DIPLOMADO DE MUJERES INDÍGENAS

Autonomía Económica y Justicia Ambiental

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MODULE III

Indigenous Women’s Leadership
DIPLOMADO DE MUJERES INDÍGENAS
AUTÓNOMÍA ECONÓMICA Y JUSTICIA AMBIENTAL

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MODULO 3 LIDERAZGO DE MUJERES INDÍGENAS

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To strengthen indigenous women’s leadership skills for encouraging their economic autonomy in the context of the struggle for environmental justice, and for their individual and collective political, economic, social, cultural and spiritual empowerment.
Unit 1

Characteristics of female indigenous leadership

Women are in connection with all the elements and beings surrounding us. We are part of the social, political, economic and cultural systems conceived as a whole unit by the Indigenous Peoples. That is why indigenous women have to develop their skills in order to lead processes.

Leadership implies the ability to influence and lead the community. This quality must be demonstrated permanently and in special or critical situations where this orientation is needed. This ability is built on the basis of personal experience and background, and it is simply acknowledged by the community. Someone who has the ability to lead is not chosen (with or without a vote).¹

Consequently, women relate with individuals and institutions with diverse beliefs, values and cultural practices interrelating with each other in usually changing and historical dynamics, turning us into historical, changing, never equal and always growing subjects.² The type of leadership in our communities depends on the geographic location, history, culture, identity, migration, urbanization, cultural syncretism, intercultural relationships, religious contacts, degree of militarization, constructive agreements with States and the degree of permanence of structures of traditional governance of communities. Even though there are permanent changes, there are also “principles” and “values” that are always respected.

Leadership can be “traditional”. In these cases, each community has a way of choosing or appointing those who will hold these responsibilities. There is

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¹ Fund for the Development of Indigenous Peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean (FILAC) 2010.

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Life Project Tree

Muestra del “Árbol de Vida”, que sirve sólo como guía.
another type of traditional leadership that depends on the “gifts” of each bearer. This is the case of important folk healers or shamans (the spiritual guides). These leaders can influence and permanently intervene in a large part of the community’s affairs or selectively do so in some of them. In these cases, individuals who bear “gifts” have technologies of access or communication with the sacred and it allows them to control important symbolic aspects of community life.

Sometimes, these “traditional” leaders can be appointed to hold leadership positions in the community or become a public authority. These are special cases where there is a confluence between traditional leadership and ruler positions in the community. For this reason, “authorities”, “rulers” and “leaders” can be identified in the community leadership.

**Summary:** Not all the authorities or rulers are leaders. Not all the leaders are authorities or rulers. Leaders are not chosen, but acknowledged.

¿Who is a person of authority?

The authority is the individual in the community who has the right to use and acquire (exercise) a vested power, established in previously established community regulations, through a procedure based on a code.

The authority is granted to an individual, or a group with the power, control or skill over the means of power or control in the community. The most important “value” for that individual or group to exercise power is service. For a community member, holding a position of authority means to accept the obligation to serve the community. Service is one of the guiding values of the social organization, and the community acknowledges it by giving prestige and authority to the person who serves them. The type of authority derives from the social recognition and prestige that someone is granted.

This acknowledgement and prestige as an authority is only recognized when the individual fulfills the office, being governed by the community values that guide life, both individually and at the community level. Someone who does not know their people’s wisdom, does not have the necessary motivation to identify their personality with the personality of their people.

A challenge that organizations working in indigenous communities have to deal with is that they analyze gender relationships—focusing on relationships between women and men—and leave traditional types of family and community organization out. Consequently, the implementation of programs aimed only at women, who leave men out, has been perceived as a source of division between households and communities.

Although we understand that masculinities are a privilege—understood as the granting of powers, licenses and exemptions—it also grants specific responsibilities. Therefore, in the communities, relationships between women and men are explained under the principle of complementarity and we must value that peoples and communities’ members assume those roles and relationships in order to move forward on the comprehensive community empowerment.
Strategies for strengthening indigenous women’s leadership

Let’s read and discuss.

There is a gap in the midst of the struggles for the rights and spaces of the Indigenous Peoples against the non-incorporation of the demands and particular needs of indigenous women. This is partially because women are not usually at the head of organizations and are represented by men who consider that the women’s situation is equal to that of the whole community, that is, to men’s. Therefore, approaching this debate internally is still an incipient process.

