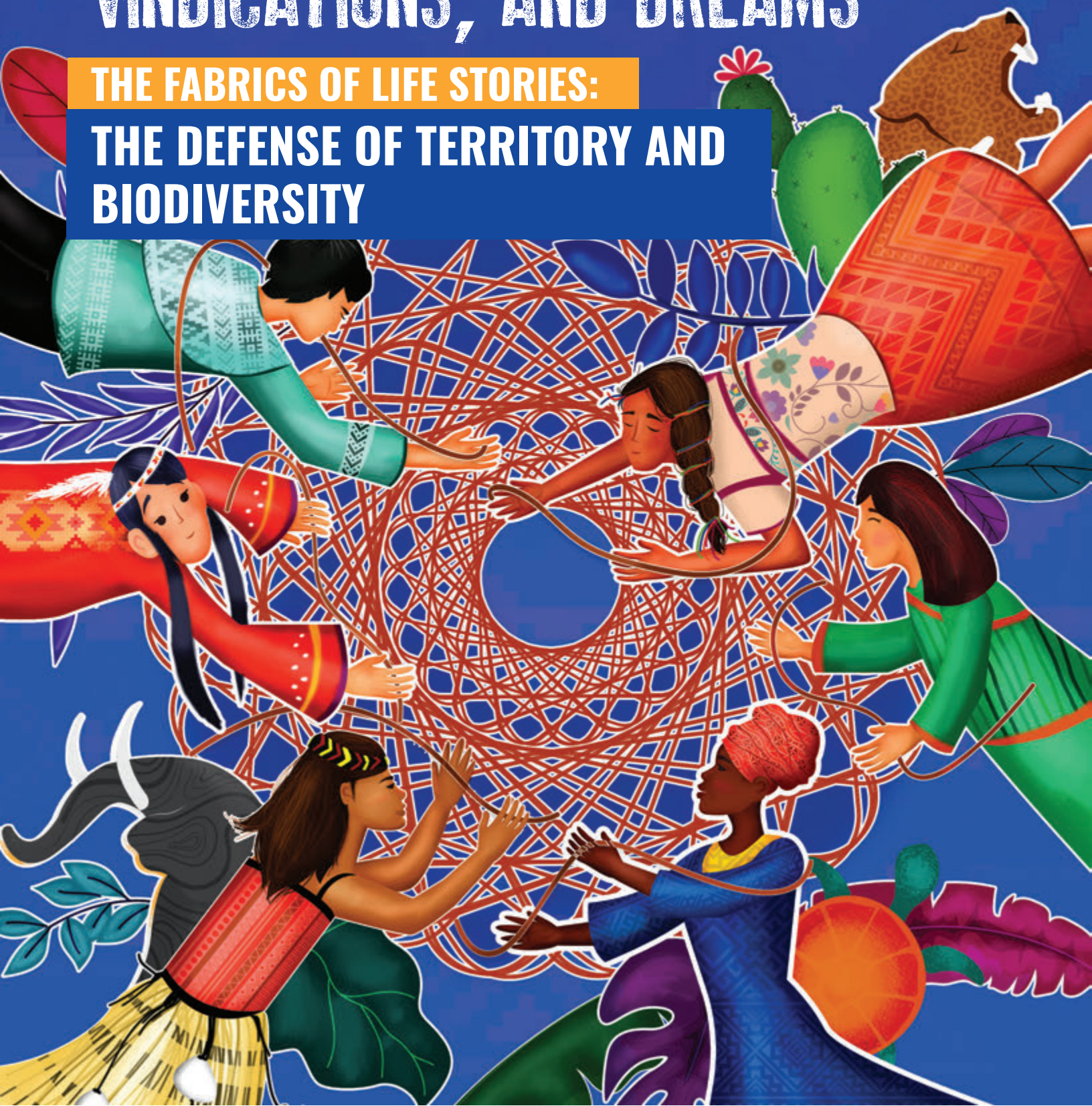
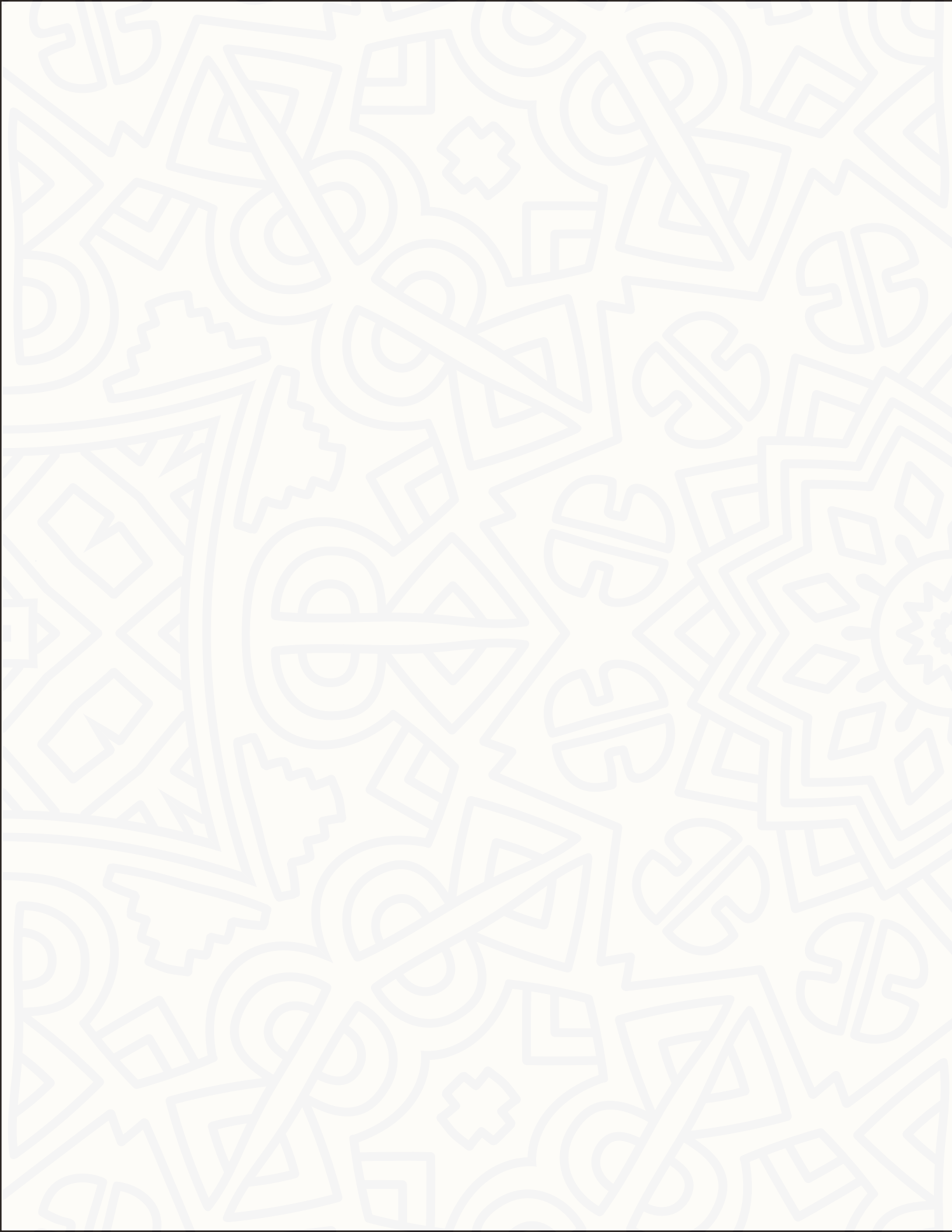




# A FABRIC OF KNOWLEDGE, VINDICATIONS, AND DREAMS

**THE FABRICS OF LIFE STORIES:  
THE DEFENSE OF TERRITORY AND  
BIODIVERSITY**







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**TAMALPAISTRUST**





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## 2. ACRONYMS



# A

**AMAM:** Organization of the Alliance of Women of the Indigenous Peoples Archipelago, West Nusa Tenggara

**AYNI:** FIMI Indigenous Women's Fund

# C

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

**CLPI:** Prior Consultation, Free and Informed

**CONPAH:** National Technical Committee of the Confederation of Indigenous Peoples of Honduras

**CSW:** Commission on the Legal and Social Status of Women.

# G

**GLSIW:** Global Leadership School of Indigenous Women

# I

**ISAWN:** Interstate Adivasi Women Network.

**FIMI:** International Indigenous Women's Forum

**ILO:** International Labour Organization

# N

**NEPAN:** Nepal Participatory Action Network

**NIFIN:** Nepal Indigenous Nationalities Federation

**NIWF:** Nepal Indigenous Women's Forum

# R

**REDD:** Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation

# S

**SDG:** Sustainable Development Goals

# T

**TEBTEBBA:** Indigenous Peoples' Centre for Policy Research and Education

**TEWA:** Women's Philanthropic Organization in Nepal

# U

**UN WOMEN:** The UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

**UAH:** Metropolitan University of Honduras



## 3. PROLOGUE



## Indigenous women are writing their own history.

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

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

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

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





to host Indigenous women leaders for an annual seminar.

The life trajectories of women described in these books demonstrate the strength, depth and validity of a strategic program such as the Global Leadership School of Indigenous Women. The bonds, knowledge sharing, mutual encouragement and inspiration participants experience are unparalleled, so that Indigenous women can continue their multifaceted struggles with more vigor and determination.

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

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

Five strong effective social movements in the last decades accompany their struggles: the human rights movement, the women's movement, the environmental movements have with the UN over the Indigenous women of these international

Let us not forget that level is an extension the national to Since states and internationally and affect our lives, we, as shape our own lives, internationally. We actors and influence people's advocacy.

Resistance, persistence, four words that struggles. Indigenous



©FIMI. Altar of the GLSIW national capacity building program, El Salvador, 2017.

own stories and creating more just societies with their many visible and invisible acts that sustain life every day. They continue to uphold a fundamental principle: **DIGNITY**.

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

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

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

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

**Elsa Stamatopoulou,**

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







## 4. BACKGROUND



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

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

It has a work plan divided into four strategic programs:

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

The FIMI believes in learning by doing and in the cross-fertilization process between practice and theory. Access to more information enables effective participation, and through such participation, capacity building is strengthened. Consequently, it reaffirms that empowerment and leadership can be acquired through the implementation of a process that combines participation, capacity building, and organizational strengthening.

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

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

On the other hand, it was also created to benefit the indigenous women of the communities as they are aware that they are bearers of ancestral knowledge, are the main reproducers of their peoples' cultures, and contribute to their continuity and resistance; however, these women had no visibility. Therefore, it was believed that the School could help out in providing visibility to these contributions of indigenous women.

