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► Exploring and Tackling Barriers to Indigenous Women's Participation and Organization

A study based on qualitative research in Bangladesh, the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Cameroon and Guatemala



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Exploring and tackling barriers to indigenous women's participation and organization: A study based on qualitative research in Bangladesh, the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Cameroon and Guatemala

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► Preface

Indigenous women across the world are raising their voices demanding respect for their rights, identities and aspirations. They draw attention to exclusion, discrimination and violence they experience, while insisting on their roles as actors and change agents. A recent ILO report offers striking evidence of the wide socio-economic gaps affecting indigenous women on a global scale.¹

The ILO Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169) and Strategy for action concerning indigenous and tribal peoples both focus on equality of opportunity and treatment for indigenous women and stress participation in decision-making as essential for tackling discrimination and inequality. In this context, the present study seeks to explore barriers to indigenous women's participation and organization. A better understanding of such barriers can inform future actions to tackle persisting compounded discrimination based on gender and ethnicity experienced by indigenous women. Action in this field is becoming even more urgent in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.²

The study is the result of a research project undertaken by the ILO with support from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA). The idea for the research emerged from the ILO's work with indigenous women on access to decent work over recent years, with SIDA support. We thank the numerous indigenous women that have agreed to share their time, perspectives and experiences which are the basis for this study. We are conscious of their expectations that this initiative will lead to concrete follow-up actions. We are also grateful to the representatives of ILO tripartite constituents that attended national validation workshops. It is hoped that this study will contribute to making the voices of indigenous women heard and serve as a useful source for social dialogue and informing future interventions to support them.

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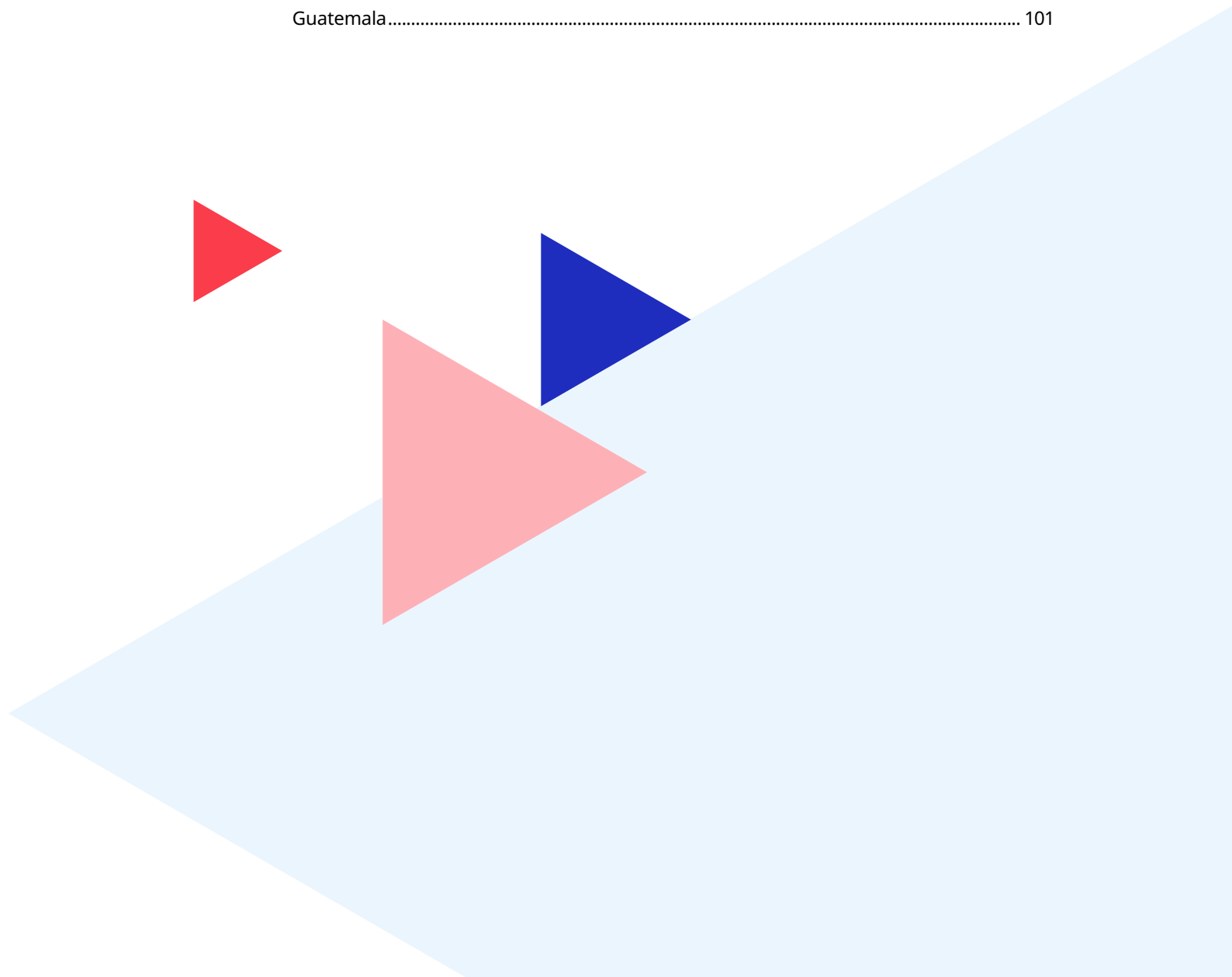
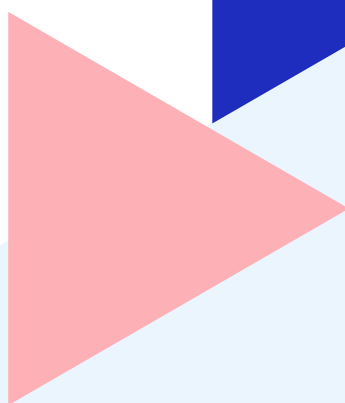
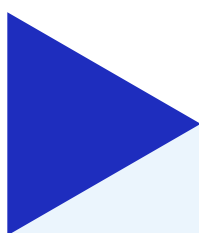
¹ ILO, *Implementing the ILO Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, No. 169: Towards an inclusive, sustainable and just future*, 2019a.

² ILO, *COVID-19 and the world of work: A focus on indigenous and tribal peoples*, 2020.

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► Executive summary

Indigenous women are at the forefront of the struggles for the recognition of the collective rights of indigenous peoples and the advancement of their rights as women and workers. In the face of multiple challenges, they have made continuous efforts to make their voices heard at local, national and international levels, including through the creation of their own organizations and networks, and the building of alliances with other social movements, notably women's organizations and trade unions, pursuing their specific demands and priorities. Whereas important progress has been made, barriers to indigenous women's organization and to their participation in decision-making processes persist.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on indigenous women's participation has yet to be assessed but certainly presents new challenges to indigenous women's struggle for participation and equality. Hence the findings and recommendations emerging from the present research effort, which was concluded before the outbreak of the pandemic, constitute a timely contribution to building a COVID-19 response and recovery that addresses long-standing patterns of exclusion and discrimination experienced by the over 240 million indigenous women around the world (ILO 2019a).

This study identifies and analyses barriers to organization and participation faced by indigenous women at multiple levels, including their root causes. Its aim is to raise awareness of the situation of indigenous women and propose entry points for promoting progress regarding their participation in decision-making processes. The study is the result of a qualitative research project undertaken in four different countries, namely Bangladesh, the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Cameroon and Guatemala, using a common methodological framework to identify, through direct interaction with indigenous women, barriers to their organization and participation operating at various levels.

The report brings to light a wide range of barriers to indigenous women's organization and participation. These barriers are of varying nature and are mutually reinforcing, operating at the individual and collective levels. Physical barriers to indigenous women's participation and organization include environmental and economic conditions, such as financial dependence on men, poverty, lack of infrastructure and basic services or lack of access to financial support for their organizations; lack of adequate meeting places; and limited access to information and weak communication networks. Psychological barriers encompass indigenous women's lack of awareness and knowledge about their rights and relevant customary and statutory frameworks; limited skills and abilities, for example language, political, leadership and negotiation skills, and poor access to formal education; as well as the fear of transgressing social and cultural rules, speaking in public, or losing their jobs, and a lack of interest or motivation. The latter is often the result of a variety of factors, including the prevailing gender norms and distribution of roles and the situation of dire poverty in which indigenous women and their communities live, which significantly affects their priorities and may limit women's opportunities or interest in engaging in participatory processes or organizations' work. Finally, social barriers affecting indigenous women's participation and organization include gender norms and roles, discrimination, violence and harassment, lack of government support, limited political participation and lack of solidarity.

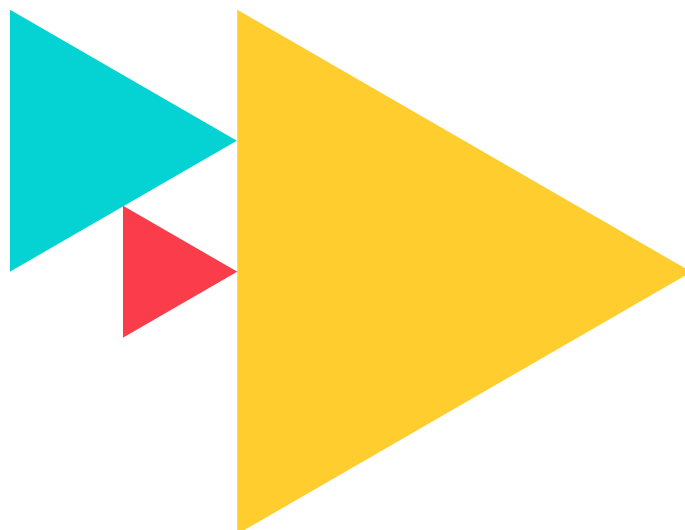
The study reveals some encouraging developments or transformative trends emerging in the countries examined, including women's membership and participation in governance institutions, the creation of indigenous women's organizations or the adoption of measures to ensure their representation in the executive committees of "mixed" organizations, as well as changes in attitudes and perceptions, including on the part of men, towards women's

participation in decision-making processes. In some cases, these developments originate in the initiative of indigenous women themselves; in others, they appear to have been encouraged by the proactive support of traditional leadership, often building on and expanding existing customary practices and sometimes following traditional leaders' involvement in indigenous peoples' and women's human rights organizations.

The study's findings suggest that addressing barriers to indigenous women's organization and participation, and supporting and amplifying positive developments under way requires an integrated approach. Such an approach should take into account the nexus between the collective and individual dimensions of the existing obstacles and the multiple vulnerabilities of indigenous women related to their gender, indigenous identity and socio-economic status, while being respectful of their priorities, cosmovision and cultural identity. The findings also point to the importance of indigenous women themselves taking the lead in the design and implementation of any strategy aimed at supporting and strengthening their organization and participation in decision-making. The relevant international instruments, in particular the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169) and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples provide a solid basis and authoritative guidance for developing such strategies. Drawing on these standards allows for the required coordination and consistency and ensures legitimacy, inclusiveness, sustainability and, above all, accountability.

Fulfilling the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development requires addressing the barriers to indigenous women's participation and organization as a matter of urgency. The COVID-19 pandemic that is striking the world at the time of writing this study further exposes the urgency of this situation.

The study provides a set of recommendations to tackle the barriers faced by indigenous women with regard to their participation and organization, and suggests a focus on three main areas of interventions, namely: (i) strengthening the policy, legal and institutional frameworks concerning indigenous peoples' rights; (ii) proactively supporting indigenous women's participation and organization; and (iii) supporting indigenous women's economic empowerment through access to decent work and social protection.







Introduction

► 1.1 Indigenous women: Leaders in a time of change

Custodians and transmitters of their peoples' cultures, pillars of their communities, traditional healers, guardians of the local environment, and primary caregivers and food suppliers for their families, indigenous women³ are at the forefront of the struggles for the recognition of the collective rights of indigenous peoples and the advancement of their rights as women and workers. Belonging to more than 5,000 distinct groups and living in countries with different histories of conquest and colonization and contemporary contexts, indigenous women do not constitute a homogenous group. Yet, they share common challenges. These are profoundly embedded in the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination that indigenous women suffer because of their gender, indigenous identity and socio-economic status, and in their experience of "a broad, multifaceted and complex spectrum of mutually reinforcing human rights abuses", including violence and harassment, occurring at individual and collective levels (UN 2015, para. 5).

Indigenous women are affected in distinct ways by the socio-economic transformations that their communities are undergoing. They are increasingly seeking economic opportunities beyond their traditional occupations and livelihood activities. Some combine their traditional occupations with new income-generating activities, often using their traditional knowledge, or enter the labour market as self-employed workers or wage earners, often migrating to urban areas (ILO 2019a; ILO 2019b; ILO 2012). As they seek alternative or complementary economic activities, indigenous women, however, face significant difficulties owing to low levels of education, language barriers, family-care responsibilities and multiple forms of discrimination (ILO 2012). They rely heavily on the informal economy, with limited or no social protection, and the low levels of wages that they earn increase, in many cases, their dependence on men (ILO 2019a; AIPP and FPP 2013).

In addition, indigenous women's roles within their communities are particularly affected when their communities lose access to their territories, and their traditional knowledge regarding the management of the natural environment, the use of medicinal plants and traditional seeds is gradually lost (ILO 2017c; IACHR 2017; AIPP and FPP 2013). Indigenous women and girls are also particularly exposed to harassment and violence in their multiple forms (see Chapter 3 and Box 2). As has been emphasized by the International Indigenous Women's Forum, the violation of their collective rights as indigenous peoples is the single greatest risk factor for gender-based violence against indigenous women (FIMI 2006).

In the face of the multiple challenges confronting them as members of indigenous peoples, as women and as workers, indigenous women have made continuous efforts to make their voices heard at local, national and international levels. They have taken various initiatives to empower themselves, including the creation of their own organizations and networks, and the building of alliances with other social movements, notably women's organizations and trade unions, pursuing their specific demands and priorities (ILO 2019a; UN 2013a; UN 2015). While important progress has been made (see Chapter 4 for examples), barriers to indigenous women's organization and to their participation in decision-making processes persist. These barriers are multiple, mutually reinforcing and operate at the individual and collective levels.

The lack or limited participation of indigenous women in decision-making processes affecting them and the obstacles they face in terms of organization and representation continue to be major factors underlying indigenous women's specific vulnerability in the world of work. This is an area where the inequalities affecting indigenous women are particularly apparent (see ILO 2019a and in Chapter 2).

³ Reference is made to the identification criteria set out in Article 1 of the ILO Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169). For the purpose of this paper, the term "indigenous peoples" is used to include both indigenous and tribal peoples. For more information see ILO 2013.

Such inequalities risk reproducing, in a vicious cycle, existing patterns of marginalization and poverty unless measures are taken to support indigenous women's economic empowerment and strengthen their organizational capacity, in cooperation with them, with a view to improving their working conditions and enhancing the protection of their collective and individual rights.

