

Guatemala and Brazil

Chapter 7: Indigenous Youth Speaking About Their Rights: *Our Stories are Guided by the Energy of the Hearts of our Grandfathers and Grandmothers*

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Growing in the midst of a story engrained in difficult paths, some blocked with the passing of time to avoid progression, burned books to erase the memory of the Indigenous communities whose elements of identity were the main objective to make disappear.

General contextualization of Indigenous Peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean

The Indigenous communities of Latin America and the Caribbean represent 45 million people, which equates to around 8.3% of the population,¹ or approximately 642 communities of

¹ Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, “Guaranteeing Indigenous Peoples’ Rights in Latin America: Progress in the Past Decade and Remaining Challenges,” (Santiago: ECLAC, 2014), <https://www.cepal.org/en/publications/37051->

Indigenous Peoples. The countries with the largest Indigenous populations are Bolivia (62.2%), Guatemala (41%), Peru (24%) and Mexico (15.1%).² Brazil, although having a smaller Indigenous percentage of the total population, enjoys the highest community diversity, totaling 305 communities with 274 Indigenous languages.³

Statistical data demonstrates this diversity of communities; therefore, they deserve special attention in public policy and representation in spaces of decision-making. Indigenous youth, in particular, have an important responsibility in carrying on the history of our ancestors.

However, neither the statistical databases nor the Economic Commission for Latin America

guaranteeing-indigenous-peoples-rights-latin-america-progress-past-decade-and.

² Centro Latino-Americano e Caribenho de Demografia (CELADE) - Divisão de População da CEPAL, com base em processamentos especiais dos microdados censitários, exceto na Argentina: Instituto Nacional de Estadística e Censos (INDEC), “Censo Nacional de Población, Hogares y Viviendas 2010. Censo del Bicentenario: Resultados definitivos,” Serie B, no. 2 (Buenos Aires : INDEC, 2012); Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (IBGE), “Censo Demográfico 2010: Características gerais dos indígenas. Resultados do universe,” (Rio de Janeiro: IBGE, 2012).

³ Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (IBGE), “Censo Demográfico 2010: Características gerais dos indígenas. Resultados do universe,” (Rio de Janeiro: IBGE, 2012).

and the Caribbean (ECLAC) possesses data on the status of Indigenous youth. The fact that such data are not present does not allow for the reflection of the deep heterogeneity of this population. This situation reveals a lack of attention towards Indigenous youth, be it in the form of data, public policy with an intercultural focus, or, consequently, discrimination and prejudice.

The status of Indigenous youth in Latin America and the Caribbean

Indigenous youth in Latin America have succeeded in sharing the realities that each one of them lives via their personal experiences. Social, political, and economic barriers have not restricted them from combining their efforts and organizational processes from the community level to the national, regional and global levels. Youth from communities such as the Aymara, Baré, Charrúa, Embera, Garífunas, Guaraní, Poqomam, Kaqchikel, K'iche, Miskito, Mixteco, Quechua, Xavante and Zapoteco, just to name a few, have been coming together to make themselves heard in one single, collective voice.

Taking into consideration that each Indigenous community has its particularities based on its context and geographical environment, Indigenous youth have their own way of looking at life, of organizing, and of making decisions. When someone uses the term “Indigenous youth,” understand that he or she is referring to a massive diversity of identities. This is why it is essential for

all programs and public policies aimed at this sector to be previously negotiated and endorsed with full and effective participation, in order to address the specific needs of Indigenous youth and for them to benefit in an inclusive and satisfactory manner.

Educational and training processes have played a very important role for Indigenous youth in Latin America, resulting in their voices being heard, as well as their demands and proposals being amplified in numerous spaces of influence and decision-making.

In regards to the current status of Indigenous youth in Latin America, we can identify five primary areas of importance: migration, discrimination, sexual and reproductive health, and the lack of separate statistical data for youth.⁴ We will discuss these points below.

a) Migration

Currently, we are noticing that Indigenous youth are suffering from migratory processes—moving from villages and smaller communities to

⁴ Q'apaj Conde, *Informe Perspectiva de Jóvenes Indígenas a los 10 Años de la Adopción de la Declaración de Naciones Unidas sobre los Derechos de los Pueblos Indígenas*, (Fund for the Development of Indigenous Peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean: 2017), http://www.fondoindigena.org/drupal/sites/default/files/field/archivos/Informe_jo%CC%81venes.pdf.

big urban centers—in search of access to education and better living and working conditions. In the midst of these challenges, they also face an additional one: culture shock and the affirmation of their ethnic identities within non-Indigenous societies.