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

### **Virtual:**

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

### **Face-to-face:**

*the second phase consists of attending intensive seminars for a week at the United Nations headquarters, as well as at Columbia University, through its Institute of Human Rights. Likewise, at this phase, women leaders participate effectively during the first week of sessions of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and meet with high-level United Nations officials.*



©FIMI. Seminars at Columbia University, participants of the 5th edition of the GLSIW. New York City.



### **Implementation of advocacy plans:**

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

With improvements based on the results of the first experience, the following year in 2014 the FIMI implemented a second edition, wherein 25 indigenous women from various countries from the same regions mentioned above participated. Likewise, the corresponding training terms were included according to the designed methodology. In 2015, the School created mechanisms for the participation of 27 participants from different peoples of the world. Through the development of three training terms, the School was growing and expanding the great network of organizations that make up the FIMI.

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

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

Furthermore, former participants took on technical tasks of the FIMI, which in turn grew and expanded its networks to other countries that were included for the first time, such as some Pacific islands: Micronesia, Guam, Papua New Guinea, and Vanuatu; even though long-distance coordination with some leaders for their in-person participation in the School was difficult. Regarding the technical team, they were greatly satisfied with the work carried out; at a distance, they witnessed the projects carried out by the women leaders. Some former participants returned to the Permanent Forum on their own and met with the FIMI team in this and other settings. They were grateful for the changes they experienced after participating in the School. In this context, the FIMI held the fourth and the fifth edition, in 2016 and 2018<sup>1</sup>, respectively.

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

<sup>1</sup> In 2017, the International Program did not take place



©FIMI. Group of participants, 2nd edition of the GLSIW, New York City

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

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

most emblematic program of the FIMI.

In this work, former participants in the training process helped out with interviewing some of the women leaders. Subsequently, each story was put together to tell how dozens of indigenous women have joined hands to move forward towards worlds with less inequality, where cultural diversity may belong and each People may have continuity and develop themselves according to their own decisions.

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



## MYRNA CUNNINGHAM KAIN

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



©FIMI. Photograph provided by  
Dr. Myrna Cunningham.

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

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

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

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

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

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

For Myrna, who already had a leadership trajectory and accumulated experiences and knowledge throughout her journey, it has been



©FIMI. Photograph provided by Dr. Myrna Cunningham.

important to open new paths and build bridges so that women continue advancing their knowledge and their exercise of individual and collective rights.

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

For her, the spirit of the school focuses on developing the capacities of indigenous women who are leaders in different parts of the world, so that they may have the strength and wisdom to influence in settings around the world. From her point of view, the idea of promoting a training space for and belonging to indigenous



women arises from the identification of women who have already had experience as activists at a global level in their communities and countries, with a certain degree of knowledge and interest in specific issues, but mainly in understanding how these issues affect the lives of indigenous women in their territories. In this regard, she says:

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

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

Among the main motivations for Myrna to propose the creation of the Global School was,

first of all, the promotion of actions in favor of indigenous women. After analyzing the adoption of the women’s platform at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing she saw that indigenous women were not being reached.

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

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

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

*“One cannot advocate solely through confrontation”.*

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

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

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



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their content and organization would be. The result of this meeting served to bring about the first curricular offer of the Global School.

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

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

From the beginning, Myrna was aware of how important it has been to have important contacts to become strategic allies in a politically important process for indigenous women as





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part of the FIMI, such as Lea Mackenzie and Mónica Alemán, who in that period played a predominant role in the management of the School.

She also recalls the valuable advice and accompaniment of Ana María Enríquez, through Vivian Stromberg from UN Women, who supported the proposal from the beginning, because it allowed her to confirm her work in favor of indigenous women. Finally, the first donors, such as the Channel Foundation and other Dutch organizations which, in their role as cooperators, believed, agreed to, and contributed to the necessary resources to make this dream and project a reality.

From Myrna's perspective, the development and management of a process such as the

Global School, for the strengthening of advocacy capacities of indigenous women, implied challenges, difficulties, and strengths, including the fact of having built strong alliances, for example, with Columbia University, which made a high-level academic endorsement possible, so the role of Elsa Stamatopoulou was fundamental; likewise, the mechanism for selecting the participants, ensuring that they came from networks and responded to organizations and groups of women and young women of Indigenous Peoples; and the combination of the virtual stage, with the face-to-face stage in New York, as part of the teaching-learning process. For her, it has been valuable how the concept of learning by doing was applied, which has been fundamental for the participants; as well as the fact that it is a

course offered in different languages, which is a great strength.

Also, she states that the greatest weakness in the process has been to ensure that the participants can enter the virtual platform, considering that the issue of virtual education continues to be a challenge for Indigenous Peoples since they have no conditions or resources to access the platform. This is something that still needs to be worked on so that both women and men have access and can make use of these tools.

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

Myrna, as a wise woman, has traveled various paths in the defense of women's and Indigenous Peoples' rights, as an interlayer of dreams and realities for herself and indigenous women,

has made an effort throughout her life in encouraging the fulfillment of her goals. In this journey, she identified that women must strengthen their capacities. For this reason, she decided to promote the school for leadership training, in which she has been one of the main facilitators. It was also a rewarding experience because she would learn and relearn together with the leaders.

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

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





learning, and teaching.

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

For her, if something is making progress, it is because it responds to changes, that is why she deems important to rethink some aspects of the school, such as trying to link training more with global processes —for example, since the SDGs will still be in force for the next 10 years, the students need to be clear on how to link them in specific processes in their regions— and ensuring that, upon their return to their countries they can take actions to achieve the progress of these objectives with an Indigenous focus.

For her, it is necessary to focus more energy on CEDAW, and obviously, on using Indigenous

procedures and mechanisms, but also all of the existing ones as procedures, treaties, and United Nations bodies.

From her point of view, the school has great significance for indigenous women leaders as it represents a huge aspiration, mainly because they need to gain visibility; they want each of their processes, programs, and contributions to be recognized; as well as the fact that it opens up an opportunity for them to link them to the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, placing them in networks with a huge number of important international contacts with whom they can advocate.



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

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

## Main lessons

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

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

Another lesson has been to value how the school has managed to make known some of

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

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

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

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





**Life stories:**

**Indigenous women leaders from Asia**

# ANSILLA TWISEDA MECER

*An indigenous woman is the one who admits and knows that she is part of her People. She is still a bearer of the history of her origins and practices the tradition and culture from where she comes.*



©FIMI. Photograph provided by participant Ansilla Twiseda Mecer, 3rd edition of the GLSIW

With the Dayak identity, Ansilla picks up the strength of the spirit of the rice field, whose origin comes from the energy of her ancestors and descendants who are part of its Indigenous People.

She was born in Pontianak, the capital of the province of West Borneo in Indonesia, a place protected by a mountainous nucleus of ancient rocks as witnesses of the history of its People.

The people of her Town call her Wisda, which represents authority. At 43 years of age, she is proud to be part of Yayasan Karya Sosial Pancur Kasih, which means to do collective work with her People and to belong to the Dayak indigenous people. For her, it is important to recognize that her

lineage comes from two origins, from the Dayak Krio paternal side and from the Dayak Kanayatn maternal side, which strengthens her cultural roots because they come from the most ancient Peoples. She states:

*“I believe that the indigenous woman is the one who admits and knows that she is part of the Indigenous People where she comes from, because she is a bearer of the history of her origins, and still practices the tradition and culture from where she comes”.*



She is a member of the Pancur Kasih Foundation, which focuses on community education through training and assistance to the population from different communities. Since 2012, she has held the position of president of the Foundation, whose duties are supervising and accompanying the field teams in the actions they take in various sections. She has a master's degree in Social Work and Psychology, with which she gained expertise at the community level providing organizational methodologies with a socio-psychological approach. For a while, she worked as a Psychologist and handled clinical cases of women who had been victims of human trafficking. She thinks that it allowed her to have greater touch with reality and to strengthen her identity as an indigenous woman.

She remembers that her father had been an activist of the Indigenous Peoples since she was a little girl. She saw how he made an effort to lead the organization of Peoples, to pull them away from the marginalization, discrimination, and oppression of the Suharto regime. Suharto was the second President of Indonesia, who ruled the country under a dictatorship for almost 32 years and caused serious violations of the rights of indigenous peoples, resulting in exclusion and inequality in all areas of life, such as the case of their Dayak people in Kalimantan.

She remembered a time that impacted her greatly was when her father was a mediator with other indigenous peers, always in the pursuit of balance and harmony among the other leaders to reach mutual agreements for the benefit of all. She explains:

*“There was a time I even thought that I didn't have any leadership talent, but it was already ingrained inside the deepest part of me since I was a little child, influenced by my father”*

## Leadership as a basis for the defense of Indigenous Peoples

The beginnings of her leadership as an indigenous woman were based on her empathy in the face of the situation of subordination and inequality experienced by indigenous women, whom she was accompanying due to the human trafficking issue.

During that period, she was convinced that women had all the potential to move forward amid difficulties that they may be confronting.

Later on, she joined the social activities that supported the Indigenous Peoples of West Kalimantan until 2006, where proposals about the improvement of the Peoples' living conditions were submitted to the government. She pursued her studies in the city of Jogja in Indonesia, which allowed her to support her work in favor of the communities with better resources and skills.

She realized that leadership meant having the ability and charisma to accompany, guide, and motivate other groups. It represented an opportunity to put into practice what she had learned from her father as a child. She also participated in a course in the city of Jogja, in which she learned about the topics of gender and feminism, knowledge which she strengthened through researching and reading several books on studies carried out in other countries.

With this leadership experience, she was finally appointed as the director of Yayasan Karya Sosial Pancur Kasih, holding such position to the present. This is an opportunity to serve and continue contributing to women.



In her journey as a leader, she has had female and male allies who have provided important support to continue her work, her parents and her husband being those who have supported her the most. She excitedly says:

*“If I don’t do things I am passionate about, I can lose the sense of my own being within me”.*

She identified community women and leaders from other allied organizations, who have been contributing to her work so that their projects can be carried out.

She has realized that there are great indigenous women who have become her role models; for example, Mamá Aleta Baun in Indonesia; at an international level,

Vicky Tauli Corpuz from the Philippines; Joan Carling, FIMI President; and Myrna Cunningham. In hindsight, their journey in the fight for the rights of indigenous women since they were little enabled her to understand the importance of perseverance. She explains:

*“They are strong and motivate me, they are a great source of inspiration”*

From her point of view, being a woman leader is willing to guide, be with, and walk alongside women or the sectors in which she has had to work. For this reason, her contributions have been geared towards the foundation, whose focus changed since she became the director, and now they focus much more on indigenous women and on promoting actions to strengthen their organizations.