Thinking of claims differentiated by sex seems to be as a separatist action that threatens the people’s unity. However, it is necessary to recognize that this vision is changing and some men consider it necessary for a greater intervention of women in the livelihood of communities and their organizations. However, the idea that women should enhance their role of caregivers in household still exists in the communities, both in women and men, although there are many actions that women take to improve training processes and empower their participation, a situation that is reflected in the different types of organizations that encourage women.

Community tensions persist regarding the issue of women’s organization linked to these questions:

- Women and gender equity individual rights? Or the general struggle of Indigenous Peoples?

- Particular interests and the fulfillment of rights or the peoples’ collective aspirations?

- Are women a threat to men’s power or a danger to cultural survival?

In short, this is an unresolved issue, still in debate, under construction and as long as women take significant steps, the organizational diversity of women is reflected in organizations that struggle for the Indigenous Peoples’ rights, territorial rights, peace processes, women’s rights, quality of life improvement, among the most relevant rights; all this conducted from a distinct indigenous perspective seeking to strengthen the identity and permanence of Indigenous Peoples.

Women have been organized around productive initiatives seeking to improve economic conditions and the quality of life of their families. They have been organized around traditional activities such as textiles, handicrafts, literacy processes seeking that all women learn to read and write. They have been organized in leadership training processes and in the defense of women’s rights and dignity, among many other demands.

These organizational processes are reflected in the increasing participation of women in community and, local and even regional — in some cases, even national — decision-making spaces. In each town, there are already multiple women in local or municipal governments holding positions such as as go-
vernors, mayors, councilors, judges, in the case of spaces of traditional power; and in countless community services such as midwives, traditional doctors, traditional healers, community judges, ombudswomen, among others.

Indigenous women have experienced multiple types of discrimination on the grounds of gender and ethnicity, and the complex issues arising from this discrimination. Many transformations resulting from different political, economic, cultural, and social contacts are taking place, including changes in the traditional decision-making mechanisms, the increase in the political prominence of the Indigenous Peoples and structural transformations in the context of the States. All of the above generates new challenges for indigenous women.

The indigenous peoples’ right to fully participate in the political, economic, social and cultural spheres of the State is stipulated in articles 5 and 18 of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in September 2007.

The Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues of the United Nations, together with other mechanisms, has urged States to take concrete measures to expand the participation of indigenous women in governmental actions and decision-making structures at all levels; guarantee equal access to government bodies, political parties, the administration of justice, trade unions, and others, and encourage training processes in this regard.

Indigenous women have encouraged transformations within and outside community structures in order to gain spaces for participation. The global movement of indigenous women has understood and demonstrated that the exercise of collective rights cannot be complete without complying with women’s rights within their peoples. The strategies have been the following:

**Processes of organizational empowerment and strengthening**

Some existing organizations have been strengthened and, in other cases, new women’s organizations have emerged. Some of them joined mixed indigenous organizations, others joined local organizations with backgrounds. They achieved the elaboration of a common agenda encouraging mechanisms of national coordination and regional articulation through different networks. The empowerment has followed the following paths:

- Individual work in order to develop confidence in their own skills and abilities, raise self-esteem and self-recognition as a subject of rights. The concept of self-esteem from an indigenous perspective is closely linked to the experience of ethnic identity.
- Strength the collective and gender consciousness as a group of women and indigenous peoples on individual and collective rights.
- It is complemented with the strengthening of indigenous organizations’ processes in order to consolidate their space in the political and public opinion spheres, overcome differences between organizations and diverse peoples, achieve greater advocacy and continuity over time (legalization of the organization, improvement of internal processes, implementation of communication channels between the rules and the bases).
- Grant credits through productive projects allowing indigenous women

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3 PROLID. BID.
leaders to perform their work as social managers and gain recognition of their communities.

Encouragement of skills and leadership training

Lack of training has an impact on indigenous women’s self-esteem and the recognition of their individual and collective rights. Training is highly valued by leaders, authorities and indigenous women in the bases. Indigenous women raise the need for long-term training actions based on principles, values and methodologies according to their cultural worldview.

Exchanges and systematization of experiences

Exchange and discussion spaces, such as summits, forums and meetings, as well as networks and virtual platforms have been established. The transmission of experiences of the elderly to the new generations has been prioritized by various women’s organizations.

The dialogue between women who are in the communities with women who have reached powerful positions promotes the empowerment of women in the local sphere and also legitimizes women in powerful positions.