Thorough analyses must be undertaken around the causes for and the consequences that result from the migration of Indigenous youth from their communities to urban centers. Many of these youth choose to migrate due to the lack of support in their field, the pursuit of paid work, and access to economic assets. They also seek access to education and healthcare. Many of the youth that remain in their communities offer support in the development of their communities, voluntarily giving back in the social, economic, and political lives of their communities, as is the vision of Indigenous Peoples.

The reality of Indigenous youth is different than that of non-Indigenous youth. Due to the lack of access to higher education resulting from their geographical and economic contexts, many Indigenous youth choose to migrate to the capital city of their countries. In spite of this heavy decision and the adverse barriers they face, those who have migrated have been able to achieve the empowerment that comes with the recognition of their identity, exercising influence within those new environments.

At the University of Brasília, Indigenous youth have had a sociocultural impact, as they have

organized to defend their rights and overcome the existing cultural resistance within the academic universe. They have come together and created a space of mutual existence, making their needs known while benefiting from a physical space within the university campus to carry out meetings or gatherings. Although they are hundreds of miles away from their communities, the support and practices of their homes are always with them.

The spaces themselves, whether they be social or physical, highlight the importance of maintaining a relationship with one's Indigenous community, which then serves to minimize the suffering of discrimination while also maintaining the community's main wish and desire: to eventually have its youth return home.

b) Discrimination

Discrimination is one of the horizontal factors that intersects the day-to-day lives of Indigenous Peoples. When speaking about this topic, it is necessary to maintain a specific point of view in regards to the needs of Indigenous youth. Discrimination against Indigenous Peoples can have racial and cultural origins, and can even stem from their place of birth.

The greatest impact of discrimination is reflected among the youth, since this phase of biological, psychological, and social development is key to the construction of one's being, and especially the representation of their community.

With globalization and access to technological development, Indigenous youth often experience their own identity and their ethnic and cultural belonging mainly via the usage of electronic devices and platforms, such as through social media.

Discrimination is intimately linked with the process of migration to large cities. The social, cultural and economic impacts that Indigenous youth experience upon arriving in an urban context can be considered extremely violent. In the midst of this situation, we are witnessing a denial of identity or even suicide.

The Cultural Association of Poqomam Qawinaqel (Our People), Guatemala

One of the efforts being put forth for the organization of Indigenous youth against such discrimination can be seen in the Cultural Association of Poqomam Qawinaqel (*qawinaqel* means *our people* in the Poqomam language) in Guatemala. Due to the constant acts of racism and discrimination directed against the Mayan population of Poqomam, the youth started to create exhibitions of the work of artisans, dance, and theater to rescue elements of their culture.

A primary school educational center was founded by the Cultural Association of Poqomam Qawinaqel in 1990, with the objective of rescuing the Mayan Poqomam culture. In this setting, the students can attend classes in their traditional attire

and speak their native language. Having overcome various challenges throughout the years, higher educational levels were finally added. A signature establishment has been created in which education is bilingual (Poqomam and Spanish), Mayan spirituality is practiced, and weaving and agriculture are part of the curriculum.

In 1997, the same institution founded a radio station that broadcasts in both languages and allows for the community to have access to a means of communication. The institution also maintains a youth group.

Around 1989, associates of the Cultural Association of Poqomam Qawinaqel discussed extensively the issue, 'The Disappearance of the Mayan Poqomam Culture.' The discussions took place in the town of Palín, the only town with a Mayan population in the state of Escuintla. The discussions concluded with the creation of a bilingual educational center (Poqomam-Spanish), in order to put an end to the loss of identity, especially the Poqomam language. Many families were consulted about the proposition, which was accepted immediately and announced to begin operation in 1990.⁵

⁵ Carlos Isabel Gómez Pirique, "Radio Qawinaqel (Nuestra Gente), Municipio de Palín, Departamento de Escuintla," Master's Thesis, Universidad de San Carlos

No matter how much effort is put forth by Indigenous Peoples to bring awareness to the issues that they face among non-Indigenous Peoples in political and social spaces, the agenda of inclusion remains in its initial stages towards real progress. The process of colonization is still very much present in Indigenous communities in Latin America, and we cannot but keep in mind the numerous violations of rights against Indigenous Peoples. The governments in Latin America and the Caribbean need to improve their protection and security of these people, utilizing national and international bodies and mechanisms to do so.

c) Sexual and reproductive health

In the “Perspective Report on Indigenous Youth 10 Years after Adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples,”⁶ Indigenous youth identified some key areas to be observed. Sexual and reproductive health with an intercultural focus is one of them.

Not all Latin American and Caribbean countries have a health system that tends to the necessities of Indigenous Peoples. Brazil has a Special Indigenous Health Department (SESAI) with specific policies for Indigenous Peoples. Nonetheless, there are some obstacles in regards to sexual and reproductive rights. The lack of an

de Guatemala, 2011, 28,
http://biblioteca.usac.edu.gt/tesis/16/16_0887.pdf.