Fulfilling the pledge of leaving no one behind enshrined in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development requires identifying and tackling the barriers to indigenous women's participation and organization as a matter of urgency.⁴ Indigenous women should have a real opportunity to influence the development of the public policies and the national strategies designed to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals,⁵ and to address climate change, including mitigation and adaptation measures, in line with relevant international human rights and labour standards.⁶ Indigenous women are part of the solution to many of the challenges that societies, and women within those societies, face worldwide (UN 2017, para. 3). They must be empowered to fully play their role as active agents of change. This requires looking jointly at their collective and individual rights as members of indigenous peoples, women and workers and ensuring that their voices are heard.

The COVID-19 pandemic that is striking the world is further exposing the urgency of addressing indigenous women's barriers to participation and organization. The crisis is exacerbating pre-existing inequalities and vulnerabilities, producing a particularly harsh impact on women⁷ and marginalized groups, including indigenous peoples, and is heightening the incidence of violence and harassment (See, among others, ILO 2020b; UN 2020a; CEDAW 2020; UN 2020b; UN 2020c; UN 2020d; CESCR 2020; ACHPR 2020 and IACHR 2020). There is a serious risk that the pandemic may deepen existing patterns of marginalization and exclusion of indigenous women, unless measures are promptly adopted to involve them in the design and implementation of policy responses to the crisis with a view to ensuring that their specific needs, risks and vulnerabilities are taken into account through appropriate interventions.⁸

4 See also UN Commission on the Status of Women, resolution 56/4, Indigenous women: key actors in poverty and hunger eradication, E/2012/27 (2012). This resolution acknowledges the vital roles played by indigenous women in poverty eradication, food security and sustainable development, and calls upon States to take measures to ensure full and effective participation of indigenous women in decision-making processes at all levels and in all areas, and eliminate barriers for their participation in political, economic, social and cultural life.

5 This is particularly the case for Goals 2 (End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture), 5 (Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls), 8 (Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all), 10 (Reduce inequality within and among countries), and 15 (Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss).

6 It should be recalled that the 2015 Paris Agreement on Climate Change, in its preamble, states that when taking action to address climate change, States Parties should respect, promote and consider their respective obligations regarding human rights, including the rights of indigenous peoples. The Agreement also stipulates that adaptation action should take into account indigenous peoples' traditional knowledge (art. 7).

7 For a comprehensive overview of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women and girls, see UN 2020. For specific information on the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the world of work, see <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/coronavirus/lang--en/index.htm>.

8 For general guidance on COVID-19 and indigenous peoples, see IASG 2020.

► 1.2 Purpose of the research

This research sets out to identify and analyse the barriers to organization and participation faced by indigenous women at multiple decision-making levels and their root causes. Its overall aim is to raise awareness of the situation of indigenous women and to generate recommendations towards strengthening indigenous women's participation in decision-making processes concerning them, in line with relevant international instruments. These include the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169), the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111), the Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190) and the accompanying Violence and Harassment Recommendation, 2019 (No. 206), the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 (No. 87), the Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 (No. 98), and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

This study contributes to the implementation of the ILO Strategy for action concerning indigenous peoples which places a special focus on indigenous women and acknowledges the need to develop interventions to address the specific barriers and challenges they face, particularly with a view to giving them a voice within and outside their communities, building knowledge of their role in traditional economies, supporting entrepreneurship, and raising awareness to prevent and combat gender-based violence (ILO-GB 2015). The study also contributes to the follow-up to the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples in 2014, on the occasion of which the international community committed to supporting the empowerment of indigenous women and their full and effective participation in decision-making processes at all levels and in all areas and eliminate barriers to their participation in political, economic, social and cultural life (UN 2014a, para. 17).



► 1.3 Underlying concepts and approaches

Participation is understood as taking part in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through freely chosen representatives. It covers, for example, the possibility of voting and being elected to decision-making bodies of various nature, engaging in popular assemblies which have the power to make decisions about local issues or about the affairs of a particular community, taking part in bodies established in consultation with the government, as well as organizing, namely creating or joining organizations (OHCHR 2018). Convention No. 169 recognizes indigenous peoples' right to participate at all levels of decision-making in elective institutions and administrative and other bodies responsible for policies and programmes which concern them,⁹ and the formulation, implementation and evaluation of development plans which may affect them directly.¹⁰ It further provides for the right of indigenous peoples to be consulted through their representative institutions before the adoption of legislative or administrative measures which may affect them directly.¹¹ The principle of representativity is central to effective and meaningful participation. The ILO's supervisory bodies have underscored that the Convention does not impose a model of what a representative institution should involve; the important thing is that they should be the result of a process carried out by the indigenous peoples themselves (ILO-GB 2004, para. 102). Thus, it can involve institutions at community, regional or national levels and may entail going beyond traditional institutions, especially in those cases where indigenous women may not have a voice in traditional decision-making (ILO 2013; see also UN 2019a, para. 56). For indigenous women, participation means "visibility" and the ability to express their desires, ideals and positions (UN 2013a). As indicated by the ILO's supervisory bodies, indigenous peoples should be able to express their opinions and have an influence on the outcome of the decision-making process (See also CEACR 2009, CEACR 2011).

Convention No. 169 also prohibits discrimination against indigenous men and women in respect of the right of association and freedom for all lawful trade union activities.¹² Indigenous women should have equal rights to establish and to join organizations of their own choosing, in accordance with the fundamental principles enshrined in ILO Convention No. 87, with a view to advancing their rights and improving their living and working conditions through representative organizations. The ILO's supervisory bodies have underscored that the right of workers to establish organizations of their own choosing implies, in particular, the effective possibility of forming, in a climate of full security, organizations independent both of those which exist already and of any political party (ILO 2006). For the purpose of this study, reference is made to a broad notion of "organization" which encompasses workers' and employers' organizations and extends to associations, mutual-aid groups, and cooperatives, among others, in order to capture the broad range of collective initiatives pursued by indigenous women to express their voices and empower themselves.

Convention No. 111, which aims at eliminating discrimination and promoting equality of opportunity and treatment in employment and occupation, including on the grounds of gender and indigenous and social origins, places a particular emphasis on the importance of the cooperation with workers' and employers' organizations, and other appropriate bodies.¹³ In this respect, the ILO's supervisory bodies have emphasized the importance of consulting with the social partners and the interested groups on the design, monitoring, implementation and evaluation of the measures and plans adopted to tackle discrimination and promote equality of opportunity and treatment, with a view to ensuring their

9 Article 6(1)(b).

10 Article 7(1).

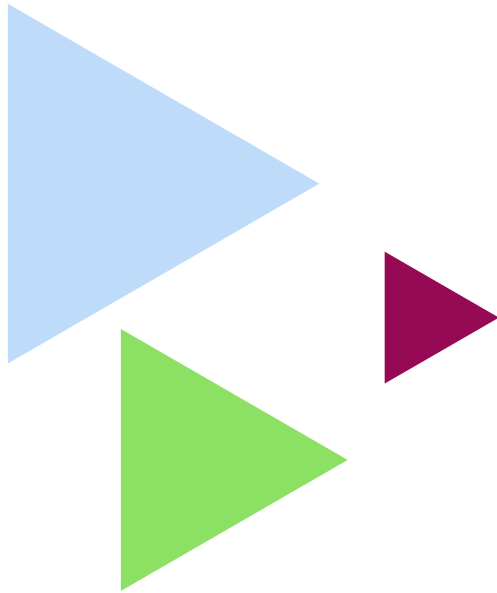
11 Article 6 (1)(a).

12 See Article 20 (2) (d).

13 See Article 3. For general guidance on the application of Convention No. 111 to indigenous peoples, see ILO 2007.

relevance, raising awareness about their existence, promoting their wider acceptance and ownership and enhancing their effectiveness (CEACR 2019a).¹⁴

Violence and harassment pose special challenges to indigenous women's participation and organization, inside and outside the world of work (see, for example, UN 2015 and following chapters). Convention No. 190 defines "violence and harassment" in the world of work as "a range of unacceptable behaviours and practices, or threats thereof, whether a single occurrence or repeated, that aim at, result in, or are likely to result in physical, psychological, sexual or economic harm, and includes gender-based violence and harassment" (art. 1 (a)). With regard to the latter, the Convention clarifies that the term "gender-based violence and harassment" means violence and harassment directed at persons because of their sex or gender, or affecting persons of a particular sex or gender disproportionately, and includes sexual harassment (art. 1 (b)) (see Box two for indigenous women's perspectives on gender-based violence). The Convention embraces an inclusive, integrated and gender-responsive approach to preventing and addressing violence and harassment, which tackles underlying causes and risk factors, including gender stereotypes, multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, and unequal gender-based power relations. As will be discussed in Chapter 4, the full spectrum of the rights recognized in Convention No. 169 is central to addressing gender-based violence against indigenous women.¹⁵ The UNDRIP also proclaims that States shall take measures, in conjunction with indigenous peoples, to ensure that indigenous women and children enjoy full protection and guarantee against all forms of violence and discrimination (art. 22).



¹⁴ See also ILO, *Resolution on equal opportunities and equal treatment for men and women in employment*, 1985, in which the International Labour Conference emphasized that in order to ensure that women's rights and needs are taken into account, every effort should be made to ensure their full participation in decision-making processes at all levels and measures should be taken to remove obstacles to freedom of association and the exercise of trade unions rights by men and women, among others.

¹⁵ ILO Convention No. 169 also calls for the adoption of measures to ensure protection of indigenous workers from sexual harassment (Art. 20.3 (d)).

► 1.4 Scope, methodology and organization of the research

The study looks into various factors including: (1) traditional and evolving social patterns related to women's roles and responsibilities in the family and community, and how these patterns influence women's access to the organizations and institutions promoting decent work and economic empowerment; (2) factors that lie within the sphere of the organizations and institutions concerned; (3) indigenous women's aspirations, perceptions, attitudes and skills, including organizing and leadership skills; and (4) root causes and barriers related to other circumstances or dynamics, including political, social, cultural or religious contexts, or issues of public security or conflicts, including violence and harassment.

The study presents the findings of the qualitative research that was undertaken in four different countries: Bangladesh, the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Cameroon and Guatemala. The research was based on a methodological framework developed for the purpose of this research project (Ballon and Yamin 2019), which builds on the "Installation Theory" (Lahlou 2017). This theory identifies a set of "determinants" of human behaviour that make possible and constrain human activity in local contexts. Local determinants of behaviour can explain why people behave in certain ways in specific contexts, including the elements that make possible certain activities and those that act as barriers to others. Thus, they can point to a path to transform behaviour sustainably based on redesigning the local configuration of those determinants. According to this approach, there are three main types of local determinants:

- The affordances that environments offer (*physical layer*), which include the physical environments and objects that support or prevent the target activities. For example, meeting places.
- The embodied interpretive systems people have (*psychological layer*), which include ideas, representations and skills. For example, the motivation to take part in participation processes or specific skills, such as speaking in public.
- The shared rules and values that are at work in a specific context (*social layer*), which include all the ways in which other people influence our own behavior, such as formal regulations, social roles or social expectations. For example, national laws, organizations' internal rules or social norms regarding how typical and acceptable it is for women to take part in participation processes.

These three layers are not intended to be clear-cut, nor are they mutually exclusive. In fact, they often overlap to influence local behaviours. Notwithstanding, their differentiation is possible and can assist in understanding how the different layers, through their interaction in local contexts, support and constrain real-world behaviours and transformation possibilities.

The research was organized around three questions: (1) What are the main physical, psychological and social barriers faced by indigenous women to organization and participation in decision-making affecting their lives? (2) Which barriers are common/diverge across countries? (3) What are the potential strategies to overcome these barriers?

The country selection was guided by the wish to investigate these issues with regard to indigenous women engaged in a broad spectrum of economic activities, encompassing both traditional occupations, such as agriculture, hunter-gathering and handicraft (all four countries), and other forms of employment, in both urban and rural areas, ranging from domestic work and entrepreneurship to agricultural work (Bangladesh, Cameroon and Guatemala) to more recent forms of labour integration, including work in the construction sector and beauty parlours (Bangladesh and the Plurinational State of Bolivia). Given the differing national contexts, the countries selected provided the opportunity to capture a variety of experiences in terms of organization and participation of indigenous women in relation to traditional governance institutions and local administration bodies, as well as women's associations and trade unions operating at community, regional and national levels.

In all four countries the ILO has been carrying out work over recent years, in partnership with the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) to tackle discrimination against indigenous women and improve protection of their labour rights in selected economic sectors, such as domestic work (Cameroon and Guatemala), tea plantations (Bangladesh) and construction work (the Plurinational State of Bolivia). The ongoing work in the selected countries facilitated the establishment of contacts and relationships essential to the smooth unfolding of the research work. It also provides a platform for follow-up activities.

In order to enable comparability of findings across countries, the methodological framework identified a common set of qualitative research methods to be used for the field research and provided guidance on topics to be raised in the the focus group discussions (see Table 1), as well as common indicators for the selection of the country samples, while leaving a certain degree of flexibility to cater for each country specificity and context.

► **Table 1**

Focus group topics: Physical, psychological and social determinants of behaviour
► The actions or steps that participants would take if they wanted to improve a specific aspect of their working conditions
► The determinants of behaviour that are currently supporting or preventing participation and representation processes (if any), as well as those that are lacking to improve participation, with a focus on three aspects: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ► The infrastructure and other physical elements, like roads and transportation methods, meeting spaces, or communication channels ► The representations, competences and other psychological elements, like skills, cultural roles and expectations, or external information ► The institutional, regulatory and other social elements, like organizational arrangements, programmes and initiatives, or the local, national or international rules and regulations
► Examples of practices/institutions that work good in terms of representation and participation of indigenous women

Source: Adjusted from Ballon and Yamin 2019

The research method proposed consisted of a combination of four qualitative methods comprising: key-informant interviews with relevant policy and community experts; in-depth interviews with indigenous leaders of communities or organizations; focus group discussions with leaders and members of organizations; and structured participant observation of formal and informal meetings in which indigenous women were participating.

The sample in each country study was then selected on the basis of the area of concentration of indigenous women, sector of occupation, and local dynamics and restrictions identified by the national consultants. For example, in the case of the Plurinational State of Bolivia, where there was a particular focus on indigenous women working in the construction sector, the sample required the selection of locations where indigenous women are present and perform as workers in this sector.

Research findings were presented and discussed at validation workshops in 2019 in which indigenous women who were interviewed during the fieldwork participated. Participants in national workshops also included representatives of trade unions and employers' organizations, academics, government officials and representatives of UN agencies and development partners. Once prepared by the national research teams, the set of national studies fed into a global report bringing together main findings with a systematized quantification of the results (Ballon and Yamin 2020). The national and global reports were presented and discussed during a project workshop that took place in February 2020 at the ILO, Geneva. The present final report of this research project draws on the national and global reports as well as the outcome of the Geneva workshop.

► 1.5 Country-specific aspects of the methodology

Field research conducted at the country level followed the common overall methodology, as described above. The scope of the research, however, varied from country to country and the methods used were adjusted to accommodate the countries' different circumstances and realities.