Consolidation of networks and alliances

Alliances between indigenous women’s organizations and training institutions, community radios, national government entities and local governments, international donors and the United Nations system have taken place. Networks and alliances are channels through which information, technical resources, training programs, symbolic supports, etc. are exchanged. Through networks and alliances, indigenous women manage to articulate their demands and be more visible and have greater advocacy, thus improving access to participation. They have also established communication channels with other social movements. Internally and externally combined advocacy strategies linking ethnic discrimination with gender discrimination are those that have managed to push the change process.

Some participation challenges indigenous women continue to dealt with

- Indigenous women deal with subordination, traditional practices and concepts which place them in a lower level in their own peoples. They have to deal with direct criticism by their own families, children, mothers, fathers and husbands who do not believe in the possibility of indigenous women participating in political decision spaces. Generally, they have access to any space in the areas of education, health and other social programs, but little participation in economic or political decision spaces.

- The belief that women are those who ensure the continuity of the indigenous culture and identity entails the idea that the participation of indigenous women in leadership positions—especially outside the community—is a danger to the cultural survival of their indigenous peoples.

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4 See “Los Espacios Conquistados” (“THE CONQUERED SPACES”) op. Cit.
5 PROLID Network. Inter-American Development Bank (BID)
6 See “Estrategias de desarrollo culturalmente adecuadas para mujeres indígenas” (Culturally appropriate development strategies for indigenous women). Angela Meentzen. BID. 2001
Women are greatly expected to ensure the continuity of identity passing on cultural practices and beliefs to their children.

- There is a belief—between men and women—that it is not necessary for women to be involved in demands for specific rights, as it is considered that women’s rights and their particular demands are not different from the demands as Indigenous individuals.

- Every day indigenous women deal with discriminatory practices and violence in their families, community, state institutions and society in general. This discrimination and violence is exacerbated when indigenous women try to change the structures that subordinate them.

- They are also discriminated by feminist and academic women who often do not understand their particularities and cannot get along with their political agendas. They accuse them of fighting only for the collective rights of their Peoples, but do not understand that, if those rights are not recognized, they lose their specific identity.

- Certain discriminatory patterns and practices restrict the access of indigenous women to education, training and information. Women often do not feel sufficiently prepared to participate in political disputes. They find it difficult to participate in existing political parties. Many of them state that they are used to fill seats, but they do not have access to decision-making. The application of gender quotas deals with the manipulation of lists by political parties, pressures and even violence against the elected women is a common occurrence.

This topic concludes with a mapping exercise of the main authorities.

First, let’s use the Venn diagram to identify the existing state authorities, communal rulers and traditional leaders in their community, and explain the roles of each one of them.

Second, write down, with the help of a matrix, the struggles and achievements of the indigenous women in their respective communities and countries.

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<th>Year</th>
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Identify and analyze the dimension of the economic autonomy process: implications at personal, family and community level.

Every culture has its own concept of empowerment. For women, empowerment implies ensuring their livelihood, ability to fully enjoy their individual and collective human rights, decrease in unpaid work, participation as protagonists and leaders of their communities.¹

For Indigenous Peoples’ women, empowerment is part of the rights of our peoples, established in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and other international human rights instruments, as well as the commitments assumed by the States in the Final Document of the World Conference of Indigenous Peoples in the UN. Empowerment includes the right to freely exercise the economic, social and cultural development of each of our peoples.

Empowerment for indigenous women means not only the ability to make decisions, but also to create those options and challenge powerful structures that usually subordinate them.

Women’s contribution to the economy and fight against poverty “through both remunerated and unremunerated work in the home, in the community and in the workplace” has been recognized in the Beijing Platform for Action, where “granting women the necessary means to realize their potential” is also recommended (Platform for Action Beijing, 1995, Article 49)

In general, economic empowerment is often associated with individual rather than collective power focused on entrepreneurship and individual self-sufficiency. This approach fits with capitalism and market forces as the main saviors of “backward” economies.

However, although indigenous women do not use the concept of empowerment in their Beijing Declaration, they do criticize the approach of the Platform and justly question the prevailing power structure

“The non-economic activities of indigenous women have been ignored and rendered invisible, although these sustain the existence of indigenous peoples. Our dispossession from our territorial land and water base, upon which our existence and identity depends, must be addressed as a key problem. The Platform is very vague on this.” (Declaration of Indigenous Women in Beijing, 1995, art.12)

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¹ Expert Group Meeting for CSW60, Glen Cove, NY | Nov 1 – 4, 2015
It suggests that:

“The contribution of indigenous women is not recorded, is not valued and is not rewarded. There is no reliable information, its reality is unknown; for example: forced migration. The deep economic, social and political inequalities imposed on indigenous peoples are masked in the statistics. It is necessary to characterize and value the current status of the population and indigenous peoples for the preparation of better public policies.”