⁶ *Supra* note 4.

intercultural perspective in health services has resulted in increases of unplanned pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections.⁷

We consider an intercultural focus in health services and proceedings a priority in order to execute interventions that guarantee Indigenous youth their sexual and reproductive rights, whether they be in rural or urban settings and with or without special needs.

Additionally, there is a need to promote intercultural dialogue to address both traditional medicine and western medicine with regards to sexual and reproductive health, thereby providing an adequate response to the various needs of Indigenous youth.

d) Statistical data

Perhaps the most problematic factor of all those listed here is the lack of separate statistical data on Indigenous youth. This data is extremely important in analyzing and becoming familiar with

⁷ Fabiana del Popolo, Mariana López, Mario Acuña, *Juventud Indígenas y Afrodescendiente en América Latina: inequidades sociodemográficas y desafíos de políticas* (Madrid: Organización Iberoamericana de la Juventud, 2009), 85-95. See also: Pan American Health Organization, “Salud de la población joven indígena en América Latina: un panorama general,” (2011), 61-74, https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/35357/S2011118_es.pdf?sequence=1.

the true situation of Indigenous youth. With that being said, institutional reinforcement of Indigenous youth networks and organizations would play a key role in generating this type of data, and therefore contribute to the processes of information generation and education of Indigenous youth for the construction of pertinent public policies and spaces.

This lack of statistical information about Indigenous youth is a concern for Indigenous youth, because we know that this data would enable us to put pressure on state institutions to support the development of reasonable standards of living. Data that is specifically about Indigenous Peoples has been appearing recently in various countries' statistical databases; however, a shortage of data especially about Indigenous youth is still holding us back, especially data on the health of Indigenous youth.

Political involvement and influence of Indigenous youth

Indigenous youth, members of regional and national networks, and youth groups, have participated in collective projects in their communities. These projects have ranged from art and music to communication and improvement in political education for children, women, and mixed groups. The objective of these projects is to

facilitate technical knowledge⁸ of the demands and needs of Indigenous communities.

Indigenous youth have been able to continue cultivating their technical knowledge about these needs in order to push for change. Throughout the years, they have succeeded in exercising influence in the regional and international spaces that were created for them, thus being able to articulate the concerns of their organized groups.

Opening up spaces, whether they be local or international, in which Indigenous youth have not been included, has been a great challenge. Indigenous voices, demands, and needs in public policies continue to be an undertaking assumed by the youth, who have created alliances and spaces that have rendered positive results.

For example, the Indigenous Youth Network for Latin America and the Caribbean (The Network) has solicited spaces for all Indigenous youth that have recognition from their communities and organizations. For The Network, it is important to encourage Indigenous youth empowerment, as well as the promotion of involvement and political influence in the various spaces of decision-making.

⁸ Here, technical knowledge is referring to the mechanisms and the legal forms in which requests can be made to strengthen skills and projects managed by the communities according to their context and needs.

To enter into international spaces, Indigenous youth have organized with their communities and organizations to have representational support. In terms of political involvement and influence in Latin America, it is necessary to give attention to the difficulties within our own region among our Brazilian brothers and sisters, since Brazil is the only non-Spanish-speaking country on the continent. The same is also true for the Caribbean countries, in which the official language could be English or French. It is more difficult for Indigenous youth from these countries to participate in regional forums that take place in Spanish.

As Indigenous youth, we understand that our mission in international spaces is to contribute to the unity, strengthening, and visibility of local organizational processes, as well as to make regional issues known and to produce relevant proposals and collective strategies for positive change. With all of these aspects present, we will be able to effectively participate in decision-making processes that affect our communities, regions, and countries.

The Network has made an impact in different national and international spaces, calling attention to childhood and adolescent issues that are a part of the collective rights of our Peoples. As Indigenous youth from diverse regions of Latin America, we have put forth great effort to make our demands and proposals heard. One of the gatherings that The Network put together took place in Faisan

de Tututepec, Mexico, in August 2016, in which the community organized so that Indigenous youth from Central and South America and the Caribbean could hold meetings and have true proximity to each other's experiences. Indigenous women from the El Faisán community, Tututepec, Oaxaca, met and provided support during the development of the activities for these youth.

In The Network, we have ensured continuity in various agendas and spaces within the United Nations, such as: the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII), the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples, the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), the Regional Conferences on Population and Development, and the Indigenous Peoples' Major Group for Sustainable Development, among others.