In **Bangladesh**, the research focused on the participation and representation of indigenous women in various decision-making bodies such as traditional social structures, indigenous peoples' organizations, local government bodies and the national parliament. It also examined in-depth violence and harassment against indigenous women in the world of work as a specific barrier to their organization and participation in decision-making (Nasreen and Yan Yan 2019).

The research involved selected indigenous groups from the following zones and districts: (a) North-Bengal: Sirajganj, Rajshahi and Natore, (b) Central North: Netrokona, Tangail and Gazipur, (c) North-East: Sylhet and Moulvibazar, and (d) South-East (Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT)): Bandarban, Khagrachari and Rangamati. In addition, several locations with concentrations of indigenous workers engaged in the formal and informal sectors were also covered, namely the Chittagong Export Processing Zone (EPZ), Dhaka EPZ and Dhaka city. Information was gathered through: 24 key informant interviews with representatives of relevant ministries, relevant UN and other agencies and indigenous and tribal peoples' organizations, community leaders and activists; 52 in-depth unstructured and semi-structured interviews with elected officials in local government bodies, traditional and community leaders, activists, representatives of indigenous and tribal peoples' organizations and trade unions, line managers of garment enterprises and workers from different formal and informal sectors; 50 focus group discussions with indigenous and tribal men, women, young persons, workers, representatives of indigenous and tribal peoples' organizations, and traditional and community leaders; 11 participatory learning workshops; and five case studies on specific individuals to gather individual experience in detail and explore real-life environments and complexities. When selecting informants for the focus group discussions and the participatory learning workshops, special attention was paid to ensuring equitable representation of ethnicities as well as representation from various age groups and socio-economic levels. In the participatory learning workshops, there was a total of 33 participants, of which 28 were women. Concerning particularly the 28 focus group discussions on the participation and representation of indigenous women in decision-making bodies, of the 298 respondents, 189 were women (Nasreen and Yan Yan 2019).

In the **Plurinational State of Bolivia**, the research examined indigenous women's participation and representation in indigenous and peasants' organizations, as well as in some urban workers' organizations. The research involved four organizations, namely the *Confederación Nacional de Mujeres Campesinas Indígenas Originarias de Bolivia "Bartolina Sisa"* (CNMCI OB "BS"); *Confederación Nacional de Mujeres Indígenas del Oriente Boliviano* (CNAMIB); *Asociación de Mujeres Constructoras* (ASOMUC); and *Federación Nacional de Trabajadoras Asalariadas del Hogar* (FENATRAHOB). While the first two organizations are more "political" in nature and deal with claims related to the defence of indigenous peoples' territories, the others are sectoral organizations (construction and domestic work) that focus on labour rights in urban areas. These two particular sectors were chosen because of the high proportion of indigenous women working in them. Information for the research was gathered through: focus groups with an average of ten participants from each of the organizations selected, involving in total 45 women and three men; in-depth interviews with two leaders from each organization; in-depth interviews with five specialists working at the national level with women's organizations; and structured participant observations (Zegada Claire and Canedo Vasquez 2019).

In **Cameroon**, the research focused on examining indigenous women's access to traditional governance institutions and organizations of different kinds, including workers' and indigenous peoples' organizations. It involved indigenous peoples from the Baka community in the department of Dja-et-Lobo in the South region; the Bagyéli community in the Ocean department; and the Mbororo community

in the department of Noun in the West region. Information for the research was gathered through: in-depth interviews with 30 indigenous women from the targeted communities; 25 focus groups, of which 20 had an average participation of ten women in each group and the remaining five included men; and structured participant observations (Memong Meno Epse Mpoung 2019).

Lastly, in **Guatemala**, the research explored barriers to indigenous peoples' participation at family, community and institution/organization levels examining a selected group of 12 organizations working on women's economic empowerment and the realization of labour rights in various economic sectors and activities, including domestic work, agriculture and handicraft. The organizations were selected after having identified the regions and the departments with the highest concentration of indigenous peoples. They are thus based in the departments of: Guatemala, Alta Verapaz, Baja Verapaz, Sololá, Suchitepéquez, Retalhuleu, San Marcos, Quetzaltenango, Totonicapán and Huehuetenango. The organizations examined are: the *Sindicato de trabajadoras domésticas, similares y a cuenta propia* (SITRADOMSA) and *Asociación de trabajadoras del hogar y domicilio* (ASTRAHDOM) in Guatemala City; *Asociación mujer tejedora del desarrollo* (AMUTED) in Quetzaltenango; *Asociación barillense de agricultores* and *Asociación mujeres eulenses para el desarrollo integral* in Huehuetenango; *Cooperación para el desarrollo integral de occidente* (CDRO) in Totonicapán; *Asociación madre tierra* in Suchitepéquez; *Asociación para el desarrollo integral - Maya Ajchmol* in San Marcos; *Asociación comercializadora de mariscos* (ASOMARCH) in Retalhuleu; *Asociación K'ak'Kastajem, nuevo amanecer* in Sololá; *Grupo de mujeres tejedoras organizadas* in Alta Verapaz; and *Comité de mujeres emprendedoras* in Baja Verapaz. Information was gathered through a variety of methods: 14 focus groups with management boards and women members of the abovementioned organizations; 24 in-depth semi-structured interviews with women members of the organizations, 20 key informant interviews with men and women in decision-making positions at national and local levels and/or responsible for designing and implementing public policies directed at women workers; and 14 structured participant observations (FLACSO 2019).

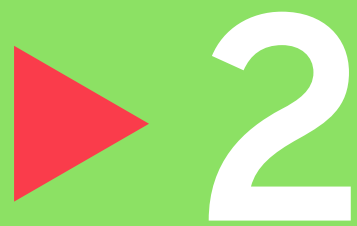


▶ 1.6 Limitations

As discussed above, the study examines different dimensions of indigenous women's participation and organization, covering women's and workers' organizations, indigenous peoples' organizations, and traditional governance institutions, as well as local administration bodies and, in the case of Bangladesh, the national parliament, with a view to identifying the main barriers they face. It should be noted that the study does not include an analysis of the participation of indigenous women and the involvement of their organizations in specific decision-making processes.

A common methodological framework was used to enable comparability across the countries in spite of the different contexts and realities. Nevertheless, due to the specific scope and focus of each country study, certain specific barriers which may be highlighted in one study may not emerge from the other studies. However, this does not necessarily imply an absence of the same barriers in the other countries. Moreover, the Bangladesh study, which was initiated before the definition of the methodological framework, is an outlier in the sense that it had a specific focus on violence and harassment in the world of work. It is also important to note that during the field research some obstacles were encountered, such as the inaccessibility of some indigenous communities or the reluctance and, in certain cases, the fear on the part of some indigenous women to speak about particular subjects. These factors influenced either the selection of the research areas or the type and content of the conversations held.





Indigenous women's socio-economic situation

► 2.1 Overview of the socio-economic situation of indigenous women: global and regional data

According to the latest figures provided by the ILO, indigenous peoples represent 6.2 per cent of the world's population, and total 476.6 million people, of which 238.4 million are women and 238.2 million men (ILO 2019a). Of the global indigenous population, 70.5 per cent live in Asia and the Pacific, 16.3 per cent live in Africa, 11.5 per cent live in Latin America and the Caribbean, 1.6 per cent live in Northern America and 0.1 per cent live in Europe and Central Asia. ILO research also indicates that a vast majority of indigenous men and women continue to live in rural areas. More specifically, the available information shows that the highest share of indigenous peoples living in rural areas across all regions is found in Africa, followed by Asia and the Pacific, and Europe and Central Asia (for more details see ILO 2019a, para. 56ff).

In addition, data also suggest that, particularly in middle-income countries, indigenous peoples are increasingly migrating from rural to urban areas as a result of the combination of a series of pull and push factors, including lack of access to basic services and employment opportunities, land dispossessions and violence (ILO 2019a, para. 56ff; see also, among others, UN 2014b and UN 2014c). Local conflicts related to the control and use of indigenous peoples' territories are found in all regions of the world (ECLAC 2014). Climate change, together with pollution and environmental degradation, is also significantly affecting indigenous communities (see in ILO 2017a).¹⁶ Yet, research in Latin America shows that the indigenous population tends to migrate less than non-indigenous individuals to urban areas, reflecting indigenous peoples' relationship to their territories above and beyond any adversities. It is also noted that indigenous men and women alike tend to prefer destinations in geographic areas close to their ancestral territories (ECLAC 2014). Many indigenous peoples make efforts to maintain the relationship with their territory, regularly returning to their territories and their communities (see, for example, UN-Habitat 2014).

Poverty indicators portray a situation of continuing disadvantage for indigenous men and women, with 18.3 per cent of indigenous women and 17.5 per cent of indigenous men living below \$1.90 a day compared to 6.8 per cent of non-indigenous people (ILO 2019a). Across the various regions, indigenous women fare worse than non-indigenous women and than indigenous men in an array of socio-economic indicators for which statistical information is available (see Table 2). For example, globally 53.5 per cent of indigenous women in employment have no education, compared to 42.5 per cent of indigenous men and 17.8 per cent of non-indigenous women. Only 8.8 per cent of indigenous women have attained further education, compared to 22.9 per cent of non-indigenous women.

Indigenous women have a considerably lower employment participation rate when compared to indigenous men, 49.3 per cent and 77.1 per cent respectively. They show however a higher participation in employment than non-indigenous women, for which the participation rate is 43 per cent. Nevertheless, they are 25.6 percentage points more likely to be working in the informal economy than non-indigenous women.¹⁷ The informality gap between indigenous and non-indigenous people is highest in Latin America and the Caribbean, where indigenous peoples have an informality rate of 82.6 per cent, which is 31.5 percentage points higher than that of non-indigenous people (51.1 per cent) (ILO 2019a). When working in the informal economy, indigenous women may often fall outside the reach of trade unions. However, examples of fruitful collaboration have been reported (see, for example, ILO 2015; see also,

¹⁶ In this regard, it should be noted that women and girls are more likely to be exposed to disaster-induced risks and losses relating to their livelihoods, and that they are less able to adapt to changes in climatic conditions, including as a result of their lack of participation in relevant decision-making processes (see also CEDAW 2018).

¹⁷ It is worth noting that indigenous peoples in general are more likely to work in the informal economy across all regions (for further information see ILO 2019a).



more generally on the alliance between the trade union movement and indigenous peoples, Ledesma Céspedes 2020).

Both indigenous men and women, when compared to their non-indigenous counterparts, are more likely to be working as own-account workers and less likely to be wage and salaried workers. In particular, indigenous women are nearly half as likely to be in wage and salaried work, and twice as likely to be contributing family workers when compared to non-indigenous women (ILO 2019a). In terms of their earnings, the data available indicate that indigenous peoples who are in wage and salaried work tend to earn less than their non-indigenous counterparts. On average, they earn 18.5 per cent less, with the highest gap being found in Latin America and the Caribbean (31.2 per cent). The pay gap between indigenous women and non-indigenous women is 8.2 per cent, which is lower than the wage gap faced by indigenous men when compared to non-indigenous men (ILO 2019a).

In sum, the information available indicates that across all regions, indigenous peoples continue to face a situation of socio-economic disadvantage, which is even greater in the case of indigenous women. As will be discussed in the following chapters, these factors of disadvantage have a distinct impact on indigenous women and their capacity of participation and organization. In the following section, a more detailed description of the realities of indigenous women living in the four countries selected for the study will be provided along with a brief description of the overall context concerning them. This will serve as a background to the description of the barriers to indigenous women's participation and organization provided in Chapter 3.

► Table 2. Socio-economic profile of indigenous men and women

Indicator	Group	Men	Women	Total
Global estimates of indigenous population				
	Number (in millions)	238,2	238,4	476,6
	Share of indigenous peoples in total population	6,1%	6,2%	6,2%
	Share of indigenous peoples in low-income countries	10,2%	9,9%	10,1%
	Share of indigenous peoples in high-income countries	1,0%	1,0%	1,0%
Educational attainment				
	Indigenous			
	No education	43%	54%	47%
	Basic	38%	27%	34%
	Intermediate	12%	11%	12%
	Advanced	7%	9%	8%
	Non- indigenous			
	No education	17%	18%	17%
	Basic	43%	36%	40%
	Intermediate	23%	24%	23%
	Advanced	18%	23%	20%
Monetary poverty incidence \$1.90 a day (2011 PPP)				
	Indigenous	18%	18%	18%
	Non- indigenous	6%	7%	7%
Participation in employment (employment-to-population ratios)				
	Indigenous	77%	49%	63%
	Aged 15-24 years	57%	39%	48%
	With children under 6 year of age	86%	44%	
	Non- indigenous	72%	46%	59%
	Aged 15-24 years	43%	28%	36%
	With children under 6 year of age	89%	44%	
Employment status - (ICSE-93)				
	Indigenous			
	Wage and salaried workers	30%	24%	28%
	Own account workers	50%	41%	50%
	Contributing family workers	12%	34%	20%
	Employers	2%	1%	2%
	Non- indigenous			
	Wage and salaried workers	48%	51%	49%
	Own account workers	43%	30%	38%
	Contributing family workers	6%	18%	10%
	Employers	4%	2%	2,8%
Indigenous wage gap : non indigenous vs. indigenous (based on mean hourly wages)				
		24%	8%	19%
Informal employment as a share of total employment				
	Indigenous	86%	87%	86%
	Non- indigenous	70%	61%	66%

Source: ILO 2019a.

► 2.2 Indigenous women in Bangladesh, the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Cameroon and Guatemala.

2.2.1 The overall context

Indigenous peoples' rights and the principle of gender equality are recognized in the national legal and policy frameworks of all four research countries, although the extent of such recognition varies considerably across them, with the greatest level found in the Latin American countries (see the country profiles annexed to the study).

Whereas the Plurinational State of Bolivia and Guatemala were among the first countries to ratify Convention No. 169 respectively in 1991 and 1996,¹⁸ Cameroon has not yet ratified it and Bangladesh has ratified the Indigenous and Tribal Populations Convention, 1957 (No. 107), the predecessor of Convention No. 169. All four countries have, however, ratified other ILO Conventions particularly relevant to the protection of indigenous people's rights and the promotion of gender equality, including Convention No. 111. Furthermore, the Plurinational State of Bolivia incorporated the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples into its national legislation through Act No. 3760 of 2007.

In spite of the varying national contexts and their specific histories and contemporary situations, indigenous peoples in the four countries are faced with some common challenges, which encompass discrimination, insufficient or lacking consultation and participation in decision-making processes concerning them and land disposessions, often occurring in connection with the realization of infrastructure projects, resource extraction, and the establishment of national parks and reserves, among others.¹⁹ This has had a particularly harsh impact on indigenous women who are responsible for feeding and caring for their family members on a daily basis, putting them frequently in a situation of great distress. Cases of violence are also found in all countries.