As part of the Dayak People, Ansilla identifies one of the elements that shows the deep values of its culture, which are related to principles of leadership. She refers to the “Rumah Bentang,” which symbolizes union and unity, because it is a place where people can get together and meet, allowing for reaching agreements and talking about all community issues. It can be called the symbol of solidarity. The other element is the “Kagari” which means cooperation; this element has influenced the attitude and behavior of the Dayak People.

Regaining these values is important for her because of the growing influence of the Catholic and Protestant churches among her People, which have been causing the loss principles and philosophy of life that have historically sustained the sense and strength of the struggle of the elderly. For

this reason, bringing them to life in the collective actions that she does and learned from her parents continues to be a daily political commitment.

## Global Leadership School: a gathering of indigenous women

Ansilla is a woman with a long journey and strong steps. Her leadership has provided her with learning opportunities wherever she has gone. For this reason, she thanks the TEBTEBBA Foundation for her application to the Global Leadership School, and the FIMI for opening such a necessary space for training. Her main motivation was to weave an international network of indigenous women to share their experiences and learn, listen to them about how they have made progress, and later reproduce the same process at the local and community levels with her training leaders from whom she has also learned.

She is grateful for having been part of a program that provided her with new knowledge and experiences, such as the new elements about the approach of sorority and perspective of indigenous women, the approaches and programs that other indigenous women leaders around the world have made to strengthen the women's movement at the local, national, and international levels. She states with satisfaction:

*"It has been my first international experience and also my first experience with an indigenous women's rights program".*

To date, she has been managing to extend the network of indigenous women. It has been valuable because it has enabled her to work with technical and methodological bases to better carry out her position at the foundation and with women, facilitating options to access funds, providing greater means to empower and prepare indigenous women on a larger scale. Her current strong network of contacts has given her better opportunities for organizational support.

Having laid out the problem of preparing the advocacy plan, she put forward one of the structural causes affecting the exercise of the indigenous women's rights of her People. Her proposal was based on the need to raise awareness among the indigenous Dayak Iban Sebaruk women about gender equality, demanding equal opportunities in the economic and political spheres at the border area in West Kalimantan, Indonesia, to provide indigenous women with knowledge and raise their awareness of political and economic empowerment through training and seminars, which were implemented by the foundation.

She negotiated with the FIMI to obtain the resources for its implementation, which has been a great experience because they have identified new areas near the border between Indonesia and Malaysia to work in. It was a very challenging process because it led them to deal with the military and the invaders from the palm oil industry, and the risks of human trafficking as well. Addressing this reality unleashed a series of questions that she has managed to understand in the course of the actions derived from the same Plan.

This Plan became a strategic tool to ensure that more Dayak women empower themselves and challenge the oppressive and economic system that violates their rights. During its implementation, she realized that the Plan could also be used





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as an instrument to evaluate changes and progress, and collect data for writing a book about the reality of women.

She has managed to expand her support network and has created opportunities to empower women from other communities who are still marginalized and live in a community near the border between Indonesia and Malaysia, and who have been oppressed due to the land conflict and the effects of climate change. She has gotten closer to them by working with them, and it has been a great opportunity to continue supporting women whose rights are being violated. She says with satisfaction:

*“Nowadays we are training four communities in the sub-district of Sekayang and Balai Beteng Tarang in the district of Sanggau. I continue to focus on the local level to raise indigenous women’s awareness in those places”.*

At the national level, her input has consisted of learning about the Sustainable Development Goals and analyzing their level of compliance concerning indigenous women, taking into account women’s situation of vulnerability, especially of

those who live in border areas; as well as strengthening greater alliances with the leaders of the Indigenous Peoples in the communities in which work was carried out, and with women who are part of the groups that carried out the activities.

She put forward a proposal on the creation of the Indigenous School, as a space for meeting together and raising awareness among women and community leaders. For her it is important that opportunities now be set aside to coordinate and collaborate with other institutions, to open up more possibilities for women.

## Individual and collective dreams

She believes that broadening her horizon in these ways has deepened her understanding in being aware of the situation and conditions experienced by Indigenous Peoples, understanding that they are part of a system of oppression and exclusion that has caused so much inequality towards Dayak women and men. Despite this, she admires how the Peoples have pressed forward enduring and dealing with this system.

At an individual and collective level, her main dream is to promote strength, power, and wisdom to generations of young women leaders to keep fighting for and defending their rights and those of their People, and not allow them to continue losing and forgetting their identity.

She believes that it is necessary to pass her knowledge on to the next generation that is willing to make changes for a better world. She is doing this by training young women in the organization, community, and family. She says:

*“I hope these future leaders will continue the work because I am getting older, that is why within my organization I have trained young women who will continue with the work and the movement”.*

It is important to increase their capacity and that of the women leaders to be consistent and equitable when managing the local organization, and wise when leading the mechanisms for the well-being of women.

The story of Ancilla’s journey is an inspiration for other women and youth. Learning about the steps she took allow others to understand, from the time she recognized her identity as an indigenous Dayak woman, how she has closely assumed the reality and strength of the people; how she has been able to take energy and light from the being of women to plant a seed in each one of them so that from their feminine being they have the power to continue moving forward amid the difficulties they may have to face.

Her leadership is an example of service for being willing to accompany, guide, and share with other leaders the knowledge and lessons found in a learning space such as the Global School that has been a bridge of learning, experiences, and strength necessary for indigenous women leaders to continue contributing to others, things that will later be passed on to the farthest places that cannot be reached by this training program.

Today, Ansilla, a Dayak woman, affirms that as indigenous women they are entitled to rights and have the capacities, energy, strength, and knowledge to mobilize and go out with their heads held high, willing to continue walking together as a leadership network empowered by their identity as a people.



# CHHING LAMU SHERPA

*We as indigenous women know our language and culture; we have an identity, a song; we are bearers of the truth; we enjoy giving and we are self-sufficient.*



©FIMI. Photograph provided by the participant Chhing Lamu, 1st edition of the GLSIW.

Chhing safeguards the mountain just the way she was taught by her Sherpa ancestors, from whom comes her wisdom to defend life in all of its manifestations. She is a human rights activist and environmentalist. She was born in Pinjuling Katne, Udayapur, Nepal. At the age of 59, she is still convinced that indigenous women's leadership is based on the principle of collectivity.

She has a postgraduate degree in Rural Extension and Women from the University of Reading, UK. She is president of TEWA, a women's philanthropic organization, and founder of the Mountain Spirit organization, which works on the promotion of Indigenous Peoples in mountain communities within the environmental field and in particular

for the participation of Indigenous Peoples and women in Nepal. She has volunteered for the Nepal Indigenous Women's Forum (NIWF) as a member of the committee on the disposition of resources for the REDD and Climate Change Program, as well as the Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NFIN) for the promotion of the Indigenous Peoples and indigenous women livelihood program.

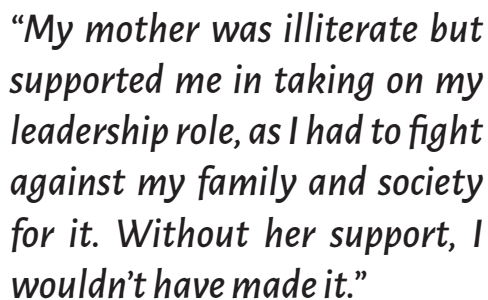
She grew up at a time when there was no school in her village, so she studied until she was 17 years old, being the first woman who graduated and obtained a certificate of studies. It was a very difficult achievement, especially due to the discrimination she experienced from her teachers. One of her

first jobs was in a public training center for the rural area. She remembers that she was not allowed to wear her dress at that time, so she had to wear the sari and had to work a lot. After several efforts, she was able to go to university, supported by her mother.

## Her leadership as an indigenous woman

Chhing recalls that her beginnings in leadership were difficult as she had completed her studies late, which meant following behind other leaders that had made more progress than her. However, she worked very hard to convince her parents to let her do community work.

The foregoing confirmed her need to get involved in organizations and find ways to achieve it and show her family that she could do it. During this period, her mother supported, motivated, and taught her a lot; she has been one of her main allies. She explains:



*“My mother was illiterate but supported me in taking on my leadership role, as I had to fight against my family and society for it. Without her support, I wouldn’t have made it.”*

One of her allies is her friend Chinagiri, who obtained better living conditions as she has lived in an urban area. This was why her friend was able to teach her to read and write. She also mentioned her Sherpa teacher who was looking for ways for her to

continue learning, so when she had to take care of the sheep in the meadows, he would give her homework so she would not lose the habit of studying. She believes they are her main allies because from the beginning they encouraged and accompanied her so that she would not give up her dream of knowing, learning, and leading.

An example of strength, life, and leadership is her mother, Nejang Lhamu, a strong indigenous woman who married at 14 years of age in an arranged marriage. However, she maintained her independence, defending women in difficult times, such as the struggles in the revolution in 1952, a period in which men left and women were on their own. On one occasion, her mother defended a woman who was breastfeeding against a soldier who was trying to take her baby away. Her mother confronted and fought against him, so he had to leave the baby and go away.

She remembers that whenever women were beaten in the village, they went to see her mother for seeking protection. She complained to the husbands about these mistreatments, which annoyed some people who did not agree with this. An event that marked her mother’s life and impacted hers is when her mother was arrested for having torn the king’s photo, a false accusation. She managed to escape and walked for three days through the forest, took a bus, crossed the border, and went to India for five or six months. After a while, she returned with more strength and energy to continue supporting women. She was involved in politics and passed away in 1994. Her mother’s life has set an example for Chhing, who honors her demands and struggles.

Her mentors are also indigenous women leaders such as Professor Elsa Stamatopoulou from Columbia University, Cecilia Ramírez, and Teresa Zapeta





©FIMI. Photograph taken from the projects of the AYNi Fund.

from the FIMI, Vicky Tauli-Corpuz from the TEBTEBBA Foundation (Indigenous Peoples' International Centre for Policy Research and Education), who because of their work and dedication in the defense of women have been an inspiration for her.

The sector in which she has focused her leadership is mainly the Mountain Spirit organization, where she supports indigenous people who live on and protect the mountain, helping them with several issues they have to deal with. As a founder of NEPAN, the Nepal Participatory Action Network, and a member of TEWA, Chandra Gurong NEPAN Conservation Foundation, she continues promoting the empowerment of indigenous women and young environmental leaders from a participatory approach.

For Chhing, the principles of her culture as part of the Sherpa People can be philosophically recontextualized and take

on a new meaning, taking into account that they do contribute to equality between women and men since even in indigenous men there is a lot of influence from a patriarchal society. They must recognize that a sherpa woman is very strong; she is the one who makes the decisions within the household activities. She believes that in the development of her leadership her actions have been supported by the values of her culture.





## Global Leadership School: training for indigenous women

With the information she obtained from the TEBTEBBA Foundation, she was able to apply for the Global School, which was an achievement and at the same time a great responsibility for her. Her main motivation was to develop the quality of her leadership to put it towards the service of women.