Thanks to the coordination of their organizational processes, Indigenous youth have been able to engage in horizontal dialogue with the bureaus of the United Nations and other international bodies. Alliances have resulted from these efforts that contribute to the specific rights and necessities of this sector, some examples being: the Rome Statement,⁹ in coordination with the Food

⁹ Food and Agriculture Association of the United Nations, "Rome Statement on the Contribution of Indigenous Youth Towards a World Without Hunger" (2017), <http://www.fao.org/family-farming/detail/en/c/883684/>.

and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO); the Health Plan for Indigenous Youth,¹⁰ in coordination with the Pan American Health Organization (OPS); the Perspective Report on Indigenous Youth 10 Years after Adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples,¹¹ in coordination with the Fund for the Development of Indigenous Peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean (FILAC).

The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

In 2015, our region began to take an important position in the Global Indigenous Youth Caucus. In this space, the support and backing of the elders has allowed for effective engagement. These are elders such as Dr. Mirna Cunningham, Ms. Maria Eugenia Choque, Dr. Miriam Wallet Aboubakrine, and Brothers Alvaro Pop and Jesus Guadalupe Blanco. This is what a true intergenerational process looks like.

Among the youth of the region that have assumed responsibility within the Global

¹⁰ *Health Plan for Indigenous Youth in Latin America and the Caribbean*, Pan American Health Organization (2017), https://www.paho.org/hq/index.php?option=com_docman&view=download&alias=44778-health-plan-for-indigenous-youth-latin-america-caribbean-778&category_slug=paho-who-mandates-strategies-6353&Itemid=270&lang=en.

¹¹ *Supra* note 4.

Indigenous Youth Caucus, there are Dali Angel Pérez, Tania Pariona, Q'apaj Conde, Rayanne Cristine Maximo, and Jessica Veja. Other brothers and sisters have been involved in the Global Caucus as focal points or co-presidents.

Having succeeded in holding a meeting with Indigenous youth of different countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, the OPS brought back the proposal on intercultural health for Indigenous youth at the 2017 UNPFII. With the technical support of the OPS, the youth drafted the Health Plan, which was presented at the 2018 UNPFII. The plan has five working areas: Gathering of Evidence to Support Health Proposals, Intercultural Competency, Political Action, Sociocultural Involvement, and Integration of Tradition and Complementary Medicine.

Seated at a round-table meeting, the youth suggested and presented a sixth working area that concerns the region and calls for urgent attention due to the alarming data that has emerged on the topic: Sexual and Reproductive Rights for Indigenous Children and Adolescents.

Indigenous Peoples' exchanges of reality generate new and necessary tools in bringing about significant change. The Health Plan is an example of such a tool elaborated by Indigenous youth; however, it is a plan that involves and relies on the support of the elders, which in turn results in collective development. Dialogue and alignment

with the elders are crucial, while respecting the customs and structure of each community.

For The Network, the local work that the youth carry out is fundamental, since it is important to bolster community leadership. Community leadership facilitates regional reinforcement and enables the voices of the youth to be heard as they relate their issues and experiences. The recurring themes among these issues and challenges have been represented in the “Perspective Report on Indigenous Youth 10 years after Adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.”¹²

The proper education and training of members and partners of The Network play an important role. When this happens successfully, institutional communication strategies flow much better, leading to a more fruitful exchange of ideas. The youth leaders then know how to handle themselves in spaces of decision-making, when it really counts.

When successful practices of amplifying the Indigenous youth voice are shared among members of The Network, increased visibility is provided to those who are the most vulnerable. Their resistance efforts and the human rights violations they suffer are then better shared with the world so that they can be alleviated.

¹² Ibid.

Among numerous efforts made by The Network is the development of the Leadership School for Young Women, which aims to strengthen the leadership capacity of Indigenous Latin American women. Other sessions, such as that which was continued from Cairo 20, were linked with feminists and civil society, among others.

Coordination with other sectors in the region enables our work to be realized in a cross-disciplinary manner, such as is currently happening with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Network has been able to raise issues related to sustainable development both in Latin America and at the global level. Among these issues and objectives are Poverty, Zero Hunger, Health and Wellbeing, Gender Equality, Water and Sanitation, and Sustainable Cities and Communities.

For us, it is crucial to continue creating spaces of dialogue and to get more Indigenous youth involved. This way, consensual proposals can be presented that reflect our needs and challenges, which in turn enables us to fully exercise our rights, whether they be individual rights or collective rights. Our intention is also to highlight the range of the diverse youth affected, and to reinforce mobilizations, links, and training processes of members and partners of The Network.

Improvements, achievements, and challenges

In this section, we discuss the main improvements, achievements, and challenges from the perspectives of education, health, policy effectiveness, and cultural and intellectual appropriation of Indigenous Peoples.