The research undertaken in Cameroon found, for example, that indigenous men and women belonging to communities who have lost access to their lands have been forced to look for alternative means of survival, resorting to work as agriculture labourers for their Bantu neighbours. They are often exploited in conditions that may amount to forced labour ("kassa" practices).²⁰ Besides entailing the loss of their livelihoods and their main source of income and food, some of the indigenous women interviewed also mentioned the adverse impact on their health and that of their children that stemmed from the loss of access to their lands and the pertaining natural resources. They emphasized in particular the fact that, when deprived of their lands, they lose access to the medicinal plants that their communities traditionally use to attend to pregnant women and children. The country study further pointed out that, since 2016, the pastoralists groups, the Mbororo, have been forced to leave the Northwest region where some of them used to live because of the conflict affecting the area (Memong Meno Epse Mpoung 2019).

In Bangladesh, it has been estimated that approximately 22 per cent of indigenous households in the CHT have lost their lands (IFAD 2012). Several areas traditionally occupied or used by indigenous peoples

¹⁸ The ratification of Convention No. 169 in the Plurinational State of Bolivia and Guatemala was an integral part of the national processes of consolidation of democracy and, in the case of Guatemala, of the peace process ending a civil war that had lasted more than 30 years.

¹⁹ See CEACR's comments available at www.ilo.org/normlex and UN treaty bodies' comments at www.ohchr.org. See also IWGIA 2019.

²⁰ See for example UN General Assembly, Report of the Independent Expert on minority issues, Rita Izsák, A/HRC/25/56/Add.1 (2014).

have, over time, been declared forests reserves or “natural parks” have been included within privately owned tea estates. This has led to evictions of communities and, in some cases, to land-related conflicts that have exposed indigenous women to violence and harassment (see the next chapter). The research has underscored that land dispossession has been a factor behind many indigenous women searching for alternative sources of livelihood and income, working as wage labourers in agriculture or migrating to urban centres where they engage frequently in low-paying jobs with poor working conditions, often in the informal.²¹ Existing wage discrepancy between women and men in rural areas may also contribute towards the migration of indigenous women to urban areas economy (Nasreen and Yan Yan 2019).²²

Patterns of violence and conflicts are found also in Guatemala, “keeping alive the legacy of violence and genocide dating from the time of the internal armed conflict of 1960 to 1996”, particularly in indigenous territories, where land rights are insufficiently protected (UN 2018a, para. 6). Cases of rape or murder of indigenous women and girls and of abuse of them during forced evictions have been reported. Some indigenous women have also claimed that there exists a correlation between the presence of corporations in their territories and the exposure of women and girls to sexual and labour exploitation (UN 2018a, para. 6). The civic space in country has been subject to severe restrictions, which limit the work of human rights defenders and civil society in general and, more particularly, there has been a considerable increase in the repression of social, community and indigenous organizations calling for respect for their rights (see UN 2020e; UN 2018a and CEACR 2019b). Episodes of violence against indigenous peoples have also occurred in the Plurinational State of Bolivia, in the context of the socio-political tensions in the country (OAS 2019). Reports have also pointed to cases of internal trafficking of indigenous women for purposes of forced prostitution, in particular in areas of major development projects (CEDAW 2015).

2.2.2 Indigenous women's multiple roles

In the various communities and realities examined for the study, indigenous women, without exception, perform multiple roles that include: productive work of different types; household work which may encompass fetching water, wood and fuel for cooking; children's education; and care for children and other family members (see country profiles in the annex). Although the indigenous population in the four countries examined remain largely rural, in Guatemala and the Plurinational State of Bolivia there is a greater presence of indigenous women in urban areas. The country study in the Plurinational State of Bolivia notes that both indigenous women working in the rural areas and those who have migrated to cities maintain a profound link to their communities of origin and to their cultures, beliefs and traditions. In urban areas, however, this relationship weakens with time and the new generations are less influenced by indigenous customs (Zegada Claire and Canedo Vasquez 2019).²³

The indigenous women interviewed for the country studies were engaged in different types of economic activities. In Cameroon, for example, Baka, Bakola/Bagyéli and Bedzang women go fishing and hunting to ensure food supplies for their families, and produce and sell handicrafts, such as baskets and mats, for income. Some of them work as agriculture labourers for their Bantu neighbours. This is especially

21 In urban areas, indigenous women tend to work in beauty parlours, fashion houses or as domestic workers. They are also found in the formal sector in the garment industry.

22 In both the plains and the CHT, the indigenous women interviewed reported that women generally receive lower wages than men (for example, Tk 400–450 for men and Tk 300–350 for women per day in the plains and Tk 350–400 for men and Tk 250–350 for women per day in the CHT). The country study observed that the wage discrimination experienced by indigenous women is based on their gender rather than their ethnicity because similar wage discrepancies are maintained in wages of non-indigenous men and women. It is thus noted that in both the plains and in the CHT, there is no wage discrimination between indigenous women and non-indigenous women. The same is observed between indigenous men and non-indigenous men (Nasreen and Yan Yan 2019).

23 It is worth recalling the discrimination faced by indigenous women working as domestic workers in the cities which forces them to renounce their traditional identities and give up, for example, their traditional clothes or cut their braids (Zegada Claire and Canedo Vasquez 2019)._

the case of those communities who have lost access to their lands and have thus been forced to look for alternative means of survival. As for Mbororo women, who belong to pastoralist communities, they sell milk and raise poultry (Memong Meno Epse Mpoung 2019). In Bangladesh, indigenous women in rural areas are engaged in agricultural work or in the production of handicrafts. Those who have migrated to urban areas work in beauty parlours, fashion houses, the garment industry or as domestic workers (Nasreen and Yan Yan 2019). The situation of the indigenous women interviewed in Guatemala and the Plurinational State of Bolivia is similar, with indigenous women in rural areas engaged mainly in agricultural work and handicraft production, and in urban areas working as domestic workers or construction workers (FLACSO 2019; Zegada Claire and Canedo Vasquez 2019). The country studies on Guatemala and the Plurinational State of Bolivia note in particular that indigenous women receive lower salaries than other workers and, in the case of domestic workers, their salary is reduced when bringing their children to work (Zegada Claire and Canedo Vasquez 2019) (see Chapter 3).

As noted in some of the country studies, indigenous women frequently end up in the informal economy outside the scope of action of trade unions (see for example FLACSO 2019). Moreover, as emerged from the country study on Cameroon or Guatemala (in this case with regard in particular to domestic workers in urban areas) indigenous women may not be aware of the existence of trade unions (Memong Meno Epse Mpoung 2019; FLACSO 2019). In the case of Cameroon, in particular, the country study reports that trade unions were not present in the areas selected for the research and indigenous women knew very little about them and did not see the relevance to their realities (Memong Meno Epse Mpoung 2019). Another obstacle to indigenous women's engagement with trade unions is the fear of reprisals, which was reported, for example, from indigenous women in Bangladesh and indigenous women domestic workers in the Plurinational State of Bolivia, whereas indigenous women working in the construction sector mostly referred to a communication problem (Nasreen and Yan Yan 2019; Zegada Claire and Canedo Vasquez 2019).

2.2.3 Indigenous women within their families and communities

The field research showed that indigenous women are often regarded as the pillars of their communities, and the cornerstone of their social organization and the preservation and transmission of their peoples' culture (see, for example, the country profiles of Cameroon and Guatemala). Notwithstanding, they have in most cases a subordinate role within their families and communities, with less decision-making power and autonomy than men (see the country profiles). This often implies that their adhesion to an organization or their participation in organizations' operations is in many cases subject to men's "approval". Moreover, despite their central role in food production, in most cases indigenous women from the research countries have no independent entitlements to the land they use recognized in law or in practice. They have therefore little voice, if any, in decisions concerning the overall management of the land and receive no compensation in case of evictions²⁴ (see country profiles in the annex). Most indigenous women have very limited access to means of production and may often only manage a small courtyard where they cultivate vegetables (see, for example, FLACSO 2019). Certain country studies also reported that some indigenous women do not manage the income they earn (see country profiles in the annex).

Overall, the country studies confirmed the existence of a gender-based distribution of roles within indigenous women's families and communities. The indigenous women interviewed emphasized the importance of their role as caregivers, which remains for them the top priority (see further in the following chapters). In this regard, it is interesting to note certain concepts from the indigenous cosmovision about the relationship between men and women that were highlighted in the country studies on Guatemala and the Plurinational State of Bolivia. For example, the notion of *chachawarmi*, of the indigenous peoples in the Plurinational State of Bolivia, underlines the complementarity between men's and women's roles

²⁴ See for example CEDAW 2015 on the Plurinational State of Bolivia or Njieassam 2019 on Cameroon.

on a basis of mutual respect – “walking together in equal conditions” (Zegada Claire and Canedo Vasquez 2019). Similarly, in the Maya culture, men and women are seen as having complementary roles of equal importance (FLACSO 2019; Xiap 2014). However, indigenous women participating in the national research conducted for this study indicated that prevailing gender roles and structures are not free from tensions. Imbalances in the gender relations within indigenous communities have also been reinforced by the influence of external factors (Xiap 2014; AIPP 2012).²⁵

According to the field research in Cameroon and Bangladesh, which looked at governance institutions and decision-making processes at community and local levels, traditional bodies are composed of and led by the male members of the communities in the vast majority of cases. However, as will be described in Chapter 4, changes towards indigenous women's fuller participation have been noted. Concerning local government institutions, the two country studies found that indigenous women's participation remains low. The research conducted in Bangladesh revealed in particular that indigenous women participating in electoral processes have been facing threats and intimidation as a way of forcing their withdrawal (see below and Bangladesh country profile in the annex for more details on the level of participation in governance institutions). As for Cameroon, the country study found only one indigenous woman member of a local council in the areas visited. People interviewed suggested that this finding was a relatively accurate reflection of the situation throughout the country (Memong Meno Epse Mpoung 2019).

In addition, the field research revealed that in all countries, whether in urban or rural areas, the time women invest in the broad range of their daily chores leaves them, in practice, with little opportunity to engage in other processes, such as getting involved with an organization's work or taking part in decision-making processes at various levels. The field research in Cameroon also highlighted that in rural areas the absence of infrastructure and the insufficient and inappropriate availability of the most basic social services, notably access to drinking water, wells, sanitary facilities, electricity, and health centres and schools, impact heavily on women's time and, in turn, on their capacity to engage in other processes.

2.2.4 Indigenous women's initiatives towards greater participation and organization

In the face of the challenges confronting them as members of indigenous peoples, women and workers, indigenous women in all four countries appear to be engaged in the defence of their collective and individual rights, despite the multiple obstacles they encounter (see the following chapters).

The field research noted, for example, that in Guatemala many indigenous women are involved in the indigenous movement operating throughout the country and, in some cases, they have been successful in adding their own claims and perspectives to the broad themes at the heart of the movement's demands for recognition and respect of indigenous peoples' cultural identity, defence of their territories and fight against discrimination. Moreover, indigenous women have also been able to establish their own organizations, such as the ones examined for the purpose of the research,²⁶ including trade unions. Nevertheless, indigenous women still experience challenges to their representation and participation (see Chapter 3).

²⁵ See FIMI 2006 according to which “[m]any Indigenous cultural values, including gender complementarity, have been eroded or eradicated over centuries of colonization and religious conversion. The fact that gender complementarity once functioned as a cultural value does not mean that it is operative in someone today simply because that person is Indigenous. Yet, a process of remembering and reclaiming this tradition—what some Indigenous anti-violence activists have termed ‘retraditionalization’— can serve to reactivate it” (FIMI 2006, p. 23).

²⁶ It should be noted that, at the time the research was undertaken, of the 12 organizations examined, only five were carrying out productive projects directed at women's economic empowerment, while the others lacked financial resources.

In Bangladesh, according to the research conducted into some of the most prominent organizations of indigenous peoples at national and local levels,²⁷ indigenous women represent, on average, 15–24 per cent of the organizations' members. In all the organizations surveyed, women are part of the executive committees. All organizations' by-laws provide for women's representation on these committees, although only in one case a specific quota (three seats) is reserved for them. Furthermore, by-laws prescribe that the committees shall have a secretary for women's affairs and this position is reserved for women. The representatives of the organizations interviewed stated, however, that finding indigenous women with the skills required for decision-making positions is not easy. Nevertheless, indigenous peoples' organizations have taken a number of measures with a view to empowering indigenous women. Some of them, for instance, have created "women wings" that operate under the overall coordination of the main organization. Thus, for example, the Parbatya Chattogram Jana Sanghati Samiti (PCJSS) and the Pahari Shromik Kalyan Forum (Hill Workers' Welfare Forum) have separate "women wings", namely: Parbatya Chattogram Mahila Samity (CHT Women's Association) and Pahari Mohila Shromik Kalyan Forum (Hill Women Worker Welfare Forum). At the national level, one indigenous women's organization has been established: the Bangladesh Indigenous Women's Forum.²⁸

In Cameroon, the major organizations set up to protect indigenous peoples' rights, at national or local level, such as the Socio-Cultural Association for Livestock Breeders of Cameroon (SODELCO), Mbororo Social and Cultural Development Association (MBOSCUDA), *Association des Baka de Mintom* (ABAWONI) and *Association pour le Développement des Baka* (ADEBAKA), count women among their members in the majority of cases. However, women mainly cover the functions of treasurer or auditor and are excluded from decision-making positions.²⁹

As regards the Plurinational State of Bolivia, women in general, including indigenous women, have been creating women-only organizations in order to gain an autonomous voice vis-à-vis men. This is the case, for example, of the *Confederación Nacional de Mujeres Campesinas Indígenas Originarias de Bolivia "Bartolina Sisa"*, which has sought to establish an independent voice from the male-dominated *Confederación Sindical Única de Trabajadores Campesinos de Bolivia*, or the *Confederación Nacional de Mujeres Indígenas del Oriente Boliviano*. A similar phenomenon is observed in urban areas, where, for instance, women workers in the construction sector have established their own association – the *Asociación de Mujeres Constructoras* – distinct from the trade union of the sector. Domestic workers have also created the *Federación Nacional de Trabajadoras Asalariadas del Hogar*, which is affiliated to the *Central Obrera Boliviana* (COB). Respondents indicated that in mixed organizations, including the trade unions, patriarchal attitudes prevail and it is particularly difficult for women to make their voices heard and respected, although their collaboration remains important to strengthen their demands before the State³⁰ (see country profile in the annex for more details).

27 For the purpose of the research, the following organizations were examined: Jatiyo Adivasi Parishad (the National Indigenous Peoples' Council); Tribal Welfare Association; Parbatya Chattogram Jana Sanghati Samiti, PCJSS; Pahari Shromik Kalyan Forum (the Hill Workers' Welfare Forum); Bangladesh Adivasi Forum (Bangladesh Indigenous Peoples Forum), BIPF; Bangladesh Indigenous Women's Forum, BIWN; and Bangladesh Indigenous Peoples Network on Climate Change and Biodiversity, BIPNet-CCBD. The structures, composition of executive committees and by-laws of these organizations were reviewed and focus group discussions and interviews were carried out to assess the level of representation and participation of indigenous women in them.