Being part of this training process gave her significant experiences. She had never before had an online course complemented with an in-person session. It was motivating. Her participation in the Permanent Forum

on Indigenous Issues, being involved in the academic world of Columbia University, added significant value to her leadership. With satisfaction, she states:

*“Now I can review my country’s policies from another perspective, with a focus on rights as Peoples and indigenous women”*



Having joined with women leaders from other parts of the world with diverse experiences was a great learning experience. She truly identified with their struggles and demands as if they were all one voice. Drafting and implementing the Advocacy Plan has also been another great experience. The in-depth analysis of the issue of communities living in the mountains regarding the impacts of climate change allowed her to identify the possibilities for dealing with it.

It was satisfying to have been capable to manage the subsidy and execute their Plan, which set about indigenous knowledge and adaptation to climate change by revisiting the past and looking to the future. As a result of its implementation, data from indigenous women was obtained, which entailed very sound tools for defending their demands as part of the Indigenous Peoples.

As a result, a total of 35% of indigenous people participated in the proposed activities, although it still represents very little data, it was great progress for her and her Mountain Spirit organization with whom said Plan was executed, leading her to strengthen its foundations.

For her, gaining new knowledge means a commitment to herself and her organization. Contributing her work with what she has learned is a priority. After completing her participation in the Leadership School, she strengthened her capacities and is convinced to put them towards the service of others. Now, she has tools to evaluate how women and community leaders work. She encourages them to participate with their voice and demands as Indigenous Peoples in community and national spaces. She says with satisfaction:

*“Through the eyes of Indigenous Peoples, I can see more about what the level of participation is like and I encourage them to continue, this is one of my contributions.”*

The opportunity to implement the Advocacy Plan allowed for establishing actions on coordination and management of funds, a process that strengthened their interest in taking advantage of the knowledge obtained during the Leadership School. She managed the creation of the FIMI fund to gather indigenous knowledge regarding food and practices of how to deal with climate change. They also learned to design work reports as part of the Advocacy Plan. As an advocacy tool, coordination has been valuable for the creation of alliances with other groups in the community, which represents a great opportunity.

She coordinates with the group of women so that they can make communities aware of the role of the snow leopard in the Everest regions and the northern and western Himalayas, as a protector of the mountains and other species. In this regard, she says:

*“I understand the importance of safeguarding and balancing the snow leopard to balance our environment and in the surroundings of the Sherpa People’s communities”.*



For Chhing, learning is an act of wisdom and an opportunity, that is why she values her participation in the Leadership School, which gave her the possibility of obtaining new knowledge, such as learning about the history and importance of Human Rights and Indigenous Peoples.

## Main individual and collective dreams

Chhing is clear about her dreams, which she conceives as goals that lead her to make commitments.

Her main dream is more equitable participation at home and the decision-making level since this is very low for

women in the community. She hopes to write a personal history about all of her life experiences among her people; as a result, she has started writing a local article that represents some progress for her. She says enthusiastically:

*“I believe that dreams are not impossible if you have goals. Time flies by. If we have to do it today, it is better to do it and not let things pile up for you”*



She claims that knowledge and experiences must be passed on to be useful, which is why she has been a mentor to Tukatichiki, her niece, and Pasand Doma, her sister, and later to Chukilama, a member of the Lakpatinji mountain organization. With this, she ensures, in turn, her leadership on others and the multiplication of their knowledge. For now, they have 300 volunteers with whom they share their experiences. In all the settings she attends, she encourages people to take their own initiative, to continue working without subsidies, encouraging them to use the resources at their disposal so as not to stop.

She believes that it is necessary to follow up with those who have already started at a more advanced level for greater support in places such as the summit in Nepal, in Indonesia. For her, it is important to know more about the local and global spheres to develop common strategies on how to mobilize as Indigenous Peoples at the regional level. For this reason, she considers it essential to share the training processes of another line such as the Global School, taking into account that the reality of Nepal is critical, so they need to take strategic advocacy steps to deal with the system of exclusion and poverty.

With her leadership, Chhing demonstrates that when you are clear about the path you are going to travel and the goals you want to achieve, your dreams can come true. She is an example of struggle and determination in favor of the defense of her rights and in the search for empowering women through her contributions.

As a wise indigenous woman, she understood the value of harmony in her work and mission as a leader, those principles of her Sherpa People which strengthen the being and capacity for action of indigenous women in conjunction with the community. With the strength and power of the mountain, she is convinced that all knowledge is a new beginning and it is in the hands of those who receive it to take advantage of it and share it.

# ELINA HORO

*Indigenous women are those who continue to be connected with communities, culture, and tradition, and they practice their life beliefs and cultural values.*



©FIMI. Photograph provided by participant  
Elina Horo, 1st edition of the GLSIW

Elina Horo is an indigenous woman belonging to Munda tribe, born in Orissa and brought up in Jharkhand. She has a deep understanding of gender inequality, and takes it upon herself to work with and empower other women too. She is a natural leader, and she takes upon problems as challenges and strives to come to solutions. Her warmth and resilience makes her a leader that a lot of other women look up to.

At 49 years of age, she is an empowered, hard-working, committed, sincere, and a strong leader, who takes social problems around gender inequality as challenges, and advocates with and for women; she works diligently for the service of the community and her people.

As a child, she was very introverted. She was the second of four siblings in her family. She recalls that since a very young age, she has been keen on doing things on her own and not depend on others, unlike her siblings who were more dependent on their parents. This inculcated in her a sense of autonomy and made her capable of making her own decisions even in the face of adversity. From an early age, she has been asserting and demanding about her needs. She always claimed her needs, and consciously worked towards breaking the societal gender norms.

She grew up in a community with difficult living conditions. Under a dominant culture, she did not initially very well understand the situation of the Indigenous Peoples. She had her questions about herself, her community and the social structures, she



carried along with herself those questions and confusions. During her youth, she went to university to obtain a degree. Upon joining the university, she found herself as the only indigenous woman in the class, then later another classmate joined, making it a total of 2 Adivasi students out of 300 Non Adivasi students. This reality was a challenge she had to deal with.

Later on, she was admitted into a training program for young women leaders, organized by the church. It is there that for the first time, she participated in a space where she met women from all over India and achieved a very active role, that is why she was chosen as the second most active leader of all the attendees. With satisfaction, she says:

*“It strengthened my confidence a lot. I was recognized and seen as a leader. People’s faith in me encouraged me to not stop and do more”*

## Her leadership as an indigenous woman

Since she was a child and throughout her youth, Elina sowed the first seeds of her leadership, seeking an opportunity to support sectors in her town. After completing her Master’s in women’s Studies, initially, she decided to work with women. However, when she got back, she did not find a space to work around gender. She realized that the church was very orthodox and she could not fit in there. It was frustrating for her because she was finding it difficult to engage in a space that prioritized working on gender.

She felt gender was a pressing issue that got sidelined, and her focus and ideas were to hope for and work towards feminist futures and empowering other women. She got the opportunity to work with an NGO hoping to apply her knowledge but she couldn’t find the right space. However, while working in this organization, she was still not finding



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adequate space to work on issues of gender and around patriarchy. It made her feel uncomfortable, so after a short while, she resigned from her position.

For almost a year, she was thinking about where to go, what to do, how to materialize her knowledge about gender issues into actual lived realities. There were many job offers for her, but the issue of gender was not within their work priorities. Finally, she realized that there were no ideal places to work. After some reflection on this, she decided that if such a space did not exist, she had to create one. That is what she did. Just at that time, she met other women who had similar experiences of discrimination or different forms of violence and were equally passionate about bringing in change in the situation. This is how the genesis of Adivasi

Women's Network happened in Jharkhand. Starting the organization had its own challenges and involved several risks and difficulties. Elina believed in the principle of learning by doing:

*"I started and could create spaces for women that I didn't find when I was looking for it. Now it has grown, and many women find it useful, especially indigenous women. They learn to lobby, develop their capacities, amongst other things".*



Today, she is grateful for the support, strength, and energy from her partner, who also was an ally and a friend to her. She counted on his understanding, confidence, and freedom to do what she considered necessary. Her partner is also an activist, and both of them shared their passion to work for the community. She believes that even in personal relations, it is very important to work for partners to be equals as beings. For her, it meant experiencing a true sense of fairness. Her parents have also been her allies; they support her, and when she feels tired or wants to stop, she goes to them and receives their strength and support.

During this process, it has been essential to have indigenous women as examples for the development of her leadership, such as her mother with whom she feels very close. She is her inspiration. She is someone who speaks directly and never gives up; perseveres and does not abandon what she starts. With emotion, she says:

*“I have learned from my mother to have perseverance. My mother also said that no matter what happens in life, we should not abandon the values we learned”.*

Her mother taught her to weave. The moment she made any mistake, her mother would insist that she start again from the beginning. She needed to do it several times until she managed to improve and achieve the perfect fabric. She kept trying until she got it right, with patience and creativity. The learning from this process has stayed with her and she relates it to her leadership. Any time, she is not satisfied, she goes back and starts again.

In the community, she identifies other women as an example to follow. Women who despite their problems, continue moving



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forward, such Joan Carling and Vicky Tauli, as examples of strength at an international level.

Her leadership has been focused on working with women as a bridge for meeting one with another, organizing discussion forums to learn about their problems, and analyze the different forms of violence they suffer in their region, bringing them together among communities, getting them to know each other. This is a slow process, but it has been the basis of a collective leadership together with other women through which collective actions are promoted and lobbying mechanisms are taught, including in its priorities, the development of advocacy capacities, and skills of women at the local, national and international levels, promoting mechanisms for their comprehensive empowerment from a social, political,

cultural, and economic perspective.

She recognizes the representative elements of the values of her People, the Munda culture, including the ancestral leadership, made up of older people who have power, such as the head of the village, a position held by some women. This is a traditional system for making decisions in favor of the community, mostly represented by men.

A few women are part of traditional decision-making bodies. As this position is represented by women also, they use the same symbol as men that represent their authority, consisting of a piece of cloth placed on the head. It is full of meaning as it is a signal of their leadership and authority in the community. As still to achieve this is a big challenge and a few women exceptionally taken into account in these settings, but not



all of them get support for what they have achieved with great effort.

Other values, such as solidarity, are still preserved despite the differences between many ethnic communities, such as Santhal and Khadia, etc. Violation of indigenous peoples' right to land, territory, and resources is becoming rampant in India and is a challenging issue. So, the existing cultural diversity is united for the same cause: the cause of Jal, Jungle, Jameen: defending and protecting the land, water, forest, and natural resources that are threatened in the face of the government's indifference, which ignores the laws that protect these resources, and, on the other hand, is also guilty for their exploitation, granting them to exploitative corporate firms.