Educational improvements for Indigenous Peoples in Latin America began to take place around the middle of the 1990s. Intercultural education is a phenomenon that continues to improve with the recognition of the necessity of bilingual schools as part of public policy, such as in the case of Brazil. In the 1980s, Indigenous education and formal training was only guaranteed in the “official” language, Portuguese. This practice was seen as a process of colonization and cultural assimilation because Brazil has the greatest ethnic and linguistic diversity out of all of the Latin American and Caribbean countries.

The persistence of the Indigenous movement in Brazil since 1996 succeeded in producing the following legislation, ensured by the Federal Constitution and by the National Education Guidelines and Framework Law of 1996, in Article 78, I and II:

The Educational System of the Union, in collaboration with the federal agencies for cultural promotion and the welfare of Indigenous Peoples, will develop integrated programs of instruction and research, in order to offer bilingual and intercultural education to Indigenous Peoples, with the

following objectives: to provide to Indigenous Peoples and their communities the recuperation of their historical memories; the reaffirmation of their ethnical identities; the valorization of their languages and sciences; to guarantee to Indigenous Peoples and their communities access to information, and technical and scientific knowledge of the national society as well as of other Indigenous and non-Indigenous societies.¹³

Even with this massive improvement, there are still many hurdles to overcome in regards to the demand for formal education among Indigenous Peoples. Higher education has always been limited to the elite, and the inclusion of Indigenous Peoples in universities is only a recent phenomenon. This inclusion is still in its constructional phases for mechanisms of access and retention, as well as for the dualist education—between western knowledge and traditional knowledge—which must not be lost.

In Brazil, in order to foster access to higher education for the first time, affirmative action policies were created by universities and organizations such as the National Indian Foundation (FUNAI), who signed agreements with institutions of higher education, thus making

¹³ Law n. 9.394, National Education Guidelines and Framework Law of Brazil, December 20, 1996.

possible the access and retention of Indigenous Peoples in higher education.

The presence of Indigenous Peoples in universities raises questions originating in the legitimacy and hegemony crises. The university constantly faces confrontation because it is in the midst of a culturally dynamic and versatile universe, and therefore needs to adapt to the agendas and demands of its student body, including Indigenous youth. This confrontation arises from a mass culture that questions the monopoly of the academy in the process of cultural production and knowledge. Nonetheless, higher education and academic culture itself reflect the privilege of certain social groups, fueling the social and economic elite. In this manner, institutions cease to be centers of excellence in production and become the construction grounds for mechanisms of social justice and democracy.¹⁴

In 2012, after 10 years of Indigenous Peoples' diverse experiences and struggles in Brazilian universities, the National Congress approved the quota policy, which, in Law No. 12.711/2012, ensures admission of public school students, Afro-descendants, Indigenous Peoples, and Quilombolas in Federal Universities of Higher Education (IFES) and Federal Technical Schools.

¹⁴ Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *Pela Mão de Alice: O Social e o Político na Pós-modernidade* (São Paulo: Cortez Editora, 1997).

This breakthrough legislation was celebrated as a historical milestone for these populations.

In 2013, the Brazilian federal government launched the Indigenous Students Retention Program through Ordinance No. 389, of May 9, 2013. The ordinance offers financial assistance via scholarships to minimize social inequality and contribute to the retention and graduation of undergraduate students, as well as those who are in vulnerable socioeconomic situations but are still enrolled in these institutions. We consider this ordinance a wonderful advancement and a good practice to be implemented in other countries in Latin America and the Caribbean that have a considerable representation of Indigenous Peoples.

The question of higher education as a permanent agenda for Indigenous youth is a significant one, for the sake of their vocational training and for their qualification to be able to work in their own communities and territories, especially as health professionals. Today we have a great number of Indigenous youth who have graduated from college and are working in their communities as doctors, nurses, lawyers, engineers, and community health agents, among other professions. They are professionals in their fields who also value intercultural practices.

Another matter that needs to be improved upon is the health of Indigenous youth. We are aware that in our communities, this matter is directly linked to the subjugation of traditional

medicine, Indigenous Peoples' traditional practices, and intergenerational dialogue. Health services for Indigenous Peoples have not improved in the region. In fact, Brazil is the only country that has public policies specifically directed towards Indigenous Peoples, in which traditional medicine is recognized as an integral part of the health system. The lack of attention to the health of Indigenous Peoples brings about dire consequences, such as the increase of unplanned pregnancy rates in youth between the ages of 15-24, the increase in youth suicide rates, and migration to cities as young Indigenous People search for healthcare options.