28 The respondents indicated that this organization depends, however, on external support from other organizations on secretarial and financial matters, among others, because its members lack capacity to secure funding and organize events.

29 It should be noted that trade unions were not present in the areas covered by the field research.

30 This is the case, for example, for the request made by domestic workers for health insurance (Zegada Claire and Canedo Vasquez 2019).





▶ 3

Barriers to indigenous women's participation and organization: systematization of findings and comparison across countries

Indigenous women face multiple and mutually reinforcing barriers to their organization and participation, operating at the individual and collective levels. In the following sub-sections, a number of these barriers will be described as they emerged from the interaction with indigenous women. They have been classified according to the structure proposed in the methodological framework described in Chapter 1 which identifies three main categories of barriers or “layers of determinants”, namely physical, psychological and socio-institutional. Under each of these layers, sub-layers of determinants have been identified (see Table 3). Subsequently, under each sub-layer, the barriers discussed with indigenous women during the field work have been grouped into sub-categories for the purpose of systematization, “quantification” and comparison across countries.

► **Table 3. Classification of barriers**

Layers of determinants		
Physical	Psychological	Social
Sub-layers		
Environmental and economic conditions	Awareness and knowledge	Gender norms, roles and perceptions
Physical meeting spaces	Skills and abilities	Discrimination, violence and harassment
Communication networks	Emotions and motivation	Political and organizational issues

Source: Ballon and Yamin 2020.

It should be emphasized that the barriers described below may be “cross-cutting” and at the same time constitute, for example, a physical, a psychological and socio-institutional obstacle. Also, indigenous women may perceive them in different ways. In addition, most, if not all, barriers are strongly linked to – or even originate in – the socio-institutional context in which indigenous women and their communities live. In this connection, it is worth noting that the conversations held with indigenous women in the context of the research were guided by a questionnaire, based on the common methodology. It is also important to underscore that the series of barriers presented in the following sections are not therefore exhaustive (see also section 1.5 on limitations). In order to have a bigger picture of the vast array of obstacles faced by indigenous women with respect to organization and participation, the following findings should be read taking into account the overall social, economic and political contexts concerning indigenous peoples in the countries in question, as well as the specific reality of indigenous women as briefly described in the previous sections and further detailed in the country profiles annexed to the study. Finally, it is worth recalling that the findings are based on qualitative data. They are not intended to represent the actual incidence of any given barrier in the national context, but rather the perception that indigenous women may have about them.

► 3.1 Physical barriers

The physical barriers to indigenous women's participation and organization have been classified according to three main sub-layers: environmental and economic conditions; physical meeting spaces; and communication networks (see Table 3). The related findings are as follows:

3.1.1 Environmental and economic conditions

a. Financial dependence on men

Financial dependence on men significantly limits indigenous women's ability to engage in participation processes, including electoral processes. The study in Bangladesh, for example, highlights the fact that indigenous women's financial dependence on their husbands or other male family members represents a challenge to their involvement in public processes as, for instance, women would normally be unable to afford the costs of conducting a campaign prior to elections, nor would they be in a position to sustain the costs of a public representative function. Thus, without the support from the male members of the family, it is not possible for indigenous women to engage in the formal governance system. The link between land rights and financial dependence on men was raised in particular in the case of Bangladesh where, in some indigenous communities, women have limited rights to land.³¹ In the Plurinational State of Bolivia, some indigenous women also mentioned their lack of land rights as an obstacle, especially in the case of widows or single women (on this point, see the previous chapter). Indigenous women workers in the construction sector further referred to the fact that single women lack access to credit because they cannot offer sufficient guarantees, while the same obstacles do not apply to married women.

b. Poverty and lack of infrastructure and basic services

The overall circumstances concerning their communities also affect indigenous women's participation and organization and represent further barriers. In Guatemala, for example, women interviewed mentioned that the poor road network is a major barrier to women's participation. Roads are lacking or in very poor condition, which means that women have to walk, often long distances, to reach the meeting place and may face security risks along the way, which discourage them from attending. When roads do exist, transport services are scarce and unsafe and their cost represents, in many cases, a further impediment to women's participation.³² Similarly, in Cameroon, indigenous women stated that transport is not always available and the cost may be excessive for women. They indicated that these aspects are seldom taken into account by the organizers of public events, including NGOs and public authorities, thus preventing women from participating. Equally, women are not in a position to convene inter-community gatherings of women to discuss their issues and organize around common challenges.

The limited or lacking access to essential public services, such as health centres and education also represent for indigenous women a barrier to participation in various respects, as expressed by the women interviewed in all countries (on access to education, see below on Bangladesh and the other countries). In Guatemala, some women have related more generally that there may be a lack of interest on the part of women in engaging with organizations given the dire poverty in which the vast majority of them and their families live. This means that their interest will only be aroused if there are some concrete benefits from their participation. In this respect, it was noted that productive projects and cooperatives

³¹ See county profile in the annex for more information on women's land entitlements in Bangladesh.

³² In many communities, transport is available only on market days. On other days, arranging transport services may be difficult and overly expensive.

are those that most attract women. Also, some organizations, for example those studied in Alta Verapaz, were established by women who were able to identify common interests in defending their territories against extractive projects and protecting their traditional fabric design from appropriation. In short, indigenous women's limited economic resources have severe repercussions on their organizational capacity. In the Plurinational State of Bolivia, indigenous women interviewed indicated that one of the major barriers to women's organization and its sustainability in the medium and long term lies in their shortage of economic resources.

Concerning urban areas more particularly, indigenous women members of the *Federación Nacional de Trabajadoras Asalariadas del Hogar* in the Plurinational State of Bolivia indicated that the lack of access to health services is for them an important obstacle, and obtaining health insurance for their category is a priority. A similar demand regarding the creation of health insurance for their specific category is being made by the *Asociación de Mujeres Constructoras*. The lack of access to adequate housing is also perceived by indigenous women living in urban areas as a barrier to their participation and organization, as expressed in particular by the indigenous women working in the construction sector and in domestic work, in the Plurinational State of Bolivia. The lack of nurseries is seen an additional obstacle by indigenous women domestic workers, as well as by those working in the construction sector, who have emphasized the need for public nurseries to adjust their working hours to meet the needs of the construction sector, which has a very early start time, for example.

c. Lack of access to financial support for organizations

As mentioned above, indigenous women's limited economic resources have an impact on their organizational capacity. This difficulty is compounded by the fact that their organizations often lack the financial support needed to perform their work, including covering the costs of their staff and affording adequate meeting space and accommodation, for example, when leaders have to move to other cities after being elected for office. In Guatemala, for example, most of the organizations researched indicated that they frequently do not have the financial means to carry out activities.³³ They lack an office and a dedicated space in which to hold meetings or keep documents, as well as paid staff to support their work. They emphasized that these factors represent significant impediments to the sustainability and functioning of the organizations, which, in turn, further discourage women's membership. Similar considerations emerged from the field work in the Plurinational State of Bolivia. Some of those women interviewed also stated that they have to invest their own financial resources into commuting from their communities to meeting places to take part in the work of the organization, which poses a further challenge to them.

d. Lack of identity cards

Lack of identity documents may represent a further obstacle to indigenous women's participation and organization.³⁴ This issue was raised in particular by the indigenous women interviewed in Cameroon who referred to that fact that the absence of identity documents prevents them from applying to public posts in the local administration or participating in local elections.

³³ It has been noted that some organizations have been financially supported by international cooperation but funds have recently been considerably reduced.

³⁴ It should be noted that the lack of identity documents is an issue affecting both indigenous men and women.

3.1.2 Physical meeting spaces

a. Lack of adequate meeting places

According to the findings from the country studies, in the vast majority of cases indigenous women lack adequate meeting space. In practice, this limits the frequency, duration and privacy of indigenous women's meetings. Moreover, the absence of dedicated meeting places adds a considerable administrative and logistic burden on women who intend to convene a meeting or, more generally, carry out work for their organizations. Indigenous women interviewed reported the need to use public venues as meeting places or to share them with other institutions, often led by men. They perceive this situation as limiting the scope of their discussions. Dedicated meeting space would not only increase safety and reduce administrative burdens for collective meetings, but could also be used for training, skills development and cultural activities in their communities.

In Guatemala, most of the organizations researched referred to the lack of an office and dedicated space in which to hold meetings. Similarly, in the Plurinational State of Bolivia, indigenous women interviewed indicated that their organizations do not have their own offices. Frequently, they have to share working spaces with men, leading to difficulties, especially because husbands may prefer that their spouses are separated from other men. As far as the rural organizations examined were concerned, the situation may be slightly different owing to their political role. For example, the *Confederación Nacional de Mujeres Campesinas Indígenas Originarias de Bolivia "Bartolina Sisa"* received a new office in La Paz in 2013, which offers the possibility to host leaders from the local level when they come to the capital to attend meetings, workshops or other events. However, at the local level, these organizations also lack physical means and may have to convene meetings in private houses.

In the same vein, in Cameroon, in all areas visited for the purpose of the research, a lack of dedicated space to hold meetings was shared by all women. They indicated that they therefore tend to meet mostly at the village chief's place or in other meeting rooms. The opinions showed that this situation seems to stem from men's wish to attend women's gatherings and "control" the subject of discussions.

b. Lack of washing and sanitation facilities, and proper infrastructure in the meeting places

In Cameroon, indigenous women reported that the meeting space they use often lacks separate sanitation facilities for women, as well as drinking water. In Guatemala, indigenous women from the organizations studied reported that they lack a space to keep documents, and access to information and communication technologies, because of their economic constraints. These factors adversely affect their meetings and the unfolding of their organizations' work.

c. Distance to meeting places

Indigenous women in Cameroon, the Plurinational State of Bolivia and Guatemala indicated that meetings often take place far away from their communities. In order for them to attend, indigenous women need to arrange and pay for transportation to those places. In particular, they report long travel times, high costs of transport and lack of options for public transportation as barriers that prevent their attendance to meetings.

Indigenous women from the Plurinational State of Bolivia living in rural areas, for example, indicated that distances are considerable and transport costs pose a challenge to women's participation and organization. Women invest their own financial resources into commuting from their communities to meeting places. When meetings are held in departmental capitals, the cost may be excessive for them, thereby preventing their participation. Similar concerns were raised by indigenous women in Guatemala

(see section 3.1.1 (b)). Concerning Cameroon, indigenous women reported that the distances between communities and main centres at local level are vast; means of transport are not always available and their cost may be excessive, hindering their participation.

3.1.3 Access to information and communication networks

An additional physical barrier to indigenous women's participation and organization may lie in their limited access to relevant information and in their communication networks, which in some cases is weak. In Cameroon, for example, indigenous women reported that an additional challenge for them is the poor access to any relevant information. Those who hold information, including on community meetings, control its distribution and may sideline women. In addition, as mentioned above, distances between communities and main centres at local level are vast and transport costs are prohibitive, further limiting women's access to information and frequently preventing them from convening inter-community gatherings to discuss their issues and organize around common challenges. The latter seems to be a reality for most indigenous women living in rural areas, as illustrated previously.

In Guatemala, some indigenous women also referred to the absence of information and presence of women's organizations in their communities. Indigenous women interviewed indicated that existing organizations often lack coordination, sometimes due to jealousy and competition among them. Some domestic workers reported in particular that indigenous women are often not aware of the existence of organizations which may help them. More generally, the majority of women interviewed indicated that, in order to ensure a regular flow of communication, they use social media (mostly WhatsApp, followed by Facebook, Instagram and Twitter). However, they also reported that many indigenous women do not have access to the internet or lack the economic resources needed, and thus remain unconnected. Furthermore, many indigenous women members of entrepreneurship support groups are illiterate, and phone calls and home visits remain a common means of communication. In some areas, like Alta Verapaz, community radios were also used in the past to convene meetings, but they have been replaced by telephone communications.

In the Plurinational State of Bolivia, indigenous women, such as the members of the *Asociación de Mujeres Constructoras*, reported that they tend to use social media to maintain a regular flow of information (for example WhatsApp groups are used to announce forthcoming meetings). However, many continue to prefer direct contact, such as phone calls, as establishing mutual trust is seen as important.



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► 3.2 Psychological barriers

The psychological barriers to indigenous women's participation and organization have been classified according to three main sub-layers: awareness and knowledge; skills and abilities; and emotions and motivation (see Table 3). The related findings are presented below:

3.2.1 Awareness and knowledge

a. Lack of awareness about rights

In the Plurinational State of Bolivia, some indigenous women reported that a lack of information about their labour rights, the relevant legislation and salary levels significantly affect women's participation since such factors hinder their ability to make decisions. In particular, it was noted that indigenous women workers in urban centres who have migrated from rural areas tend to have very little knowledge, if any, about their rights, the value of money and the level of salary they are entitled to. Women indicated that in these cases support from organizations, including trade unions, is crucial. The country study mentions, for example, the leaflets produced and distributed by the *Red Boliviana de Mujeres Transformando la Economía (REMTE)* containing information on legislative provisions and other relevant information about the domestic work sector. Some indigenous women further reported that when men get involved women in their organizations, often to fulfil quota requirements, they tend to select young women because they have less knowledge and experience and may thus be more easily manipulated.

In Bangladesh, indigenous women's lack of awareness of their rights is also seen as a significant barrier to their participation in decision-making processes concerning them. It has been observed, for example, that in the CHT, where civil society is more vibrant and indigenous women have long been part of the indigenous rights movement, women are more likely to express support for indigenous women's representation in traditional governance structures compared to indigenous women in the plains who have had less opportunity to participate in awareness-raising programmes or other activities relating to indigenous peoples and women's rights conducted by civil society organizations or the Government (see below and in Chapter 4).

b. Lack of knowledge about customary and statutory provisions regulating governance institutions and other relevant norms

In Bangladesh, indigenous women's lack of knowledge of customary laws, as well as the lack of information and knowledge of the various local administration bodies, their responsibilities and the legislative provision governing them was reported as a major barrier to women's participation. The lack of interest in women's participation in decision-making processes, held by many of the women interviewed, was based on the belief that women tend to lack knowledge of the customs and practices by which their respective communities are governed. The country study also revealed that, once elected as members of formal governance bodies,³⁵ indigenous women face a number of challenges to performing their duties that include the lack of knowledge of rules and functions of the concerned bodies and its standing committees (see country profile in the annex).

³⁵ It should be recalled that the national legislation provides for quotas to ensure women's representation in elective bodies. See the country profile in the annex.

In Cameroon, the country study similarly reported that indigenous women have limited access to information concerning local and national elections, as well as the procedural rules governing the process. In all the communities visited for the research, none of the women interviewed could provide information on the local forthcoming elections. In practice, indigenous women are excluded from the processes, unless men approach them directly to solicit their votes.