She states with concern that at the national level they are dealing with serious problems related to democracy, which is threatened by the intervention of the right-wing Centre in power. The problems consequently reflected at the local level. Indigenous Peoples suffer due to the nationalistic approach, marked by Hindu fundamentalists, who have restricted food choices, such as prevention of consumption of beef. Such proscription is oblivious of and against the food cultures of various communities.

Sometimes such prohibition leads to fatal incidents via mob lynching in the name of cow protection. Sacrificing animals is also part of some rituals. Several Adivasis, Muslims and Dalits get beaten up and killed in the crowds, and lose their lives. The frequency of such attacks in Jharkhand is alarming. While solidarities and support pour in for the affected families from different progressive civil society groups. Mob lynchings in Jharkhand have been a pressing concern.

*“There have been around 29 reported cases that have taken place in five years. The number of people who have died from gunshots and have faced other forms of state brutalities, but Peoples solidarity gives us strength”.*

## Global Leadership School: an opportunity for learning

In the course of her leadership, Elina has always looked for spaces in which she can strengthen her knowledge and rethink it. When she had information about the Leadership School, she identified a good opportunity to achieve her purposes of strengthening her capacities. During that period, she was part of the academic advisory council of FIMI, so she reported her interest in applying, and finally, she became part of the process with the FIMI.

Her experience as a student of the Global School was significant as it allowed her for the first time to be in a session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, focusing spatially on women and bringing to light their living conditions worldwide.

She shares her knowledge from international solidarities in her organization and with community women, and helps promote the rights of women at the local and national levels.

For her, the creation and implementation of the Advocacy Plan meant the reaffirmation of her interest in supporting



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women, to strengthen their role in the community for decision-making at the local and national levels. Therefore, it was created to be carried over the long term, which implied dedication to achieve her designed actions, using different training methods and from a gender perspective as an approach. That would contribute to the empowerment of women, increase capacity development, facilitate their awareness of the impacts of climate change, and prevent the violence and danger they face, or provide support to raise voices against it. As an experience, the implementation of the Advocacy Plan facilitated tools to write reports, and documentation, which then Elina brought

those skills and training at the community level through her organization.

At the community level, her organization continues giving support so that women can raise their voice concerning their rights. At the national level, she along with other indigenous women founded the Interstate Adivasi Women's Network (ISAWN). ISAWN acted like a space to connect with more women and identify women leaders, who are now responsible for supporting the community, learning to organize activities for women, managing resources and developing activities. ISAWN importantly engaged in the advocacy and lobbying activities for



indigenous women's rights. Likewise, at the international level, she was a part of international indigenous women's groups such as FIMI.

For her, coordination is essential for working with women. This is an advocacy strategy strengthened during her participation in the Global School, enabling the management of resources and alliances with other sectors and institutions to implement the Advocacy Plan. As a result, she got connected with an organization that understood how important it is to implement actions in favor of women at the community and national levels.

She believes that all knowledge is a new tool with which to work, and like stated earlier, she believes in learning by doing. The Leadership School gave her the space to focus on women's issues from her indigenous identity. She learned about the mechanisms of the United Nations and did a presentation at the international level. For her, it was innovative to know how a training platform is developed at the distance and is complemented in in-person sessions.

*She learned about a different teaching methodology and she was able to implement a part of the program for women, at the national and at the local levels, putting what they learned into practice, creating tools and means of communication, developing spaces for women to learn and be part of.*

## Main individual and collective dreams

Elina has been a woman who has set goals and strives to achieve them. Her participation at the School allowed her to strengthen her way of thinking. Her international participation contributed much to broaden her point of view on the being of indigenous women. She understands the importance of global networking, such as the FIMI the needs and demands of indigenous women at a global level are not very separate from the needs existing at the community and local levels. With all this exposure, she is equipped with knowledge about other working methods to get women to use and translate those into their contexts.

She is aware that she still has a long way to go, both for herself and for women. It implies having social, cultural, political, and economic opportunities, for all women, which is a dream she wants to realize. In her own words, she says:

*“My dream is that one day I will see more empowered women with a more dignified life, with new challenges, but with hopes and dreams”.*

She is sure that one way to move towards this dream is to pass on her experiences and lessons to those close to her and who will have the possibility of continuing the fight. For this reason, she is working with her team in the organization. She is sure that as women leaders they are going to be able to reach many more.

She deems it necessary to continue strengthening the women's network and her leadership skills from a more comprehensive perspective, promoting more advocacy and lobbying actions at the community, national, and international levels; for which they must develop their internal capacities, become self determined, and self dependent.

Elina is a woman with clear convictions, a determined leader in her struggle to contribute to the improvement of women's lives. As an indigenous woman leader, she takes from her culture the values that make the exercise of her collective and individual rights a reality. Her journey so far has not been without its own challenges.

It has represented great challenges living in a system that constantly denies women their dues, but she has dealt with through collective work and in alliance with women, putting her skills, knowledge, and experience to work in service.

She is a living example of perseverance and constant search for the common good, for additional knowledge that adds greater possibilities to her leadership. She is humble and believes there is always room for more learning. Global Leadership School has been one such site of training and learning for her.



# ROHANI INTA DEWI

*We as Indigenous women as are proud of our identity. We fight for our rights. We are weavers of culture.*



©FIMI. Photograph provided by participant Rohani Inta Dewi, 3rd edition of GLSIW.

Rohani is a woman from the Sasak people, who represents a different way of leadership, represented as cotton threads dyed with natural dyes, which weave her thoughts, knowledge, and dreams. Her story is a passage through which her main challenges to become a defender of the life of her people will be known.

She lives on the Lombok island in Indonesia, an enormously wealthy place due to its biodiversity which — from the worldview of Sasak women and men— is thought of as a gift inherited from their ancestors to protect it, giving meaning to their constant struggle in defending their territory. She is currently a student of the Master's Degree in International Relations. At 28 years of

age, she is a leader committed to restoring the values of her culture, values that can strengthen her work. She is a member of the Alliance of Indigenous Women of the Archipelago, West Nusa Tenggara AMAN, in which she holds the position of a secretary. To gain this position and be able to do fieldwork, she participated in a training process in the defense of women's and Indigenous Peoples' rights to local forests and land ownership.

Due to the increasing presence of companies in mining extraction, which is causing severe social, economic, and psychological damage to the population, she joined the network of defenders of the Cek Bocek community, which is being directly affected.

In this network, she is a spokesperson and responsible for the empowerment of leaders so that they have the arguments to negotiate with the local government and are supported for their voices to be heard. The approach of her defense was taken into consideration to stipulate the national regulations towards the protection of local forests. She promoted a negotiation agreement among the local government, the communities, and the central government, which was favorable to the community.

The main memories of Rohani come from her childhood when she went to school. Being a leader in her class was very important, as she had the ability and willingness to support other girls and boys in the group. In high school, she was also appointed to representative positions. Afterward, she continued supporting student organizational processes, which she improved at the university by joining the national youth organization, called the Indonesian Islamic Student Movement. With satisfaction, she says:

*“In high school, my friends liked to call me a youth leader. I was often the high school representative for plays and other activities”.*

## Leadership space for the struggle and defense of indigenous peoples

She understands leadership as the possibility of starting a journey to put her skills and abilities towards the service of a group. While being a leader at the university level, she was part of the student council, as the first woman leader to hold a position in a setting where all of the members were men. While being a member of the organization, the leaders of the Association of Indigenous Women of the Archipelago invited her to found PEREMPUAN AMAN, a women’s organization in the region, and she was the first generation of women in the province of West Nusa Tenggara who held the position of Secretary. She acknowledges that it was one of the first settings in which she thought about becoming an indigenous leader. Since then, she has dedicated herself to learning more about the reality of indigenous women.

Being an indigenous woman leader was a political choice ratified by her, assuming a commitment to serve her people and support the recognition of their rights.

She is aware that all of her progress would not have been possible without the support of other people who have been close to encourage her to move forward, such as her parents, illiterate farmers who have always motivated her to continue studying, to not stop, and to improve herself, with the slogan “do not leave work with the land because this is where family support comes from,” as part of their cultural tradition. She also mentioned her husband as strong support.





©FIMI. Photograph provided by participant Rohani Inta Dewi, 3rd edition of the GLSIW.

*She considers the FIMI as great support because it has provided her with learning space to strengthen her capacities and continue learning about leadership.*

At an organizational level, her main ally has been the women's association, which gave her one of the first opportunities to learn about women's rights and allowed her to meet many indigenous women activists and leaders in Indonesia.

In her journey as a leader, she has met with other indigenous women, who she

considers as guides and examples to follow, from whom she can draw their experiences and knowledge, including Aleta Baun, Rukka Sombolinggi, Mia Sickawati, Myrna Cunningham, Cecilia Ramirez, and many others. They have become her inspiration to be part of women's movements. They have been a support for her.

Her support has been focused on the empowerment of women, so that there are more female leaders involved and influencing in public policies, and they can bring their voice and proposals to the local and national governments.

Consequently, concerning the problems experienced in the communities about the exploitation of natural resources and the resulting abuses to the communities, she has been working on the issues of

women and peace, giving messages to the communities about the role of women in the mechanisms of defense for their rights, involving women with different capacities. A strategic contribution is her position as a teacher at the School of Political Sciences and International Relations at the University, a professional space that allows students to become aware of the reality and violation of the rights of indigenous women and their peoples.

As part of the Sasak people, she is respectful and a believer of the values of her culture and the set of symbols that represent her spirituality as part of the sacred, which she considers a strength for the development of her leadership. A very strongly-held value is that of “Bersiru” which means helping each other. It implies being committed to helping each other as a family and community until the next generation, without breaking this chain, which is passed on as part of the inheritance from the oldest to the little ones. In her own words, she says:

*“The value of my culture influences me, wherever I am, wherever I go, it motivates me to be useful to others. For me, the best person is the one who can help others”.*

## Global Leadership School: a collective vision of indigenous women

The teaching-learning scenarios have been part of the progress of Rohani’s leadership, which is still the basis for contributing to her work with women. Her admittance into the Leadership School was a great opportunity to approach the issues of Indigenous Peoples, especially those of indigenous women.

Her main motivation was to meet indigenous women leaders from different latitudes that would represent a possibility for her to learn about their performance, as well as their experiences regarding the defense of women’s rights, and be in contact with the academic world from the perspective of indigenous women to build bridges of friendship and support. She cheerfully says:

*“I feel stronger after meeting so many women, with whom we share the same goals and the same vision”.*

Her training process at the school represented a significant experience in her life. She values every one of the activities carried out, the topics studied, as well as the innovative teaching methodology. It was her first contact with women from other parts of the world who have advanced knowledge on the rights, and her first trip abroad as a way to go out and approach the world from another perspective.