And it urges to:

“Recognize indigenous women as economic agents, reproducers of life, culture and identities and as subject of economic and political rights, of knowledge and recognition.”

Below, there is some compiled data on the economic situation of indigenous women.

According to the UNDP (2014), Indigenous Peoples represent 5% of the world population, but 15% of the poor population. At least 33% of the total people living in extreme poverty in rural areas around the world come from indigenous communities. This figure affects especially women since it has been proven that the effects of poverty, mainly in the areas of housing, food, water, health and education have a disproportionate impact on them. It is important to note that poverty conditions are strongly linked to violations of land rights and control over natural resources. It is important to consider discrimination and exclusion as causes of inequitable distribution of resources such as land, production tools, financing, technology, etc.

It is impossible to analyze the economic situation of indigenous women without referring to their relationship to land, territory and natural resources. This link includes aspects beyond the socio-economic or political ones since it includes aspects of their worldview, collective and ancestral history, sacred sites, rituals and the continuity of their peoples’ identity.

Despite of several existing instruments of international law such as the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Indigenous Peoples are commonly displaced, expropriated and their territories are exploited. Generally, indigenous women do not have official land titles, which facilitates exploitation without their free, prior and informed consent, by the extractive industries endorsed by the governments.

Faced with this conflictive situation, indigenous women are the most affected ones by forced displacement, migration, ecological degradation and armed conflicts. Land appropriation is not impartial in terms of gender and indigenous women’s rights dealt with violations of collective land rights. (IIWF, 2010). In addition to the external threats to the rights over the indigenous lands, the internal limitations that usually benefit indigenous men within the communities are included in the case of women.

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2 Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo (PNUD), Sostener el Progreso Humano: reducir vulnerabilidades y construir resiliencia, Informe sobre Desarrollo Humano 2014, pág. 3.
As stated by the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2015):

“The gendered effects of those violations become manifest in situations where indigenous women lose their traditional livelihoods, such as food gathering, agricultural production, herding, among others, while compensation and jobs following land seizure tend to benefit male members of indigenous communities. The loss of land and exclusion of women can create vulnerability to abuse and violence, such as sexual violence, exploitation and trafficking. Additionally, the secondary effects of violations of land rights, such as loss of livelihood and ill health, often disproportionally impact women in their roles of caregivers and guardians of the local environment.” (A/HRC/30/41, par.16)

S According to the Report of the Special Rapporteur, the high level of unemployment is a major problem linked to the poverty conditions experienced by indigenous communities, as well as wage discrimination and exploitation in the labor force, which further increases the poverty conditions.

In general, indigenous women have access to jobs in poor conditions. Their wages are below the minimum subsistence levels, do not have legal protection and often work in exploitative working conditions. Indigenous women are often overloaded with tasks. When they have access to a job, they also have to do domestic tasks, care for older and sick children, help with agricultural tasks, care for animals. (IIWF, 2010)

The study of CELADE-ECLAC (2013) shows some data on the situation of indigenous women in the labor market using the indicators available in the population censuses of 9 countries in Latin America. It should be noted that these data do not include the collective and family economies based on the frequent reciprocity among indigenous peoples. Informal or home-based work commonly performed by indigenous women are not included either.

Data from CEPAL/ECLAC in Latin America (census data from the second half of the 2000s and the 2010 round) show as a systematic pattern that, with the exception of Ecuador and Uruguay, indigenous women have the lower rates of economic participation, registering the lowest levels in Panama, Colombia, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Mexico, Peru and Brazil. Gaps in participation rates begin to increase, both in urban and rural areas, when the gender variable is included, whether indigenous women are compared with men of the same ethnic status or with non-indigenous ones.