3.2.2 Skills and abilities

Indigenous women across the four countries manifested the need to strengthen certain skills and abilities that they perceive as fundamental in order to take part in decision-making processes and reinforce their organizational capacity.

a. Language barriers

Language is referred to as a barrier by indigenous women in all four countries. In Guatemala, for example, indigenous women reported that women's lack of proficiency in Spanish results in their fear of expressing themselves in public and accepting responsibility positions. Likewise, indigenous women in Cameroon indicated that language represents a major barrier to their participation if indigenous languages are not used in the meetings, since women mostly lack fluency in the national languages. Furthermore, interpretation services are often provided by men thus not guaranteeing the confidentiality of women's meetings and discussions. In Bangladesh, indigenous women's limited ability to speak in Bengali in practice impedes their participation in formal governance institutions, both in the plains and in CHT. It should be noted that language barriers are an even greater obstacle in the plains where Bengali people represent the majority of the population. Finally, in the Plurinational State of Bolivia, indigenous women reported that language represents a considerable obstacle for all women, particularly those living in urban areas. Furthermore, the inability to understand certain concepts in Spanish or express one's views in this language on themes which may be foreign to their experience usually inhibits indigenous women when they meet with women from other segments of national society.

b. Lack of leadership, political and other skills

In Guatemala, indigenous women indicated that, even those indigenous women who are bilingual and therefore do not face language barriers may hold the same fears about expressing themselves in public and accepting responsibility positions because of their lack of experience and poor communication skills. Furthermore, many women are reluctant to accept management positions because they do not know how to draft formal documents, such as minutes or petitions. In addition, the lack of negotiation skills is also perceived as an obstacle. Indigenous women reported that, while they may gradually acquire these types of skills as they get involved in their organizations' work, the lack of negotiations skills remains a barrier for them, especially when indigenous women are members of mixed organizations.

Indigenous women in the other countries shared similar considerations. Indigenous women in the Plurinational State of Bolivia, for example, stated that uneasiness about public speaking is one the first challenges they confront when working in an organization or engaging in participatory processes, especially when men are also present. Similarly, in Cameroon, indigenous women shared their lack confidence about public speaking and indicated that their weak leadership and political skills are an additional barrier to their participation and organization.

c. Poor access to formal education systems

Indigenous women interviewed in Bangladesh reported that their lack of education in practice prevented their participation in formal governance institutions, both in the plains and in CHT. The country study reveals that indigenous women's access to education is limited. In a context marked by poverty, families prefer to invest their limited resources in boys' education, which results in a higher dropout rate of girls from secondary school compared to boys. Higher education among women is therefore rare. While illiteracy is widespread among older generations of women, younger generations have completed primary education. In Guatemala, the country study also notes that women's lack of access to school exacerbates traditional patterns of subordination, as boys and girls are often deprived of the opportunity to interact in a public space as equals and, moreover, women, in many cases, do not have the opportunity to develop as social subjects with their own aspirations. In Cameroon, indigenous women reported that their lower education levels than men, and early marriages and pregnancies, are a considerable barrier to their participation in decision-making processes and organizational efforts.

3.2.3 Emotions and motivation

a. Fear of transgressing social and cultural rules, speaking in public, losing their jobs or other negative consequences

Indigenous women interviewed in the four countries expressed a various range of fears limiting their ability to participate in decision-making processes and engage in organizations' work. These fears are closely linked to the various barriers discussed in this chapter, including the social barriers illustrated below, notably gender roles and negative perceptions, and the lack of skills and abilities that was described in the previous section, particularly the lack of public speaking skills and experience. The "emotional" component of these barriers, manifested by indigenous women as a form of "fear", represents in itself an additional barrier that adds to the impact of the barriers to which the emotion is related, creating a further layer of difficulties for indigenous women.

For example, in the Plurinational State of Bolivia, indigenous women shared their fear of being discredited and having to face prejudices, as well as the feeling of "transgressing" social and cultural rules when speaking up or participating in an organization. This represented for them a significant barrier. The study also noted that fear of reprisals from their employer may prevent indigenous women domestic workers' participation in the work of their sectoral organization. In Guatemala, as mentioned earlier, indigenous women, including those who are bilingual, similarly expressed their fear of speaking in public. Indigenous women in Cameroon further referred to the fear of reprisals. In particular, when discussing their roles in decision-making processes, which are currently mainly dominated by men, indigenous women indicated their preference for changes to occur naturally, without having to push for them and expose themselves to reprisals of various kinds,³⁶ or pay a high price at personal level (divorce or remaining single) (see under "social barriers" below).

Lastly, in Bangladesh, according to the information gathered, indigenous women's participation in organizations, such as the Pahari Shramik Kalyan Parishad, an organization formed to organize indigenous garment sector workers from the CHT, is minimal due to the fear of losing their jobs, among others. Indigenous women interviewed in Bangladesh also mentioned their fear of losing their jobs, facing reprisals or experiencing retaliations on their family members if they were to report cases of harassment. As will be discussed below, violence and harassment are for indigenous women egregious barriers to their participation and organization. In all four countries, indigenous women referred to

³⁶ Some women voiced their fear of being victims of witchcraft if they participate in public spaces in 'representative' positions. For them, public exposure could attract the attention of witch doctors who could mystically kill them.

intimidations, threats, episodes of harassment and violence or an overall situation of insecurity concerning themselves and their communities, which severely affected their ability to organize and participate in decision-making (see below under “violence and harassment”).

b. Lack of interest and motivation

The situation of dire poverty in which indigenous women and their communities live significantly affects their priorities and may also limit women's opportunities and interest in engaging in participatory processes or organizations' work. For example, as referred to above, the country study in Guatemala notes that indigenous women may have an interest in those processes only if they receive some concrete benefits from their participation, for example, in terms of strengthened livelihoods. At the same time, the country study also reports an increase in women's organizations, particularly cooperatives, that have been set up precisely in response to women's interest in organizations that may meet their economic needs, and the “contagion effect” of the women who take part directly in these initiatives, as opposed to others.

The perceived lack of interest or motivation is also very often linked to the prevailing gender norms and distribution of roles within their societies. As will be illustrated further below when discussing social barriers, indigenous women often perceive their engagement in participatory processes as an extra burden on their already overly full days or, as the case of Bangladesh illustrates, may, in some cases, lack interest because the idea of a woman holding certain responsibility positions remains foreign to them or, as was expressed in the case of Guatemala, they choose to conform to social norms and resign themselves to comply with the traditionally assigned roles. In Cameroon, the vast majority of women interviewed maintained that they do not need to participate in decision-making processes nor do they need to hold responsibility positions in order to improve their living conditions, as this would amount to taking on men's role).

c. Low self-esteem

A range of factors, including particularly those that will be described in the following sections, contribute to indigenous women's low self-esteem, which, in turn, represents an additional obstacle to their engagement in participatory processes. Women interviewed in Guatemala and in the Plurinational State of Bolivia referred explicitly to lack of self-esteem as an obstacle. Additionally, in the case of domestic workers in the Plurinational State of Bolivia, indigenous women reported that they frequently struggle with their own feelings of lack of worth and shame concerning their job, which lead some of them to try and hide their profession. In Bangladesh and Cameroon, indigenous women similarly spoke of a lack of confidence. In many cases, indigenous women appear to have internalized a strong feeling of inferiority to men. In Bangladesh, the country study reveals that the prevailing idea among both women and men is that women “lack intelligence” and their opinions are irrelevant. Some of the women interviewed showed a certain degree of awareness that women's lack of confidence is the result of their historical exclusion from governance institutions and that, if given the opportunity, women could acquire the knowledge and skills required to occupy positions of responsibility. In Cameroon, the country study reveals that the purely “decorative” role sometimes imposed on indigenous women when they access public administration posts further undermines their confidence.



► 3.3 Social barriers

The social barriers to indigenous women's participation and organization have also been classified according to three main sub-layers: gender norms, roles and perceptions; discrimination, violence and harassment; and political and organizational issues (see Table 3).

3.3.1 Gender norms, roles and perceptions

a. Gender norms and roles

Gender norms and roles constitute a transversal barrier that is strongly related to many of the barriers presented in this chapter. Indigenous women in all four countries acknowledged that gender norms and roles greatly influence the extent of their participation and organization, either because of the limited time they have after fulfilling their multiple roles and responsibilities or, more generally, because decision-making responsibilities are traditionally assigned to men (on this point see also Chapter 4). Indigenous women's recognition of the existence of these barriers does not necessarily mean, however, that they question them. Indigenous women interviewed across the four countries emphasized that, although they recognized that family responsibilities pose challenges to their participation and organization, such responsibilities remain a priority for them.

As illustrated in the previous chapter, indigenous women are responsible for feeding and caring for children, the elderly and sick family members, in addition to performing other economic activities. Indigenous women interviewed did not question the current distribution of roles within their family. They nevertheless identified it as a major obstacle to their participation and considered that obtaining support, both moral from the male members of their family and physical, such as assistance from other able family members, is crucial to address it. In the current situation, many indigenous women indicated that they do not contemplate participating in public life, including running for elections, because this would represent an additional burden on their already very busy daily routine (on norms and perceptions about women's holding responsibilities positions, see the next section).

Similarly, indigenous women interviewed in the Plurinational State of Bolivia indicated that their family and work responsibilities leave them with limited time to engage in the organizations' work. Women members of organizations indicated that in practice they face a three-fold working day, involving caring for their families, carrying out their job and working in the organizations. Balancing the three is arduous and becomes even more challenging when women hold leadership positions. Some women interviewed indicated that the lack of support from their families seriously curtails their opportunity to advance their careers within the organizations. Indigenous women emphasized, however, that caring for their children remain a priority for them and that they are largely reluctant to leave their children with a third person. They do not regard their household chores as an "obstacle".

In Guatemala too, prevailing cultural patterns and traditional expectations concerning women's role within the household were referred to as major obstacles to women's organization and participation in decision-making processes concerning them. Indigenous women interviewed reported that when organizations are comprised only of women, they arrange meetings so as to take into account women's other tasks, including their family responsibilities. Usually, Saturdays and Sundays are therefore preferred to facilitate women's participation. Conversely, in mixed organizations, women's multiple responsibilities are not taken into consideration and their participation is severely hindered. Some women also reported that within their households they are victims of intimidation and jealousy from the male members of their households which, in some cases, leads to psychological and physical violence. To avoid conflicts within their families, indigenous women indicated that they choose to obey their husbands and avoid challenging the traditional distribution of roles. Additionally, even though the number of women' organizations has

been increasing along with number of women engaged in them, the women interviewed emphasized that in mixed organizations, women remain confined to secondary functions, mainly secretaries or cooks, and are excluded from decision-making positions. Yet, some organizations have taken special measures to facilitate women's access to leadership positions by, for example, reserving some seats on their boards for women.

Indigenous women interviewed in Cameroon likewise reported that their family responsibilities pose challenges to their participation. They indicated that the timing of the meetings convened by public authorities or other actors often does not take into account women's multiple roles and arrangements are not made to facilitate their engagement. More generally, they also reported that they find it difficult to challenge men's traditional role in order to claim a greater space for themselves in decision-making. In the majority of cases, they seek men's approval before taking initiatives and they follow men's guidance within their associations. As noted previously, the vast majority of women interviewed maintained that they do not need to participate in decision-making processes nor do they need to hold positions of responsibility to improve their living conditions, as this would amount to taking on men's roles. Some of the women interviewed, however, did express the view that they should break these constraints. They highlighted that if women in decision-making positions were in closer contact with other women, women's advancement would be more easily fostered. All women interviewed were of the opinion that a balance should be struck to allow them to progress professionally while respecting their traditions. They underscored that such traditions are not static but continually evolving.

b. Negative perceptions around participation

Owing to the prevailing distribution of gender roles and responsibilities, indigenous women's engagement in public spaces is in many cases perceived negatively, by men and women alike. Indigenous women may be the target of criticism and prejudices and, in some cases, even of jealousy and violence, for joining an organization and taking part in its work or for engaging in various decision-making processes.

As recalled earlier, indigenous women interviewed in the Plurinational State of Bolivia referred to their fear of being discredited and having to face prejudices, as well as the feeling of "transgressing" social and cultural rules when speaking up or participating in an organization, which continue to be significant barriers for them. They reported that women who get involved in organizations' work and participate in meetings are often criticized by both women and men. Moreover, one man interviewed observed that violence against women has increased since women started claiming their rights and challenging the traditional roles. According to the study, one of the chief obstacles to women's participation resides in the household, where men regard women as their "property" and are extremely jealous, thus impeding their public activities. The majority of indigenous women who participate in trade unions covered by the study are single and once they get married or find a partner, they reduce or stop their participation. As previously recalled, in Guatemala also, some women reported that within their households they are victims of intimidation and jealousy from the male members of their families, which in some cases leads to episodes of psychological and physical violence.

The study on the Plurinational State of Bolivia also noted that the situation differs between indigenous women in rural areas and those engaged in wage work in urban areas. In the rural areas, where women tend to work closer to home, the only occasion on which they leave the familiar areas are to attend organizations' meetings, and the pressure they face from their families and communities can thus be enormous. In the urban areas, on the contrary, the pressure originates in their workplace. In the construction sector, for example, indigenous women interviewed emphasized that it has been particularly challenging for women to be accepted as this is considered to be a typically "masculine" sector.

In Cameroon, as recalled in the previous sections, the majority of women interviewed maintained that participating in decision-making processes or holding responsibility positions would amount to taking on men's roles. According to the country study, the traditional authorities of indigenous communities expressed the view, with few exceptions, that women's traditional subordinate roles should be preserved and that their speaking in public should be restrained. Women's emancipation is still largely perceived

as a “threat”. Nevertheless, changes in perceptions and attitudes are observed, as will be discussed in the next chapter. Similarly, in Bangladesh, the country study noted that many respondents regarded tradition as immutable. Consequently, men and women alike see changes in the traditional practices as “corrupt” and are reluctant to encourage or accept them. On the other hand, women holding “kabaris” positions in the CHT indicated that prejudice against women and negative perceptions regarding their abilities are gradually changing in their communities, since they were appointed as traditional leaders (on this point and on other developments in favour of women's greater participation, see Chapter 4).

3.3.2 Discrimination, violence, and harassment

The findings from the four country studies show that indigenous women are exposed to various forms of violence and harassment, within and outside their communities, that severely limit their participation and organization.

► Box 1. Gender-based violence from the perspective of indigenous women

An extreme manifestation of discrimination, gender-based violence against indigenous women and girls cannot be separated from the wider contexts of discrimination and exclusion affecting indigenous peoples as a whole, including land dispossession (UN-Women et al. 2013). As recalled in Chapter 1, “[f]or Indigenous women, the systematic violation of their collective rights as Indigenous People is the single greatest risk factor for gender-based violence—including violence perpetrated within their communities” (FIMI 2006, p. 7). At the same time, the right to be free from violence, as defined by indigenous women themselves, forms an integral part of any effort to secure the rights of indigenous peoples as a whole (FIMI 2006; UN 2015).