The creation of the advocacy plan represented a great learning experience. She understood that advocacy itself is a necessary process to achieve changes and confirmed that she has been promoting actions to achieve it since the beginning of her leadership.

The plan was designed together with her team. It was enriching because they managed to complement each other as a learning process. Watching and listening to the action plan of other participants allowed her to identify that each plan has different actions, but the same purpose, despite being developed in culturally diverse contexts. The plan proposal was about strengthening

the defense of indigenous women's rights to land and natural resources, about the negative impacts of mining exploration on their livelihoods and cultural objects in the community of Cek Bocek: a case of Gold exploration of a multinational company in the community of Cek Bocek, Nusa Tenggara, sponsored by the Alliance of the Indigenous Peoples Women of the Perempuan Archipelago.

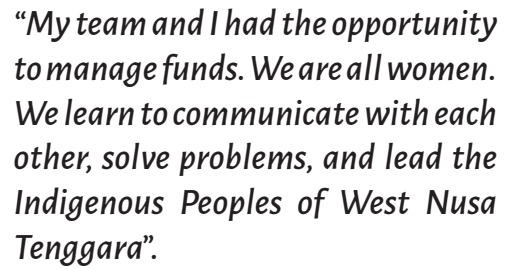
The proposal was financed by the FIMI. Its implementation represented an opportunity for Rohani as the plan offered a space for indigenous women to share their knowledge, information, and experiences. It enabled them to learn together and pass on strength

and positive energy to each other in the fight for their rights as indigenous women and the defense of their territory.

After completing the training in the Global School, at the local level, she created the Women's Indigenous Community at the regency level, within Nusa Tenggara, where they connect, conduct training programs regarding the organization and political advocacy as Sasak women. At the national level, she contributed to Gadjah Mada University, providing a talk on indigenous women and climate change, as well as on the roles and perspectives of indigenous women in risk management in the face of natural disasters. In these settings, she managed to introduce the issue of indigenous women, which had not been recognized in the university environment.

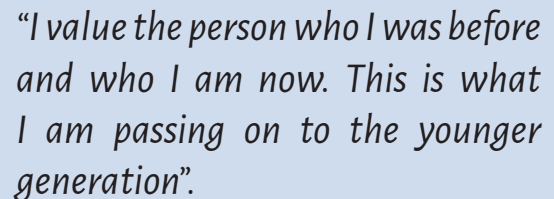
She was selected to represent AMAN in the training program on gender mainstreaming within forest policy intervention, which took place at one of the universities in Bangkok, Thailand. This issue is still a great challenge for her due to the implications of addressing the issue of gender from indigenous women's perspective. She states that when she was studying her master's degree, she wrote her thesis on Indigenous Peoples. It was one of her first academic studies.

A lesson learned by Rohani consisted on understanding that any action for change must include a clear approach to coordination, as part of advocacy, establishing a strategy, which requires the promotion of alliances leading to make agreements and take actions that facilitate changes and develop collective contributions. She says:



*“My team and I had the opportunity to manage funds. We are all women. We learn to communicate with each other, solve problems, and lead the Indigenous Peoples of West Nusa Tenggara”.*

Her participation in the Leadership School allowed her to learn new things, such as being proud of being an indigenous woman and meeting many peers who are undertaking struggles in other parts of the world, feeling self-confident, learning to value and love herself, and finally reaffirming her people and culture. In her own words, she says:



*“I value the person who I was before and who I am now. This is what I am passing on to the younger generation”.*



## Individual and collective dreams

For her, dreams are the continuation of her goals achieved throughout her journey. She knows that there is only one chance to achieve some of them and promote changes in herself. She realized she is not alone, and that there are indigenous women all over the world who continue taking on leadership and promoting rights for themselves, others, and their peoples.

One of her dreams is to have a training center to share and learn about knowledge and wisdom among indigenous women, as a space for the exchange of strengths and knowledge to be more connected to each other at the community and national levels.

She is sharing her knowledge in her community and women's organization, and in her work as a professor. She has been passing on what she learned to young women leaders such as Juanda, who has a school for Indigenous Peoples, the only one in Lombok, which represents a great opportunity for more young people, boys, girls, and women to learn about their people, but mainly it is a possibility to multiply the knowledge accumulated in this phase of her life.

She also considers that it is necessary to continue training indigenous women so they are given tools for themselves and the defense of their rights. One issue that needs to be addressed is political education, which makes it possible to have arguments and strategies to confront the Government. She prepares methodologies to learn how to write and thus write her story.

Getting to know the road traveled by Rohani as a woman leader has been a lifelong learning process, in which the value of “Bersiru” is confirmed as the principle of her Sasak identity. It becomes a reality in her contributions, experiences, and teachings to other women and youth. Such a principle adds to the meaning of mutual help.

Her leadership is an example of how the identity of an indigenous woman—conscious and consistent with her knowledge and life practices—is woven. It allows us to understand how beautiful it is to put knowledge to the service of a group. It is like making threads of a new loom in the fight for the defense of the rights that have historically been taken from their people by the Government. It is to show how a training process such as the Global School is a political advocacy strategy to strengthen women's leadership in the defense of life.





**Life stories:**  
Indigenous women leaders  
from Latin America



# REINA AURISTELA COREA LÓPEZ

*A Lenca woman who walks towards the empowerment of her rights, adding to the strengthening of the indigenous movement of women and ancestral peoples, based on demanding our individual and collective rights.*



Walking through the life of Reina is an encounter with her history, culture, the smell of her land, and the events that marked her being and work as a woman of the Lenca people. It is an invitation to know her struggles and challenges in the defense and demand of her specific and collective rights.

She was born in the municipality of Huajiquiro, department of La Paz, Honduras, a colorful village based on its natural diversity and people respectful of its culture and human values. Being born

in a Lenca Community, with its own culture and all the experiences of an Indigenous People marked her identity as a woman. During her childhood, despite the economic conditions, she managed to obtain her high school studies as a Mercantile Expert and Public Accountant. When she completed her studies, she joined spaces where Indigenous youth were already organized; however, it strengthened her even more as she ended up participating actively in some other municipalities at the departmental level.

At 47 years of age, she firmly believes in the collective power of Indigenous Peoples to defend their rights and territories. It is part of the Lenca indigenous movement of Honduras, which is committed to land acquisition, cultural revival, academic training, production, inclusion with equity, and the eradication of gender violence. In this space, she holds the position of gender officer to create a difference for true social inclusion with equity among her people.

## Leadership as a mission and strengthening of the participation of Lenca women

Reina says that in her culture the participation of women has been a challenge. There is still latent machismo in the relationships between men and women. Consequently, it has been an enormous effort for her and other women in her municipality to obtain recognized spaces for participation. In her own words, she says:

*“My leadership started with the Honduran youth, participating with young men and women, despite the machismo of men towards women, which led me to work for the benefit of indigenous women”.*

It has been important to promote spaces for participation with women to discuss the conditions they have to deal with and identify ways to obtain spaces without questioning men. The process allowed her to identify that her leadership had a purpose. She understood what a life mission and a political election meant; consequently, she took a chance and made herself visible with a voice and proposals in favor of women.

During her journey, she has been supported by other women, whom she considers her main allies and comrades in the fight. Together with them, she has strived so that spaces for women leaders might be obtained within mixed organizations. In the same way, her family is an important ally, who has understood and supported her, since, on many occasions, she has had to leave her son by himself to support the women. She says:

*“As a leader, many times you need family support, financial support, social and political support from your colleagues, and obviously from your own family”.*

As important guides in the development of her leadership, she also recognizes other indigenous women, who with their example, history, and journey have given her support and strength to continue her mission as a leader. For example, her mother, who was a victim of machismo from her father; as well as Berta Cáceres from the Lenca people and Miriam Miranda from the Garífuna Afro-descendant people of Honduras, two older and wise colleagues with whom she has worked from the beginning and from whom she learned a lot. Their teachings are still





©FIMI. Participants from Latin America during the face-to-face activities, 2nd edition of the EGLMI.

useful in the fabric of her leadership. She has also met with male colleagues, some young people, and others who have held powerful political positions and have given her spaces and resources to continue in this process of strengthening the participation of women.

With a look and attitude of commitment, she recognizes that leadership as a mission implies being in the service of other people, in other sectors and spaces in her municipality and country, for which she has focused on working with several related organizations, whether Indigenous or Garífuna, peasant, feminist, women's, and mixed, with whom she has carried out training activities focused on their rights as indigenous peoples and women. Reina says that even though the percentage of the Lenca people in Honduras is not very high, they have fought to maintain

and restore their values, which are the basis of the life of her people. She affirms that the foundations of leadership are in her culture, of which she is very proud, that is why she relates it directly to the sense of justice and authority. In her own words, she says:

*“Yes, as Lenca Indigenous People, we have our own justice and authority, called Auxiliaría de la Vara Alta, it is the mayor’s office rules on how the citizens of this people must govern ourselves”.*



For her, the Auxiliaría de Vara Alta represents leadership because it shapes the way of the community's coexistence; it establishes authority and leadership, seeking the common good, without treading on anything that surrounds us and is part of the people. With concern, she comments that this Indigenous government system is weakening due to the interference of the state justice system, which has imposed and has been disrupting the values and principles as managed by the Lenca rule of law.

## The Leadership School as a great teaching space for female indigenous leaders

To continue strengthening her leadership in favor of women, she recognizes that it's necessary to acquire further knowledge. Therefore, she has supported her grassroots organization in applying to the Global Leadership School. With satisfaction, she says:



*“I am not the only Honduran who has participated, but also women leaders from other Indigenous Peoples, and we are very happy and grateful to the FIMI and the Leadership School since studying there has taught us a lot”.*

She is happy to share that learning, meeting other women leaders from around the world, and now knowing about the international instruments that protect Indigenous Peoples and women in particular, such as Convention 169, are priceless. She affirms:

*“With the international instruments, we have learned how to deal with a State demand or how to file a shadow report”.*

Another important tool in her training was to develop an advocacy plan. She managed to understand that advocacy goes hand in hand with change, that is, promoting actions that transform a situation, a reality, and something that is negatively affecting women and peoples. Her experience in this regard was of great value since she worked on it as a team, involving colleagues from their organizations to formulate it. Likewise, as part of its implementation, she carried out negotiations in her country with some international cooperation agencies. The process allowed her to confirm that working together and with other people's ideas is a window of opportunity to share knowledge.

She has carried out several activities after she participated in this important education and training program, advising women and Indigenous Peoples organizations, working together with their leadership and creating a team to prepare a shadow report, putting into practice her knowledge obtained in managing the content of the instruments. Advising other organizations has become a very important experience thanks to the training and lessons obtained through the FIMI's Leadership School.