Low participation rates are the result of several factors:

• lower levels of formal education placing them at a clear disadvantage position when looking for a job, especially in urban areas;
• many indigenous peoples develop subsistence economies with little market orientation, and where women’s participation implies the fulfillment of their traditional or “natural” roles, including motherhood and care for children and adults, the management of subsistence sowing, small livestock, among other tasks.
• In order to have a clearer picture, it would be necessary, at least, to redefine the rural work of both indigenous and non-indigenous women,

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3 Informe de la Relatora Especial sobre los derechos de los pueblos indígenas, Victoria Tauli Cor- puaz. Consejo de Derechos Humanos 30o período de sesiones. 6 de agosto de 2015. A/HRC/30/41
using categories that would render their unremunerated work visible, and therefore not declared as such.

**Economic empowerment from the indigenous women’s perspective**

There is an ethnocentric tendency to characterize indigenous women and indigenous peoples in general because of their shortcomings and vulnerabilities. “In these cases, poverty is conceived as a structural characteristic of the indigenous population, rural population and, of course, indigenous women.”

Within this framework, it is worth reflecting on three key aspects from the point of view of indigenous women. Economic empowerment must be a process, articulate the individual with the collective, and consider the traditional knowledge of indigenous women as a source of power.

**Empowerment as a process**

Empowerment should be primarily understood as a process arising from the groups or individuals themselves rather than a vertically formulated strategy. This is why development agencies or other agencies can not consider that they “empower women” since they can empower themselves.

Empowerment cannot be achieved only with the implementation of certain activities or consultations as it is necessary to understand it as a holistic process that involves reflection and analysis by women to identify their needs, priorities and interests.

Likewise, as previously mentioned, empowerment is necessary in several aspects of life. Only having access to resources, being able to make decisions in an area, or increasing individual capabilities is not effective. It is necessary to think about empowerment as a process where several interconnected areas are involved.

For example, projects providing microcredits to women are very important and valuable. However, in order to empower women, they need to be part of a broader process and with other components. There are cases, for example, where women access credits which are then managed by men, often poorly invested, and consequently worsening the situation of women who incurred the debt (Goetz and Gupta, 1996). It is also advisable to verify if the activities financed by the microcredits are really empowering women.

The same applies to participation or consultation processes. Of course, in order to make empowerment possible it is necessary to implement participation and consultation strategies. However, these are not enough. Empowerment involves questioning the distribution of power, designing and implementing mechanisms to achieve greater equity in that distribution.

It is necessary to make clear that women must empower themselves, so women’s organizations and groups play an important role in this process. In order to make empowerment possible, all possible mechanisms must be activated so that women become active protagonists and not mere recipients of help or support. This process implies a more equitable distribution of power in society from both the individual and social, as well as economic, political spheres. It

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4 IIWF, 2010: op. cit.
implies that women have greater control over their lives both individually and collectively and decision-making power in decision-making institutions

**Collective Empowerment articulated with the individual empowerment**

Many programs promoted by development agencies work to support the individual empowerment of women by encouraging their participation in decision-making spaces, training and leadership programs and access to economic resources.

In the case of indigenous women—as they belong to an indigenous people and have collective rights—it is essential to include strategies in order to collectively empower the groups of women. The efforts of several indigenous women’s organizations working to deal with the causes of gender subordination and balance power between women and men and between indigenous and non-indigenous women would be involved in this sphere.

Therefore, it is important to reflect on what type of organizations support is given to. In many cases, non-indigenous women’s organizations are supported, which in general have access to higher educational levels and work with indigenous women, but these latter are not involved in encouraging the empowerment processes, and therefore, the results are not as effective. Ignoring the empowerment collective dimensions means not to confront the most structural causes of power inequality.

**Changing the approach: indigenous women and traditional knowledge**

As part of the empowerment process, it is essential to start to recognize, emphasize and strengthen the power that indigenous women already possess, and identify the areas that can be strengthened. Within the context of current discrimination, it is likely that indigenous women will be considered as a vulnerable group with no decision-making power both in their communities and at other levels.

According to a study made by IIWF (2010), indigenous women in all regions have a leading role in the reproduction of the individuals, environment and indigenous peoples, both physically and spiritually.

This role has multiple and greater dimensions, firstly because of the non-existence of public services in indigenous territories, which means that indigenous women completely assume the care for all their people: girls and boys, the elderly, people with different abilities, displaced people, etc.

In this sense, women have a key role in food crisis resulting from the destruction of local food production in favor of the multinational corporations that currently monopolize the supply with low subsidized prices and enormous social costs resulting from the growing demand for health services due to malnutrition and obesity and the costs of the food crisis itself.