From the perspective of indigenous women, violence against them manifests in various ways. They range from “development aggression” to violence perpetrated against them during armed conflicts; from the militarization of their territories to their displacement and migration; from violence in the name of tradition to violence inflicted against them in connection with their involvement in the defence of their rights (FIMI 2006; UN 2013b; AIPP and FPP 2013; see also IACHR 2017).

Moreover, since indigenous women participate fully in the collective identity of their peoples, and their roles are often linked to their spiritual practices, they do not necessarily locate the harm and suffering produced by violence against women solely within the body or the individual mind (i.e. physical, sexual or psychological harm as per common definitions of violence) (FIMI 2006). In this regard, it is worth recalling that the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) has interpreted article 2 of the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women (Convention of Belém do Pará) to include spiritual violence as a form of violence against women, and has recognized that spiritual violence takes place when acts of violence and discrimination against indigenous women not only harm those women individually, but also negatively impact the collective identity of the communities to which they belong (see further in IACHR 2017).

For example, indigenous traditions and indigenous women themselves identify women with the Earth and therefore perceive degradation of the Earth as a form of violence against women. “This conviction is more than a metaphorical allusion to Mother Earth. It is rooted in Indigenous cultural and economic practices in which women both embody and protect the health and well-being of the ecosystems in which they live” (FIMI 2006, p. 16).

Indigenous women in Bangladesh, for example, emphasized the overall context of violence and harassment against indigenous women and their peoples in the country, and referred to various manifestations of it that adversely impact their opportunities to participate in public affairs and engage with organizations. As previously mentioned, indigenous women indicated that when they run for elections, they are frequently victims of threats by the supporters of competing candidates. According to the information gathered in the country studies, when indigenous women file complaints with law enforcement agencies regarding the threats received, little if anything is done, so most of them eventually decide to withdraw from the election process. The fears are particularly acute where the context is especially insecure. It is worth recalling that indigenous women face a high risk of being victims of violence and harassment, especially in the CHT, particularly in the areas where land-related conflicts exist between indigenous peoples and non-indigenous settlers (see previous chapter).

Indigenous women interviewed from CHT reported having experienced inappropriate touching and derogatory remarks of a sexual nature by non-indigenous men. All of them had knowledge of at least one incident of sexual harassment against indigenous women or girls that had occurred in their areas. No one, however, indicated that they had sought justice or that they knew of any victim who had. Generally, it was reported that this was due to the prevailing lack of trust in the formal legal system. Indigenous women members of indigenous peoples' organizations thus indicated that they feel especially insecure when they participate in meetings, particularly if those meetings take place in the evening and if they have to travel long distances or when they have to stay away from home to participate in the organizations' activities.

Indigenous women engaged in various wage-earning employment (for example, beauty parlour workers, domestic workers, tea garden workers and fashion house workers) in Bangladesh also mentioned violence and harassment as one of the greatest barriers to organization. The majority of them have not filed a complaint about the harassment experienced and many were reluctant to talk about it. Several reasons were mentioned as to why harassment represents a barrier to women's organization, including fear of being subjected to further harassment or of losing their jobs, concerns about their safety outside the workplace, and lack of support,³⁷ which is only provided in the case of the most egregious situations, such as rape and murder. In the case of tea garden workers, women also feared reprisals against their family members.

Indigenous women in Cameroon similarly referred to the security situation in indigenous peoples' areas as an obstacle to their participation. They indicated that no special measures have been adopted to enable indigenous women's participation by, for example, ensuring lighting along the roads or adjusting meeting schedules to account for the safety risks faced by women. These security concerns also apply to indigenous women living in urban areas. For example, as described earlier, in Guatemala, indigenous women working in urban areas expressed their fear of urban violence and a general feeling of insecurity, which makes them reluctant to move around, including commuting to attend the meetings of the sectoral organizations. Concerning rural areas, indigenous women in Guatemala also reported facing security risks when having to travel long distances to reach meeting places. Indigenous women in the country also referred more generally to the climate of political violence and violence against trade unionists (see previous chapter).

37 This also includes, in some cases, a lack of support from other colleagues because of indigenous women's ethnic origin.

Additionally, in Guatemala and the Plurinational State of Bolivia, indigenous women reported cases of violence within their households and communities. In Guatemala, some women reported that within their households they are victims of intimidation and jealousy from the male members of their families, which in some cases leads to episodes of psychological and physical violence, when they try to get involved in the external activities, such as the activities of an organization or other participatory processes. The country study on the Plurinational State of Bolivia reflects the observations of a man saying that violence against women has increased since women started claiming their rights and challenging the traditional roles. The country study also refers to cases of verbal harassment against indigenous women engaging with organizations' work and sexual harassment from co-workers in urban areas.

3.3.3 Political and organizational issues

a. Men's interference into women's organizational aspirations

The lack of offices and meeting spaces to which indigenous women referred to in various countries, as described in the previous sections, often leads to indigenous women having to share spaces with men, which limits the extent and freedom of their conversations and activities. In other cases, such as in Cameroon, indigenous women interviewed indicated that indigenous men tend to attend women's gatherings and "control" what is being discussed.

Concerning mixed-organizations, the presence of men, as previously mentioned, impacts the extent of indigenous women's participation in various ways (see section 3.2). In Guatemala, indigenous women reported that women remain confined to secondary, subordinate roles and functions, mainly secretaries or cooks, and are excluded from decision-making positions. Likewise, indigenous women in the Plurinational State of Bolivia indicated that they tend to be sidelined by men.³⁸ Indigenous women interviewed in Guatemala further emphasized that in mixed organizations, women's multiple responsibilities are not taken into consideration when deciding venues and times of meetings, thus their participation is greatly hindered.

b. Lack of government and political party action

In Bangladesh, indigenous women referred to the lack of support and commitment from political parties as a barrier to their participation in electoral processes. Ensuring representation of different sections of the population is in general not a priority on the agenda of national political parties, unless it has some strategic value. In the plain land, where indigenous peoples are in a disadvantaged position owing to their small numbers, party backing is essential to win in any election. Hence, without the commitment of political parties, ensuring indigenous women's representation in elected bodies remains challenging.³⁹ Furthermore, the country study noted that, although the national legislation provides for reserved seats in favour of women to promote their participation in formal governance institutions (see country profile in the annex), indigenous women's participation remains low and thus special measures are needed due to the barriers they face. For example, the country study noted that in the National Parliament, where quotas have been established to ensure women's representation

³⁸ The country study reports that some women reported that in certain cases men would hide information from them, for example regarding strategic negotiations, which are thus carried out without women's knowledge.

³⁹ The country study found that in Rangamati, an indigenous woman from the Chakma people, backed by the largest indigenous peoples' political party in the CHT, was able to secure the position of Upazila Chairperson. This is unprecedented in the history of Upazila Parishad elections in Bangladesh and was made possible thanks to the strong support received by the political party, including through intensive field-level campaigns. Indigenous persons' representation in political parties is generally very low, except in the districts of CHT where it is strategically important to include indigenous persons to win seats in national elections, as well as to have party dominance at local level government.

in general, only four indigenous women have been elected since the country's independence in 1971 (Nasreen and Yan Yan 2019).⁴⁰ In the view of some of the indigenous women interviewed, special measures in the form of reserved seats for indigenous women are needed in order to ensure their participation in the Parliament, especially in the case of indigenous women from the plains.⁴¹

In Guatemala, indigenous women identified the absence of public policies designed to strengthen indigenous women's participation and organization as a barrier. Indigenous women from the urban organizations interviewed in the Plurinational State of Bolivia also referred to the lack of material support from the State for their organization as an obstacle (see section 3.1 on the lack of financial support in the other countries more generally).

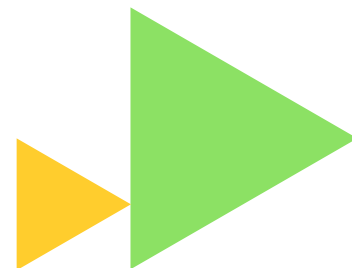
c. Limited political participation and lack of representative organizations

As has emerged from the previous points, various factors influence indigenous women's political participation. Indigenous women may, for example, lack interest or motivation to engage in participation processes; they may lack time and the financial resources needed to engage with political participation; or they may not be aware of the provisions regulating electoral processes, among others. Their limited political participation may also be the result of gender norms and perceptions or discrimination, violence and harassment (see points above and Chapter 2 on indigenous women's participation in governance institutions). Indigenous women's limited political participation may, in turn, further affect their possibilities of participation and organization, as relevant public policies and legislative measures are designed and adopted without their input.

The country studies on Bangladesh and Cameroon report that indigenous women's political participation is particularly low (see Chapter 2). Indigenous women in Guatemala referred to the absence of representative organizations as an additional barrier to their participation. The country study notes, however, that indigenous women have been able to establish their own organizations and, in some cases, have succeeded in adding their own claims and perspectives to the broad themes discussed by indigenous peoples' organizations (see Chapters 2 and 4).

d. Lack of solidarity and mutual support

Indigenous women interviewed in the Plurinational State of Bolivia, referred to a lack of mutual support among women and to women being as critical as men regarding women's participation in public spaces. In Guatemala, indigenous women also mentioned that existing organizations are dispersed and lack coordination, sometimes due to jealousy and competition among them.



⁴⁰ They were all from the CHT. This could be explained by the higher percentage of indigenous population in the CHT compared to the plains (Nasreen and Yan Yan 2019).

⁴¹ It is noted, however, that, as with indigenous men, since Parliament members are elected via political parties, they are to abide by political parties' agendas and may not be in a position to represent and voice indigenous men's and women's specific concerns and cooperate among them beyond allegiance to the various political parties (Nasreen and Yan Yan 2019).

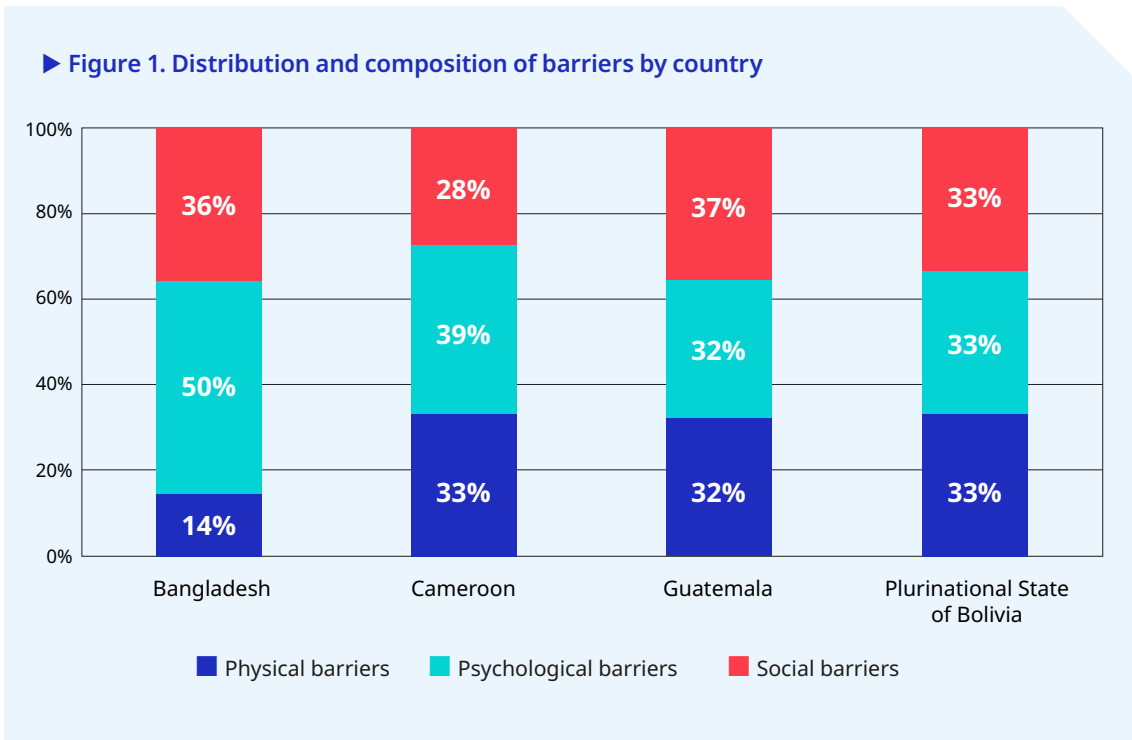
► Table 4. Overview of barriers by country*

Layer	Sub-layer	Barrier	Country				
			Bangladesh **	Cameroon	Plurinational State of Bolivia	Guatemala	
Physical	Socioeconomic conditions	► Financial dependence from men	x		x		
		► Poverty and lack of infrastructure and basic services	x	x	x	x	
		► Lack of access to financial support for organizations			x	x	
	Physical meeting spaces	► Lack of identity cards		x			
		► Lack of adequate meeting places		x	x	x	
		► Lack of wash and sanitation facilities and proper infrastructure in the meeting places		x		x	
	Communication networks	► Distance to meeting places		x	x	x	
		► Access to information and communication networks		x	x	x	
	Psychological	Awareness and knowledge	► Lack of awareness about rights	x		x	
			► Lack of knowledge about customary and statutory provisions regulating governance institutions and other relevant norms	x	x		
Skills and abilities		► Language barriers	x	x	x	x	
		► Lack of leadership and political skills		x	x	x	
		► Poor access to formal education systems	x	x		x	
Emotions and motivation		► Fear of transgressing social and cultural rules, of speaking in public, of losing their jobs or of other negative consequences	x	x	x	x	
		► Lack of interest and motivation	x	x	x	x	
		► Low self-esteem	x	x	x	x	
Social		Gender norms, roles and perceptions	► Gender norms and roles	x	x	x	x
			► Negative perceptions around participation	x	x	x	x
	Discrimination, violence and harassment	► Discrimination, violence and harassment	x	x	x	x	
		► Presence of men in meetings and subordinate role in mixed-organizations		x	x	x	
	Political and organisational issues	► Lack of government and political party action	x		x	x	
		► Limited political participation and lack of representative organizations	x	x		x	
► Lack of solidarity and mutual support				x	x		
Total number of barriers (out of 23)			14	18	18	19	

* This table is not intended to be representative of the incidence of any given barrier in a single country. Please see Chapter 3 for more.

** Please note that the questionnaire used in the case of Bangladesh did not include questions on physical meeting spaces and communication networks.

Adjusted from Ballon and Yamin 2020



Source: Adjusted from *Ballon and Yamin 2020*. Note that in the case of Bangladesh the percentage related to the physical barriers reflects the absence of questions about some of the sub-layers. See Table 4.





▶ 4

Envisioning a way forward

► 4.1 Existing barriers and indigenous women's aspirations

As described in the previous chapter, indigenous women are confronted with multiple obstacles to their organization and participation that intersect and mutually reinforce each other.⁴² These barriers are of varying nature and are rooted in the discrimination and social, economic and political marginalization suffered by indigenous peoples in the country, as well as in the patriarchal power structures that prevail within and outside indigenous communities.⁴³ When examining such barriers faced, it is therefore crucial to take into account the overall social, economic and political context concerning indigenous peoples in the countries concerned, as well as the specific reality of indigenous women.