For Reina, giving and receiving is a principle of leadership, translated into contributing her own knowledge for the development of others and other sectors among her people. One way of doing this has been through her position in her organization as a gender and inclusion officer, which has allowed her to work directly with women, promoting training and awareness spaces for their empowerment, a process in which she shares about the rights of indigenous women. She participates in several international events as she is a member of the Alliance of Indigenous Women of Central America and Mexico as a focal point in Honduras, and she presents proposals representing the voice of Lenca women.

She has made it so that other colleagues have been able to obtain advocacy and training spaces, in which they have acquired more knowledge and ventured into organizational processes, learning in the way she did in the beginning. She explains:



*“In my organization, I am one of the most experienced women regarding the management of the cooperation funds. This is not an easy task. You have to know how to talk with the voluntary aid workers and submit proposals; we have administered funds”.*

Her participation in the Leadership School left valuable lessons that will remain over time, including the handling of international instruments such as Convention 169, and the process of how to initiate an international lawsuit. As an Indigenous organization, she used such knowledge to support a group of divers from the Miskitu people in the lawsuit filed to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, based in Costa Rica, since given the lack of support from the Government for the

acquisition of necessary equipment they have lost body parts and many have even lost their lives. In this regard, she tells us:

*“Sometimes I reread the documents handed out in the Program about Convention 169. It was very interesting to me. It also motivated me to study international law”.*

At the work level, she advises her colleagues who ask her about any topic or procedure and ask for her opinion. She recognizes that her training provided her knowledge or experiences that can help them improve their work or support.





©FIMI. Participants during the seminars at Columbia University, 2nd edition of GLSIW.

## Individual and collective dreams towards the empowerment of women

One of her main dreams is to educate her 13-year-old son so that he is aware of the indigenous problems and those of their country. Finally, she would like to complete her university studies and join an international body, institution, or organization that works for Indigenous Peoples. Reina says:

*“I would like to be able to contribute to the organizations with which I work, with much more knowledge, by being much more experienced and empowered. We are working towards that.”*

For her, knowledge is a treasure that must be shared and passed on. She mentions that, when she returned from her training process at the Leadership School, she held several workshops with her colleagues from the organizations as she considers that her knowledge and experiences must be passed on to them. It is important to share her experience to women who are her comrades in the struggle, who are currently working or are entering the indigenous movement, and provide them with the tools, instruments, and content regarding the rights of women and Indigenous Peoples; additionally, to her son and female sisters, so that they pass it on to their descendants so that they may recognize each other and empower themselves, which is even more important.

Along this journey, Reina identified other needs for training and support. She thinks that it is important to train on conflict resolution because there are many conflicts in Indigenous organizations at the local and national levels due to land, forest, and water

issues. With certainty, Reina affirms that an important strategy is the management of funds and looking for qualified people who can train on the subject of negotiation and conciliation. Likewise, identifying leaders from other countries, and the implementation of exchange tours both nationally and internationally, to support the resolution of conflicts faced by indigenous women and peoples, are actions that motivate the participation and involvement of women.

Reina Corea, an indigenous woman from the Lenca people, is like a thread of the leadership fabric of her people's women. Throughout in her life, she has reflected on her life, the lessons, and the challenges that

impelled her to assume leadership in the middle of a society that does not recognize and that excludes indigenous women, within a State that does not respond to their needs, since its structures do not have an approach of rights that they deserve as women and peoples. Her story is a life lesson as it shows the nuances of her journey, of her identity, and how valuable it is to have a training space such as the Global Leadership School, which represents a door, an open, wide and white path so that indigenous women strengthen their leadership and demand life with principles of equity, harmony, justice, and self-determination.



# WILMA MARÍA CALDERÓN GOSTAS

*An indigenous woman, bearer of knowledge, protector of common goods. We are diversity, we are the water, we are the river, we are the continuation of everything that it means to be a native people.*



©FIMI. Photograph provided by participant  
Wilma Calderón, 4th edition of the GLSIW.

With roots in the Miskitu people, Wilma flourishes with an indigenous woman identity through which wisdom, strength, and spirituality blossom, sustaining her existence, giving color and meaning to her being, and acting as a leader. She was born in Puerto Lempira in the department of Gracias a Dios in Honduras, a place where the blue-green water of the sea feeds the spirit and life of the people.

At the age of 41, she is grateful for her native ancestral roots as part of her Miskitu culture. She has a degree in Management and Social Development at the Universidad

Metropolitana de Honduras (UMH). Currently, she is part of the Indigenous Women's Biodiversity from Latin America and the Caribbean, an organization that works on issues such as Indigenous Governance, the autonomy of La Mosquitia territory, cultural revitalization and legalization, administration and collective control of lands, territories, and natural resources. This network is a member of the Technical Committee of the FPIC Honduras Working Group. Also, she is a technical advisor on environmental, territorial, biodiversity, and cultural issues of the rights of Indigenous Peoples of Honduras, a responsibility that commits her to respond

with humane quality and from the cultural principles of her people. Likewise, at the national level, she is a member of the National Technical Committee of the Confederation of Indigenous Peoples of Honduras (CONPAH, for its acronym in Spanish).

Growing up among the Miskitu people of Honduras and Nicaragua, without a doubt, marked her childhood. Wilma saw the difference in the struggle among the leaders of two relatively different countries, crossed by the same ethnic identity. During those years, she observed how the Miskitus of Nicaragua had greater progress concerning the rights of Indigenous Peoples, awakening doubts and interest in understanding what the causes of these differences were.

For her, it has been a long process of struggle in her country, that is why from a young age she undertook the task, as an indigenous woman, of helping her people unlearn other cultural practices that have caused a setback in the defense and fulfillment of some rights, especially of indigenous women and; for example, holding decision-making positions, which is being achieved with slow but sure steps. Currently, it is possible to see women making decisions in local, regional, and national territories.

The actions undertaken by Wilma in her youth allowed her to find the answers she was looking for, understanding that the differences between the two countries lay mainly in the war that took place in Nicaragua, which had a violent impact on the lives of the people, causing greater awareness in the peoples for the defense of their rights.

## Providing visibility to Miskitu women as a result of their leadership contributions

With mixed feelings, Wilma talks about the beginnings of her leadership, which has not been easy. Starting in a circle where there was space only for men who at that time were the only ones who left their communities to seek the political and economic development of their territories. In such efforts, it was very difficult to see a woman as a leader, since she was not allowed to assume those roles, despite her capacities to achieve positive results.

At the age of 20, a period in which she was hired by a development institution for the Miskitu people as a field facilitator of a project — being able to closely see the reality of women and get to know their needs— she had the opportunity to contribute to development community and support in providing visibility to the demands and concerns of women. As a result of the aforementioned, Wilma made an important decision for her life: to move to the city to pursue her university studies and get the education that would allow her to support more women. She states:

*“I had good male mentors who saw my ability to study at the university level, as well as my ability to be a woman leader in the indigenous movement, where there were no women”.*





©FIMI. Photograph provided by participant Wilma Calderón, 4th edition of the GLSIW.

In her university days, she set clear goals for herself. She concerned herself with reading and documenting about the rights of women and Indigenous Peoples, which allowed her to move forward and occupy positions in the technical area, as an advisor to her organization. It motivated her to promote other peers and sisters in the struggle, not only for them to listen to the proposals, but to participate with a full and sure vote to strengthen the organization and the territory. In her own words, Wilma says:

*“The contributions made by women from the community for making decisions and conducting negotiations come from our organization at the local, national, and international levels”.*

For her, it was important to provide visibility on how most mixed organizations have a Western and macho vision, reflected in the structure of their board of directors, which was made up only of men. Under this form of organization, it has not been easy to break these structures and change that system



©FIMI. Group photography during seminars at Columbia University, 4th edition of the GLSIW.

in favor of the culture of its people, which shows that women are the decision-makers in the territories; a path in which they have been breaking barriers, which has meant a 15-year struggle, contributing on political, environmental, social, and cultural levels for the benefit of their territory.

Wilma feels honored and grateful for the steps she has taken thus far. She recognizes that she has not been alone, but accompanied by women, whom she considers her main allies, who have given her support and strength, such as the network of indigenous women on biodiversity. She deems her daughters as her main companions in life and at the community level she recognizes the strength given by older leaders such as Sendela, a wise woman knew from her people, who taught her the value of being

part of a collective.

As examples of strength and as teachers along the path, she recognizes Myrna Cunningham, Tarcila Rivera, and Teresa Zapeta, who have been participating in international leadership spaces and who have been an inspiration in the struggle for the individual and collective rights of women. As a strategic ally at all levels, she recognizes the FIMI as a source of learning, solidarity, and support that has given her greater strength to continue making progress.

Wilma believes that leaders are not made by themselves, but rather they are created insofar as there are mentors who teach women leaders the steps and the way to go. She esteems Felicia Gostas Bluchas, her



grandmother, an indigenous feisty woman, who raised her eight children, a woman who made decisions for herself and her family, like a true matriarch.

Dressed in her Miskitu identity, she appreciates how the principles of her people's worldview support action, in addition to being a woman or a man. Based on this mindset, she needs to relate it to the sense of authority and leadership. She says that within the elements that represent this philosophy of life is the Masda organization, which is a system that has taught the values of respect, solidarity, and resistance guidelines assumed by the leaders who are now grouped in 12 territorial councils and who give strength to the struggle. It also refers to forests, land, knowledge, and the mother tongue as elements that make their culture, their vision of the world, and life come alive and become practical in the work of women leaders and community leaders. She explains:

*“As a tangible object of our Miskitu culture, I can say that this is what makes mutual respect possible, as well as the solidarity of that spirit of struggle for our common goods. It keeps us united in our territory”.*

## The Leadership School: a path for the empowerment of indigenous women

Applying what she learned at the Global Leadership School allowed her to be a representative of the Indigenous Women's Biodiversity Network (IWBN), a valuable opportunity for her since it deepened her knowledge about the complexity of violence against women as a structural problem and had an impact on the lives of indigenous women. It also led her to enhance her capacities to contribute their work in different branches, organizations, and associations within the territory. Also, it raised her expectations a lot because it was the first time that she was part of a high-level training process. Likewise, one of her main motivations was to expand her knowledge to share and pass it on to her Indigenous sisters, with whom she worked on rights issues.

After her training in the Global School, Wilma was appointed as a member of the board of directors of the Women's Network, an unexpected event because she believed she was not qualified for such a position; however, it had an impact on her life.

In her eagerness to learn, she identified that one valuable tool that strengthened her leadership was the implementation of the advocacy plan; an important experience because it allowed her to see the issues of women from a comprehensive perspective, and thus define strategic actions to change the position of women concerning the

participation mechanisms established by the State. Her proposed plan addressed the importance of strengthening the capacities of the Afro-Honduran and Indigenous Women Network made up of leaders of Honduran Indigenous Peoples, based on the criterion of representativeness, whose purpose is that the organizations brought together in the said network can influence the positioning of its political agenda, which is consistent with international and national regulations on the individual and collective rights of indigenous women.