In regards to sexual and reproductive rights, there is a need for intercultural dialogue on health, because Indigenous women in particular have their own way of taking care of their bodies, which does not necessarily mean that they seek out chemical drugs. Data from the OPS show that Indigenous youth become sexually active before non-Indigenous youth,¹⁵ which indicates a necessity of knowledge about their sexual and reproductive rights. This knowledge will ultimately serve in decreasing the rates of unplanned pregnancy and maternal mortality, while promoting the prevention of sexually transmitted infections and the

¹⁵ Pan American Health Organization, "Salud de la población joven indígena en América Latina: un panorama general," (2011), 62, https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/35357/S2011118_es.pdf?sequence=1.

empowerment in one's right to free will, from an intercultural perspective.

With respect to sexual and reproductive health, it is crucial to promote intercultural dialogue between traditional and western knowledge. Educational spaces should be opened up for the family and community, including for traditional authorities. Indigenous youth have empowered themselves by learning to use certain devices, such as phones or the internet, to carry out all of their communications. However, one of the great challenges remaining in this space is having resources to be able to create audio/visual material to share Indigenous knowledge beyond one's immediate community.

As mentioned earlier, one challenge confronted by Indigenous youth is high suicide rates. Suicide originates from many factors, be they social, physical, or biological. Dialogue with appropriate health services is necessary for suicide prevention. Discrimination has been one of the main reasons for suicide among Indigenous youth, in addition to territorial conflicts and rights violations in Indigenous territories. However, it is worth noting that ancestral and spiritual aspects are intrinsically associated with suicide prevalence among Indigenous youth of Latin America and the Caribbean. Few health professionals know how to deal with this situation.

Nevertheless, it is intended that the Health Plan for Indigenous Youth of Latin America and the

Caribbean¹⁶ be implemented in other countries, thus guaranteeing their rights to health, wellbeing, and a good life for all.

Traditional means do not create spaces for Indigenous Peoples, and when they do, they are limited and contain biased information. This has forced Indigenous youth to create their own communication strategies to inform their communities through local radio stations, alternative filmmaking, and online information pages, thus bringing about change from the local to the regional level and beyond.

When voices are given the space to be heard and allowed to be disseminated via communication platforms, the community begins to make a change. All of a sudden, these substantial and generational changes are documented through videos, pictures, and audio. This is exactly what facilitates information sharing and education, which shows that people are collectively seeking out solutions to the problems affecting them. Not only do these communication mediums succeed in transmitting information about daily life among Indigenous Peoples, but they also open up spaces for Indigenous Peoples to thrive by using their maternal language and their cultural attire anywhere and everywhere. It is important for these cultural elements to exist freely and without discrimination.

¹⁶ *Supra* note 10.

Documentaries and photographs have transcended borders. Presently, the struggles of Indigenous Peoples in defense of elements of their identity and territories are being documented and shared globally. As a result, regional efforts are being united for the implementation and respect of the articles detailed in Convention 169 of the International Labour Organization (ILO).¹⁷

For example, *People of the Sea and the Wind* is a communications experience. It is a feature film that presents the story of two towns, Álvaro Obregón and La Venta, in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, Oaxaca, that struggle to defend their territory against the invasion of transnational corporations who seek to construct wind turbines on their land. “According to the map of wind parks shown on the website of the Mexican Association of Wind Energy A.C. (AMDEE), the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, for this year of 2016, will have 27 wind parks, with more than 1,500 wind turbines.”¹⁸ Jorge Perez, an Indigenous youth of the Zapotec community, was a part of the team that documented

¹⁷ International Labour Organization (ILO), *Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, C169* (27 June 1989), Article

30, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ddb6d514.html>.

¹⁸ “Eólica en México: Este año habrá 27 parques eólicos en el Istmo,” *Revista Eólica y del Vehículo Eléctrico*, January 4, 2016, <https://www.evwind.com/2016/01/04/eolica-en-mexico-este-ano-habra-27-parques-eolicos-en-el-istmo/>.

the story, which went on to be recognized both nationally and internationally.

Effective engagement of Indigenous youth

For years, the Indigenous youth of Latin America have put forth great effort and have shown tremendous dedication in ensuring their presence in spaces like that of the United Nations and other global institutions and bodies.

One of the proposals that we consider as an advancement for Indigenous youth is the creation of a scholarship program for Indigenous Peoples in bureaus such as the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in Rome, and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in Brazil. Both bureaus have dedicated themselves to incorporating Indigenous youth in their work spaces so that the youth can have an experience in the United Nations and cultivate their professional skills in favor of their Indigenous communities and organizations.

While these initiatives are certainly seen as positive steps forward, it is still important to understand that more work needs to be done in these areas. These initiatives must be built upon so that Indigenous youth can better integrate into the work environment. There is much difficulty among youth in accessing their first job, be they Indigenous or non-Indigenous.