Women care for, feed and heal their peoples and Mother Earth and also allow the reproduction of peoples as such. Women are traditional knowledge-bearers which allows them to watch over Mother Earth, for example, in the face of climate change. These knowledge, beliefs and practices are not found in books or manuals, but are passed on and learned from generation to generation.
This power of indigenous women, ancient wisdom-bearers, is often not recognized or valued by public entities, development agencies and even in the communities where patriarchal models are strongly established.

"The nature conservation may be a precondition for economic growth, since future consumption depends to a large extent on the stock of natural capital. Conservation is undoubtedly a precondition of sustainable development that unites the ecological concept of sustainability with the economic concepts of growth and development."  

Some initiatives for the economic autonomy of indigenous women:

- Artists of traditional foods and community tourism who are participating in the creation of the Indigenous Business Chambers;
- Designers and weavers who re-interpret the forces of nature, traditional legends and their grandmothers’ dreams in their works;
- Activists, fighters against gender violence, who combine political empowerment with food security, use of non-timber forest and sea coasts products at fairs;
- Bearers of gifts as traditional medicines, who use the collective knowledge of their people.
- The Indigenous Women’s Fund, created by IIWF. A philanthropy experience based on the communitarian vision of reciprocity, solidarity and complementarity. It constitutes a window for opportunity and material, financial and human investment for the empowerment of indigenous women, as well as generation from the vision itself.

The initiatives of indigenous women’s economic empowerment combine, in an innovative way, ancestral knowledge and wisdom with practical experiences in order to generate creative products with an indigenous stamp, unique, “sui generis”. These are products from their territories, their histories, strengthen their collectivities and their relationship with nature. Some lessons learned from these initiatives are:

- Local initiatives allow to make public policies flexible and adapt them;
- They contribute to increase knowledge about rights and strengthen organizational capacities;
- Attention must be consciously paid to adapt laws, national programs to local circumstances and in a culturally appropriate way,
- The use of the local language, symbols, codes and ethical and spiritual indigenous norms are essential to involve women;
- When the projects are implemented by the indigenous women themselves—who know their communities and local circumstances and have access to internal structures—, better results are achieved;
- Local projects have an impact on policies, change regulations, attitudes; strengthen organizational skills, alliances and associations; achieve direct changes in socio-economic conditions.
- Support measures for indigenous women’s business enterprises will contribute to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

However, they have to deal with challenges such as culturally appropriate technical assistance, financial and credit schemes—accessible but respectful of terms—and collective ownership; search for fair internal and external markets; innovation, creativity and quality while maintaining identity and stamp; respect for intellectual property, among others. The most complex challenge, however, is to break the stigmata of vulnerable victims and become dignified and respected indigenous businesswomen and, of course, protected by inclusive public policies that reflect cultural diversity. We have learned that,

We must emphasize the need to understand indigenous women's empowerment as a process and not an activity or project, which includes an individual, but mainly, collective dimension and must also start from recognizing the power that women themselves already possess.

The concept of empowerment is very useful because it emphasizes the conception of women as active agents and not passive beneficiaries of development strategies designed by others. Empowerment is only possible if it is driven by women themselves. Indigenous women can empower themselves and that is why the role of organizations is very important. External stakeholders can provide resources, financial, material, information, human, connections, alliances, opportunities to participate in powerful spaces etc.

It is essential to rethink what kind of organizations are supported in order to empower indigenous women. Many development agencies or public institutions manage resources through non-indigenous and northern-based NGOs that implement “top-down” programs. Likewise, projects producing short-term and more tangible results enjoy the benefits. In general, projects with social and political components are often prioritized by funding agencies.

Some recommendations

- Recognize environmental goods and services as public goods and recognize that respect for the knowledge, cultures and traditional practices of indigenous peoples contributes to sustainable and equitable development and proper management of the environment 6.

- Support women’s right to own and use land, including collective and usufruct rights to land and common property, and apply actions based on Free, Prior and Informed Consent. 7

- Get indigenous and tribal peoples and women’s organizations and representations involved in the creation of national and global policies, especially when they refer to investments in infrastructure, mining and extractive industries and trade in environmental goods and services that have an effect on livelihoods and well-being of indigenous peoples and their ecosystems 8.

- Support the indigenous women’s economic activities—in consultation

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7 12 13 14 Informe del “Expert Group Meeting on Women’s Economic Empowerment” organizado por la CSW los días 26 -28 de Septiembre en Ginebra, Suiza.