Said proposal is based on the issues of social, political, and economic exclusion suffered by indigenous and Afro-Honduran women, and that constantly violates their Human Rights due to the imposition of mega-projects in their territories, privatization of lands, waters, and rivers, which is an attack on their spiritual practices and worldviews. For her, the approach to this issue implied understanding —from her own experience— the strategic needs of women in the face of an exclusive, racist, and unequal system. Wilma says about it:

*“For me, it was quite a positive experience in the sense that the plan allowed for working on the political agenda of women in a more territorial way. In other words, within the framework of the country’s agenda for indigenous and afro women”.*

As a result of this process, she says with satisfaction that it allowed women to have a 5-year strategic plan, such as a political agenda to work with local governments, linked at the regional and national levels;

an initiative that marks life and that of many women, because it makes it possible to undertake work at the local level in the defense of their rights and the management of their territory.

For her, an important contribution is to promote reflections and analysis on the issue of the forest and territorial governance for the implementation and use of the article that addresses the Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) contained in ILO Convention 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples, in which the primordial role of women as part of the consultation mechanisms is emphasized. At the local and national levels, she provided arguments based on this agreement, such as in the case of Moskitia with the consultation mechanism of the biocultural protocol of the Nahua people of Honduras, which has been led by women.

She established coordination mechanisms at the local level, venturing into actions of economic empowerment with products such as cocoa, fish, and grains. It was an opportunity in which she assumes the role of a governance, organizational, and gender specialist, working with the 12 territorial councils where the network of indigenous Miskito women is being promoted in six of them. In coordination with Mairin Indian Miskitu Asla Takanka, an organization where the design of the gender strategy for Miskito women and also leading the gender commission for the Miskito people with the Moskitia Asla Takanka organization, she has managed to support the Lenca people in the design of the strategy for the coffee sector, ensuring that indigenous women are taken into account and their contributions are provided visibility in the production process of this bean.

In addition to her efforts and actions in favor of women, Wilma thinks it is important to have addressed the issue of violence against



indigenous women, a prevalent problem in the villages, which is not discussed and that strongly affects women. For this reason, she is thinking about expanding her knowledge of international instruments such as CEDAW, understanding its content from the perspective and feelings of indigenous women, and taking advantage of this knowledge and applying it with women in matters of complaint and prevention.

## Challenges and dreams for the collective work of indigenous women

Wilma assures that dreams can come true if you work on finding the conditions to achieve them. One way to start working for them is through changes on personal and organizational levels.

Some of her dreams are for her small business to grow for the benefit of women and to be recognized locally, nationally, and internationally. On a collective level, she dreams of ensuring that all women support one another, putting into practice sisterhood, solidarity, and support among all, challenging the racist and sexist system that causes them to be divided at certain times.

As a woman leader, she is aware that knowledge turned into wisdom —as she learned from her grandmothers— must be passed on to other people, in the form of teachings and examples, such as her daughters, who are beside her and always accompany her. On the other hand, the women of her organization are the main foundations of work, teaching, and mutual learning, whom she considers a great support and who give meaning to her leadership. She finds great value in sharing her different experiences with the two great

organizations of her Miskitu people, which she sees as networks of collective support to jointly address the needs and problems they have to deal with as Indigenous Peoples.

From her point of view, it is important that, according to the reality of women, specific issues that they deal with as miskitas can be addressed; and local training processes with a focus on the rights of indigenous women can be promoted. Finally, she believes it is necessary to visualize the women's contribution to matters of territorial management and governance.

The encounter with Wilma's story invites us to know, from the view and energy of an indigenous Miskitu leader, how changes can be promoted from the personal to the collective level, which in turn has an impact on the reality of other women, who just like her create and empower their identity and leadership.

Her life is an invocation to service, the recognition of the struggle and dedication to assume her rights, the promotion of other women's and her people's rights. It is to understand how the seed of knowledge is transformed into the collective knowledge and how valuable it is to find training possibilities, from and with indigenous women, on the path of leadership such as the Global School, which is sowing opportunities and possibilities for women from their own identities and territories to continue overcoming obstacles to confront racism and inequality.

# CECILIA RAMÍREZ PÉREZ

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



©FIMI. Closing activity, regional capacity building program  
South America, Santiago de Chile, 2018.

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

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

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

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





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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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







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

In the same way, the implementation of the first edition of the school implied a lot of learning, observing, and listening to those who had coordinated these processes during that phase. The orientation and instruction of Mariana López, who coordinated the FIMI programs at that time were also important. Under her guidance and with the participation of various allies, indigenous and non-indigenous leaders, they developed the different training contents, designed for women leaders from different peoples of the world. From her point of view, the school is not only a virtual training space with a presence at Columbia University for women leaders, but it has also made it possible to expand and articulate the FIMI to more organizations with local and national advocacy. It has been a meeting space for various women with different backgrounds, in which training is a point of intersection that has united them,

providing mechanisms to build bridges of solidarity among them.

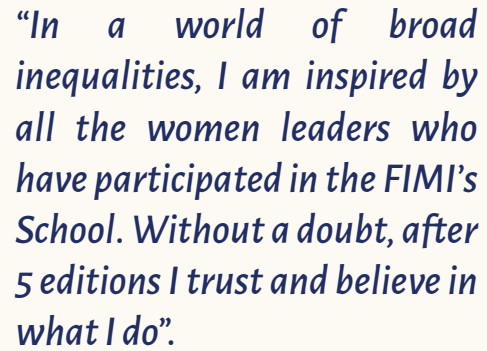
For the participants, it is a one-of-a-kind meeting space, and for many of them it has been a watershed in their lives, marking a before and after, allowing them to understand their leadership in a broader dimension of space and to realize that their battles are not isolated, since they share things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

Cecilia acknowledges that the implementation of five editions of the School has made it easier for the FIMI to identify indigenous women leaders that have contributed with technical tasks within other processes as part of its mission, allowing them to put their abilities, knowledge, and experiences to the service of others, as

well as be in contact with other leaders in international and regional spaces, in which they have brought the voice of indigenous women with proposals and demands for the fulfillment of their specific and collective rights.

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

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



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

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

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



their specific and collective rights.

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



# 5. CONCLUSIONS



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

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

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

The female being with whom each leader arrived on the earth plane is deeply intertwined with the earth, water, and natural resources; as givers of life, providers of everything that inhabits the universe; that is why, from their identity as women from

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

The place of birth of each leader was based in territories and Peoples from Africa, Asia, the Arctic, Latin America, North America, and the Pacific, regions of the world inhabited by ancestral Peoples, with diverse cultures, languages, knowledge, and rich biodiversity, which have given sustenance to their existence; territories with history and



©FIMI. Group photo, 3rd edition of GLSIW, New York City.

realities that have directed the life of each one of them, and today are being strongly threatened by the impacts of climate change.

## Decisive relevant events in the lives of those women leaders

The stories and lives of women leaders have been influenced by events that intersect the impacts of racism, discrimination, exploitation, patriarchy, and exclusion; historical and current oppressions determined by the existence of monocultural and oppressive governments, which did not recognize (to date, in some countries, they are not yet recognized) the rights and identity of indigenous peoples and women.

As a result of these systems, they have been victims of wars, repression, displacement, historical and current dispossession; facts and history that they have to go through due to constant violence. They have survived in conditions of poverty, illiteracy, lack of basic public services, food insecurity, and poor health conditions. They have dealt with conflicts such as persecution and criminalization, human trafficking, exploitation of natural resources, and the dispossession and depredation of their territories.

These stories told about the strength, wisdom, and resilience of indigenous women dealing with these colonization actions from the spirituality and knowledge of their ancestors, families, and peoples. They showed how over the last 70 years, the number of women trained spiritually, energetically, humanly, politically, and



academically, in social and legal disciplines, has grown. With these tools, they have gained greater strength to care for, defend, and demand their rights as women and as Indigenous Peoples.

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

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

Therefore, based on their experience, being a woman leader is a banner of struggle, power, and resistance in favor of life and the defense of her specific rights, such as the right to a life free of violence; the rights to political participation, education, comprehensive and integrative health; ownership and control of their own resources, so that their voices and proposals are heard and taken into account in public policies, plans, programs, projects, and budgets of the States.

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



©FIMI. Photograph taken from the projects of the AYNÍ Fund.

However, with the strength and wisdom of their ancestral cultures, they have resisted and are willing to continue moving forward along wide, flat, and clean paths.

Today, leaders are contributing to the compliance with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the enforcement of actions contained in the Beijing Platform for Action, including

recommendations of these international mechanisms that governments have committed to implement, but have failed to do so. Indigenous women leaders, as politically active subjects, are following up with these governments, promoting the inclusion of their approaches in the laws and government policies, in particular those referring to women and Indigenous Peoples.

## Global Leadership School of Indigenous Women: a gathering of knowledge

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

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

rights as women and indigenous peoples.

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



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



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

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

Dealing with the State is still a challenge, as well as strengthening their participation in political processes at the national, regional, and international levels to occupy positions of decision-making, in which they can advocate by promoting plans, public policies, and legislation in favor of indigenous peoples and women; contribute to the building of peace in their countries so that they may have a good quality of life as peoples; and continue

encouraging generations of young leaders who have the strength, power, and wisdom to go keep fighting and not allow themselves to continue losing their identity.

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

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



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

# 6. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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

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



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

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

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

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







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

**Dr. Myrna Cunningham, , ideologist and advisor of the IWGLS**

*“I feel stronger after meeting so many women, with whom we share the same goals and the same vision”.*

**Rohani Inta Dewi, Sasak, Indonesia**

*“Now I can review my country’s policies from another perspective, with a focus on rights as Peoples and indigenous women”.*

**Chhing Lamu, Sherpa, Nepal**

*“My dream is that one day I will see more empowered women with a more dignified life, with new challenges and dreams”.*

**Elina Horo, Munda, India**

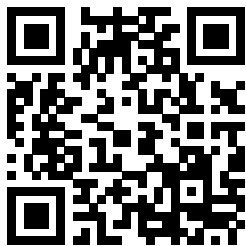
*“Sometimes I reread the documents handed out in the Program about Convention 169. It was very interesting to me. It also motivated me to study international law”.*

**Reina Auristela, Lenca, Honduras**

*“For me, it was quite a positive experience in the sense that the plan allowed for working on the political agenda of women in a more territorial way. In other words, within the framework of the country’s agenda for indigenous and afro women”.*

**Wilma Calderón, Miskitu, Nicaragua**

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