When thinking about border zones and Indigenous Peoples, more delicate attention ought to be given by the states and protection organizations that represent the rights of Indigenous Peoples. In Latin America alone, Indigenous Peoples have suffered from numerous factors related to territorial processes, violence, and discrimination, among others. Consequently, in the day-to-day lives of Indigenous youth, we see connections to drug trafficking, sexual exploitation of children, teenage pregnancy, and the risk of contracting sexually transmitted infections. This reality is directly linked to territorial conflicts. For Indigenous Peoples, their land represents their existence. Fortunately, we have been able to obtain lawful entitlement of these lands in many countries. In spite of this progress, many Indigenous Peoples still live in unmarked territories. These territories are zones of conflict, where Indigenous Peoples suffer from toxic monoculture (such as in the case of Brazil), exploitation of mineral resources, and, mainly, large infrastructure projects of the state.

Some countries in Latin America and the Caribbean have made progress in demarcating Indigenous territories, however we cannot say by any means that these issues have been completely resolved. To recognize the land is to recognize the existence of Indigenous Peoples, yet many governments seem to have no interest in granting this recognition.

In Uruguay, Indigenous organizations of the Charrúa community put pressure on the government

for recognition, principally for recognition of their right to their land and ratification of the International Labor Organization Convention 169. Data taken from the 2011 census from Uruguay's National Institute of Statistics (INE) show that there is growth in the self-identification of Indigenous Peoples, which marked a four percent increase in the Indigenous population from the 2006 census.¹⁹

The youth of the Council of the Charrúa Nation (CONACHA) aim to bring awareness to the authorities for the recognition of their identity. The elders have used a very distinct strategy to get the youth involved. For example, they try to have ceremonies, celebrations, and other cultural events with music that combines traditional and modern styles. For us, it is also very important to implement art in our work with youth, which allows us to preserve the most traditional aspects of our cultures while fusing them with modernization. Another avenue for cultural strengthening for the CONACHA is in the campsites in the woods and mountains, where ancestral knowledge is passed on. This medium, in particular, is all about recovering the meaning of plain existence, when there was no technology, just human beings and nature. This is the main mechanism to maintain the memories of our people.

In Mexico, it has been a bit tough to obtain coordination among its 68 communities of

¹⁹ *Censos 2011*, Instituto Nacional de Estadística: Uruguay, <http://www.ine.gub.uy/web/guest/censos-2011>.

Indigenous youth. One of the key weaknesses is the inability to open up spaces for them. Yes, they do have a national youth institution, but the issue of Indigenous youth in particular is complicated. Yet we see once again that even in the face of adversity, efforts are still being put forth and progress is still being made. Grassroots organizations, such as Indigenous Women for the Conservation, Research, and Use of Natural Resources (CIARENA), have opened up spaces and have trained leaders. The youth have been able to create alliances among themselves, which have gone on to pave the way for them to address Indigenous issues in spaces that count.

Currently, the Charrúa people of Argentina, Uruguay, and Brazil are trying to unite themselves separately from the states to which they currently belong. In the words of Martin, an Indigenous young man from the Charrúa Nation: “The state has settled on our land, yet we are a nation bigger and greater than the state. It is understood that we are one people and we know no borders.”

In Brazil, for example, there are iconic cases in which Indigenous Peoples succeeded in gaining official recognition of their land, such as in the cases of the Raposa-Serra do Sol community in the northern state of Roraima, and the Xukuru do Ororubá community in the northeastern state of Pernambuco. In the case of the latter, their cause was brought before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, and the community would go on to

be compensated with more than one million reais from the Brazilian state.

Recently, Brazil has been expelling Indigenous Peoples from their lands, such as in the case of the Guaraní-Kaiowá community in the central-western state of Mato Grosso do Sul. This community lives and experiences extreme human rights violations daily. They live in small campsites along the federal highway of the region, without access to clean water, sanitation, education, or health facilities. These atrocities are due to the conflicts with agribusiness in the region, which is represented by the majority of the legislators in the National Congress.

In Colombia, Indigenous Peoples and their organizations have united with other movements, such as that of the Afro-descendants, in their fight against the humanitarian crisis where armed groups clash with drug traffickers, often on lands of Indigenous Peoples. This conflict has brought about dire consequences, such as the forced conscription of Indigenous youth into these armed groups and the inevitable abandonment of Indigenous land in an attempt to escape the crisis.

When discussing human rights violations, not only are we talking about Indigenous Peoples' relationship to their lands, but we are also talking about water. For some communities, water represents a spiritual reference as a part of their ancestry and identity. In 2015, Brazil recorded its

worst environmental disaster in history with the collapse of the Samarco dam in the southeastern state of Minas Gerais, which unleashed mining waste across more than 528 miles.²⁰ This disaster resulted in 17 deaths, leaving entire villages submerged and depositing a little less than 16 trillion gallons of mining waste in and along the Doce River. The main people impacted by this event were members of the Krenak community, who live on the margins of the Doce River and depend on it heavily for subsistence and survival. The river represents not only a means of subsistence, but also a part of ethnic, cultural, and ancestral identity. From this angle, it cannot be denied that the collapse of the Samarco dam resulted in a grave genocide.