8
with them and take into account the indigenous peoples’ traditional knowledge—, in order to strengthen their leadership and improve their development, specially through equal access to productive resources and agricultural inputs, land, seeds, financial services, technology, transport and information.\(^9\)

- Understand the indigenous women’s empowerment as a process that implies a change in paradigm, and includes recognizing the power that women already possess and questioning the structures that marginalize them.

- Provide indigenous women’s organizations with resources in order to promote individual and collective empowerment processes covering several dimensions of life, such as education, skill building and leadership, economy and production, sexual and reproductive health, communication and new technologies, organizational strengthening, formation of alliances and participation in decision spaces, among others.

\(^9\) Report of “Expert Group Meeting on Women’s Economic Empowerment” organized by the CSW on September 26-28 in Geneva, Switzerland
Intersectionality is a tool that allows us to realize that certain groups suffer multiple types of discrimination, and it helps us to understand how these types of discrimination have an impact on the access to rights and opportunities for these groups.

Although all women, in one way or another, suffer from gender discrimination, there are other factors such as race and skin color, lineage, age, ethnicity, language, ancestry, sexual orientation, religion, socioeconomic class, ability, culture, geographic location and status as a migrant, indigenous, refugee, displaced person, girl or individual with HIV/AIDS, in a conflict zone or occupied by a foreign power, that combined each other to determine the social position of an individual or a group.

Intersectionality is an analytical tool used to study, understand and respond to the ways in which gender intersects with other identities and how these crosses contribute to unique experiences of oppression and privilege.

Individuals live multiple identities, made out of several layers, resulting from social relationships, history and operation of powerful structures. The analysis of intersections aims to reveal the various identities, disclose the different types of discrimination and disadvantages resulting from the combination of identities. It seeks to address how racism, patriarchy, class oppression and other discrimination systems create inequalities that articulate the relative positions of women. It takes into account historical, social and political backgrounds and also recognizes unique individual experiences resulting from the conjunction of different types of identity.

Intersectional analysis suggests that the combination of identities should not be understood as a sum that increases the burden, but as one that produces substantively different experiences. In other words, the objective is not to show how one group is more victimized or privileged than another, but to discover significant differences and similarities in order to overcome discriminations and establish the necessary conditions so that everyone can enjoy their human rights.

Some recommendations to apply intersectionality

1. When collecting empirical and statistical data about the impact that economic policies have on women, it is necessary to inquire about the experiences of those who belong to poor sectors, or different Indigenous Peoples, or other particular groups identified; for example, indigenous people with disabilities, young people, rural, urban, other.

2. When establishing the priorities of a project, it is necessary to allocate resources to the most marginalized individuals, who must have been previously identified when analyzing the intersection of different forms of discrimination. Empowering those who have less access to the re-

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1 Association for Women’s Rights in Development (AWID). 2004.
sources and the exercise of their rights, and focusing on the processes that lead to poverty and exclusion (providing, for example, basic health, education, security and protection services, or supplying inputs and appropriate agricultural technologies) can lead to effective and tangible achievements in terms of women’s rights and gender equality. To achieve this, the following key questions should be asked when starting the project:

What types of identity are essential in the organization of this community (in addition to the gender, we must take into account ethnicity, religion, nationality, age, caste, skills)?

- What types of identity are essential in the organization of this community (in addition to the gender, we must take into account ethnicity, religion, nationality, age, caste, skills)?
- Who are the most marginalized women, girls, men and boys in the community and why?
- What social and economic programs do the different groups in the community have?
- Who has access to land or has control over natural resources?
- Who has access to or control over productive resources, who does not and why?
- Which groups are the most publicly represented, which ones are the less represented and why?
- What laws, policies and organizational practices limit the development possibilities of the different groups?
- What opportunities are available to different groups in order to move forward?
- What opportunities facilitate the boost of certain groups?
- What initiatives would address the needs of the most marginalized or discriminated groups in society?

We need descriptions and personal testimonies, as well as disaggregated information according to race, sex, ethnicity, caste, age, citizen status and other forms of identity. The analysis should try to reveal how certain policies and practices shape power relations in the community. For example, an analysis of poverty should not be limited to finding that women are overly poor in a given region; it must also explore which groups of women are, in effect, the poorest; what policies and practices affect it; how the historical and political situation influences, and whether the proposed policies and development projects are geared towards the specific problems faced by different groups of women.