In regards to the impacts of the great infrastructure projects on Indigenous lands, the Mapuche community, among others in South America, have been fighting against the separation process of oil refining, which is known as one of the most aggressive processes of energy production that exist. This process contaminates the ground as well as ground water. Peru is one of the countries that

²⁰ G1 Minas Gerais, “Há 3 anos, rompimento de barragem de Mariana causou maior desastre ambiental do país e matou 19 pessoas,” *Minas Gerais*, January 25, 2019, <https://g1.globo.com/mg/minas-gerais/noticia/2019/01/25/ha-3-anos-rompimento-de-barragem-de-mariana-causou-maior-desastre-ambiental-do-pais-e-matou-19-pessoas.ghtml>.

has been suffering from the presence of oil refineries on Indigenous lands.

Tragedies such as these bring to light the inefficiency of the state in relation to Indigenous Peoples, as it continues to allow numerous violations to go unaddressed and unaccounted for, including Indigenous Peoples' rights to exist on their land. When thinking about the great infrastructure projects, they do not consider the ancestry, continuation of life, and health of the Indigenous youth that are to come in the future. In many cases, Indigenous Peoples are considered as barriers to development, and so we ask ourselves: What development?

The way in which globalization accompanied by neoliberal capitalism facilitated the wave of social inequalities, environmental imbalances, and social sustainability has caused irreparable socio-environmental impacts. The main damage inflicted by neoliberal capitalism is rooted in inequality, be it social or economic. If all of the acquired knowledge throughout the years had been used coherently, it would be easily understood that Latin America is not by any means underdeveloped. If the state was willing and able to understand Indigenous Peoples' ancestral and traditional knowledge, then they would know the development that we are talking about.

Conclusion

The knowledge of our grandfathers and grandmothers constitute the seeds that, upon germination, reap engagement in Latin America and the Caribbean. Education starts at home and in the community, which in turn serves as a fundamental beginning of influence.

In order to strengthen the capacity of the newer generations, communities have organized in various ways. For example, communities cultivate their elements of identity by passing on knowledge to younger generations, which acts as real support in the facilitation of learning in daily life. This daily life consists of transmitting collective values and caring for Mother Earth. There is a special bond with Mother Nature, a bond that promotes balance and comfortable coexistence with our surroundings.

The support of the elders in the process of learning new knowledge is key, due to their wisdom and acquired experiences. The elders in particular serve as examples in reproducing positive works within Indigenous communities. Traditionally, knowledge was passed down orally because there were no technological tools of communication. Currently, the knowledge gap is still considerably wide since there are still communities without access to technology.

There is more work to be done with respect to public policies aimed at the Indigenous youth of Latin America. We do see countries that have adopted policies for Indigenous Peoples, yet they still lack a focus on the youth. For us, it is of utmost

importance that we continue to build spaces of dialogue and get more and more Indigenous youth involved. Together, consensual proposals can be brought forward that reflect our needs and challenges, enabling us to fully exercise our rights, whether they are individual or collective. In addition, we aim to highlight the range of the diverse youth affected, and strengthen the mobilizations, links, and education of Indigenous youth. This is our goal.

We must strengthen the link between Indigenous youth's organizational processes and collectively analyze the achievements, strategies, and improvements among the newer generations. We must follow the example of the Indigenous youth scholars who have gained visibility in their universities for having offered reflections and discussions in search of the valorization of cultural and traditional knowledge of Indigenous communities. They are seeking out ways to connect Indigenous and scientific knowledge.

Right now, we are being recognized by our leaders who truly want to understand more about the aspirations and concerns of Indigenous youth. We always talk about the importance of our ancestors, who are our living encyclopedias. Like them, we must resist and continue the fight. We must be ever more prepared to occupy spaces with our culture, songs, and attire to make our presence felt.

We are immensely grateful to have been able to participate in the writing of this book. To paraphrase the words of the young Brazilian Indigenous woman Celia Xabriaba, of the Xabriabá community: “To recognize Indigenous participation in epistemic formation is to contribute to the decolonization process of minds and bodies.”²¹

²¹ Celia Xakriabá, “O Barro, o Genipapo, e o Giz no Fazer Epistemológico de Autoria Xakriabá: Reativação de Memória por uma Educação Territorializada,” Master’s Thesis, Universidade de Brasília, 2018.