The nexus between indigenous women's collective and individual rights plays a fundamental role in determining the possibilities and extent of indigenous women's involvement in participatory processes and their organizational efforts. As shown in the previous chapters, the marginalization of their communities affects indigenous women in profound and distinct ways. In this respect, it is also worth recalling that the attention afforded to indigenous women has sometimes been limited because the focus on women's rights has been perceived by some as "divisive" or even "secondary" in the midst of the collective struggle to defend indigenous peoples' territories and rights (see UN 2015 and FIMI 2006).

Securing indigenous women's human rights is integral to securing the rights of their indigenous peoples as a whole (FIMI 2006; UN 2015). The direct engagement and consultation with indigenous women and girls remain essential in this regard (UN 2015). Solutions should be found at community level, including for the sake of their effectiveness and sustainability, as a part of the exercise of indigenous peoples' "control over their own institutions, ways of life and economic development", with full respect for the collective rights of the communities and the individual rights of their members⁴⁴ (Convention No. 169, preamble; see also AIPP and FPP 2013 on ongoing changes).

The findings of this study also confirm that women's economic empowerment and participation are profoundly linked and, as such, should be addressed jointly.⁴⁵ Indigenous women's economic empowerment affects their participation in decision-making processes at various levels (see previous chapter). In turn, the lack of women's participation in relevant policy development affects their economic empowerment, as their specific situation, needs and aspirations are not adequately taken into account.

The vast majority of the indigenous women interviewed in the context of the country studies expressed the wish to improve their living conditions through "a good job" in order to contribute to their families' needs, without giving up their family role (Memong Meno Epse Mpoung 2019; FLACSO 2019; and Zegada

42 It is important to note that the barriers described in this study will continue to affect indigenous women's participation and organization unless they are addressed in a consolidated and coordinated fashion. Also, policy interventions in one domain may have positive or negative repercussions on others, which need to be properly assessed.

43 An earlier study by the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues on indigenous women's political participation found that patriarchy, racism and discrimination are central factors in indigenous women's limited access to political participation (UN 2013a).

44 In this regard, it should be recalled that ILO Convention No. 169 recognizes indigenous peoples' rights to retain their customs and institutions where these are not incompatible with fundamental rights defined by the national legal system and with internationally recognized human rights. Procedures shall be established, whenever necessary, to resolve conflicts which may arise in the application of this principle (Art. 8). UNDRIP also declares that indigenous peoples have the right to promote, develop and maintain their institutional structures and their distinctive customs, spirituality, traditions, procedures, practices and, in the cases where they exist, juridical systems or customs, in accordance with international human rights standards (art. 34). See also note 29 on gender complementarity among indigenous cultural values.

45 On this point see in general UN 2018b.

Claire and Canedo Vasquez 2019).⁴⁶ As recalled earlier, most indigenous women interviewed stated that being able to fulfil family responsibilities represents a priority. For example, the large majority of the indigenous women interviewed in Guatemala indicated that their preferred option would be to have their own trade or start an activity related to the agricultural activities of the family, which is where most women currently work (such as coffee production, vegetable growing and animal raising), or produce handicrafts such as embroidery, weaving, basket production or flower arrangements. The abovementioned options are preferred because they would allow women to flexibly organize their working day, taking into account members of their family, notably their children (Zegada Claire and Canedo Vasquez 2019). Similarly, indigenous women in Cameroon who are self-employed,⁴⁷ such as those who cultivate the land, raise animals or produce handicrafts, reported that they wish to improve their current situation and strengthen their occupations rather than engaging in wage-work. Many of them thus participate in local development projects with a view to improving their means of production or searching for sale networks. Indigenous women indicated that when they are able to contribute economically to the needs of their families, not only does their self-esteem increase but their ability to make decisions in the household is also strengthened (see for example FLACSO 2019).

Moreover, indigenous women across all four countries acknowledged the importance of enhancing their education, including their fluency in the national languages and professional training. In Guatemala, indigenous women in rural areas expressed their interest in receiving training, for example, in areas such as embroidery, baking, animal husbandry or the cultivation of family gardens in order to increase their chances of earning an additional income for their families. They also underscored that some skills acquired through experience and taught in informal ways (such as those related to clothes design and tailoring) are not sufficiently valued, thus limiting their economic opportunities. Indigenous women interviewed in the Plurinational State of Bolivia also deemed it useful to receive more specific training aimed at improving their working skills (for example, courses on cooking and ironing for domestic workers). Those belonging to rural organizations further referred to the importance of learning how to design and manage projects to enhance their access to resources, training programmes and external support, in particular regarding diversification options within their agriculture-based economies (Zegada Claire and Canedo Vasquez 2019). Additionally, with regard to access to education, they emphasized that the current constraints met by women are exacerbated by the State's failure to provide indigenous communities with access to education that is bilingual and culturally appropriate (see FLACSO 2019). Indigenous women in Cameroon also highlighted the impact of early marriages on girls' education and indicated that they should be prevented (Memong Meno Epse Mpoung 2019).⁴⁸ At a broader level, some indigenous women noted that courses on leadership skills and self-esteem could be helpful as raising women's awareness of their potential would enable them to assess their opportunities (see FLACSO 2019; see also below on indigenous women's wish to strengthen their leadership skills).

In addition, the country studies showed that indigenous women in all four countries valued the opportunity to engage with organizations to defend their rights and improve their livelihoods. Nevertheless, most of them acknowledged that the scope of their participation is still generally limited and in mixed organizations they are frequently confined by men to secondary roles. While the latter may be a challenge in general for all women seeking to gain a voice through organizational efforts - and as has been described in the case of the Plurinational State of Bolivia, has led to the creation of women-only organizations, including trade unions - in the case of indigenous women the obstacles are further compounded by the fact that non-indigenous women may not necessarily share their visions or priorities. Difficulties liaising with non-indigenous women emerged from some of the country studies. In Bangladesh, for example, the challenges indigenous women face once elected to local bodies include the problem that, whereas when discussing gender-related issues, women may be able to support each

46 Note that these are reported indigenous women's replies to the question about their priorities in life which was asked following the methodological framework developed at global level (see the annex). The framework pre-identified specific themes/priorities.

47 See Chapter 2 on land dispossessions and indigenous women resorting to wage employment on plantations.

48 Indigenous men interviewed also conceded that girls should access education on an equal footing with boys and early marriages should be prevented (Memong Meno Epse Mpoung 2019).

other regardless of their ethnic origin, when debates centre on questions that are specific to indigenous communities, it is difficult for indigenous women to gain other women's support. In the Plurinational State of Bolivia, indigenous women reported some uneasiness in interacting with women from other segments of national society due to language barriers and also emphasized the importance of ensuring that discussion topics are not imposed by third parties but rather genuinely reflect indigenous women's own agendas.

Notwithstanding, indigenous women interviewed in the four countries recognized the importance of the support received from existing organizations and of participating in organizations, whether or not they are specific to indigenous women. Indigenous women domestic workers in the Plurinational State of Bolivia, for example, indicated that engaging with the sector's women's trade union helped them strengthen their position and improve their working conditions, thanks to training sessions and awareness-raising relating to their labour rights, among other things.⁴⁹ Indigenous women working in the construction sector likewise highlighted that joining the sectoral women's organization was key for them to obtain better contracts and for capacity-building (Zegada Claire and Canedo Vasquez 2019). In general, they indicated that women-only organizations are crucial to help them become aware of their rights, value their working contribution (especially in the case of domestic workers), organize professional training courses and gain better working conditions. They are also useful arenas in which to foster solidarity between women and exchange experiences. In rural areas, the country study noted the importance of organizations that are not exclusively labour-related but have a broader social and political base and are linked to the defence of indigenous peoples' cultural identity and territories (Zegada Claire and Canedo Vasquez 2019).

Similar aspects were underscored by indigenous women in Cameroon who expressed the wish to receive training on collective entrepreneurship and labour rights, notably the right to equal remuneration, especially in the case of the Baka women working on plantations for the Bantus. They also valued the contribution of organizations focusing on the protection of land and cultural rights, particularly in the case of the Baka, Bakola/Bagyéli and Bedzang women who are subject to land grabbing and have lost access to the forests on which they relied for traditional medicine and income. Additionally, as noted in Chapter 2, the country study noted that indigenous women overall have very limited awareness about trade unions and their relevance to their realities (Memong Meno Epse Mpoung 2019).

In Guatemala, indigenous women highlighted that, at the individual level, the participation in organizations and the exchange of experience that takes place within those contexts have helped them gain more confidence and become more proactive in searching for ways to improve the living conditions for them and their families (FLACSO 2019). Indigenous women interviewed reported that they particularly valued the support obtained in improving their living and working conditions from organizations, such as trade unions, associations, or committees and groups for economic empowerment, particularly in the case of actions directed at improving the quality of their products so as to meet international requirements for trade (for example fulfilling the criteria set out for organic production or the sustainable management of soil) or establishing a common trademark for export, as these kinds of actions have contributed to enhancing the financial situation of their families (FLACSO 2019). Similarly, they consider the exchange of experiences with women's groups from other communities and districts very helpful in broadening their knowledge and acquiring new ideas on how to enhance their own economic

⁴⁹ At the same time, they also indicated that some of them may not be aware of the existence of organizations defending their rights because of their isolation in their employers' houses (Zegada Claire and Canedo Vasquez 2019).

opportunities. Indigenous women also regard innovating production processes as very relevant to their needs (FLACSO 2019).⁵⁰

Indigenous women have expressed the wish that their organizations obtain autonomy and have influence, which remain limited when they interact with other organizations, trade unions, confederations or the State (see Zegada Claire and Canedo Vasquez 2019). In their view, it is vital to improve women's literacy and capacity-building regarding politics, rights and leadership (see Memong Meno Epse Mpoung 2019, FLACSO 2019, and Zegada Claire and Canedo Vasquez 2019). As illustrated in the previous chapter, indigenous women also underscored that they still find it difficult to speak in public with confidence. This is regarded as a central ability that they would like to develop and strengthen in order to be able to make their voices heard and improve their living conditions (Zegada Claire and Canedo Vasquez 2019). In addition, some of them emphasized that raising women's awareness about their rights is very much needed but organizations lack funds to undertake these kinds of activities at the local level (see Nasreen and Yan Yan 2019).

Lastly, concerning national and local governance institutions, the country studies on Bangladesh and Cameroon offer noteworthy insights. Indigenous women in Cameroon voiced their wish to be represented and participate in decision-making processes concerning them, and regarded the few women who have been able to engage in these processes as role models to be followed who could support and inspire girls (Memong Meno Epse Mpoung 2019).⁵¹ Yet, indigenous women considered that those women who are currently "leaders" within their communities are not sufficiently skilled and would need additional education and training in order to attain positions of responsibility (Memong Meno Epse Mpoung 2019).⁵² Concerning Bangladesh, while the majority of indigenous women interviewed in the plains indicated that men should maintain their traditional positions as head of villages, cluster villages and different councils (see details in the country profile in the annex), some have expressed the view that indigenous women should be given the same opportunity as men (Nasreen and Yan Yan 2019).⁵³ All respondents felt, however, that communities may not be ready to accept such a change. Women interviewed also felt that men were more knowledgeable and capable of dealing with public affairs than women, and thus more suited to traditional leadership roles. While some men interviewed supported the idea of encouraging women's participation in village meetings, most of them shared the same opinion as women concerning the latter's lack of skills and capacity. Concerning the CHT, while important changes have occurred in some communities concerning the appointment of women to traditional roles, as will be described in the next section, in others, like the Mro, Chak, Khumi, Khiyang and Bawm communities, indigenous women do not feel the need to have women appointed to leadership roles in their villages and have mixed opinions on allowing women's participation in community meetings (Nasreen and Yan Yan 2019).

50 A particular case was referred to concerning the acquisition by an association of a plot of land which was subsequently managed collectively by women for raising poultry and cultivating vegetables, for the twofold purpose of gaining an income and providing food directly to their families. This project allowed women to work in their own communities, create job opportunities, strengthen their capacities and improve the conditions of their community, making women the actors of their own development. Moreover, the project permitted a "teamwork" approach, whereby the whole family was involved, and family and work responsibilities were more equitably distributed among all family members. Seeing an improvement in families' income, men became more inclined to favour women's external activities (FLACSO 2019).

51 At the local level, women leaders are more commonly found in the Baka, Bakola/Bagyéli and Bedzang communities than in Mbororo communities. Conversely, there are more Mbororo women leaders in cities (Memong Meno Epse Mpoung 2019).

52 An important difference has been noted in this regard between Mbororo women, some of whom have attained university education and may hold responsibility positions at various levels in urban areas, and the women from the Baka, Bakola/Bagyéli and Bedzang people. However, none of them have received specific training on leadership skills (Memong Meno Epse Mpoung 2019).

53 Indigenous women working for NGOs or as teachers, or having participated in the activities of some organizations tended to be of the view that traditional governance structures needed to evolve to accommodate women's participation in meetings and access to decision-making positions.



► 4.2 Noteworthy developments

In all the domains examined in the country studies, important positive developments or transformative trends were noted. These originate in the initiative of indigenous women themselves or are facilitated by the proactive support of the traditional leadership, often building on and expanding existing customary practices, and sometimes following traditional leaders' involvement in indigenous peoples' and women's human rights organizations.

The country study on Cameroon, for example, notes that, while indigenous peoples' traditional institutions are normally led and composed by the male members of the communities, women may play an "informal" advisory role to the community chiefs. In certain Baka communities, indigenous women have been called to perform the function of the village chief in his absence. Also, among the Mbororo, women have recently been allowed to participate in meetings with men, which would have been unimaginable until some years ago (Memong Meno Epse Mpoung 2019). In Guatemala, indigenous women have started applying for public positions at local level. Others are community mayors (*alcaldesas*), participate in the *Consejos Comunitarios de Desarrollo Urbano y Rural* (COCODES) (Community Councils for Urban and Rural Development) or are members of the *Coordinadora Local para la reducción de desastres* (COLRED) (Local Coordinating Unit for Disaster Reduction) (FLACSO 2019).

Concerning traditional institutions, the country study on Bangladesh also reports developments. In the CHT - where leadership positions (chieftainship and *karbariship*) are held by men and are inherited by male members of the family (for more details see the country profile in the annex) - in 2014 the Chakma Chief in the Chakma Circle proposed a reform of the traditional governance structure allowing for women to become *karbaris* following nomination by the villagers and endorsement by the chieftain. This reform was later adopted in other communities (Nasreen and Yan Yan 2019). As a result, according to the country study, the number of women *karbaris* increased from six in 2012 to 514 in 2018, out of 2,780 *karbari* positions.⁵⁴ Moreover, the level of indigenous women's participation in villages where women *karbaris* have been appointed has increased significantly compared to the villages without women *karbaris*. Progress is affected by many factors, including the leadership capability of the woman *karbari*, the level of support she receives from the male *karbari* and the chieftain, as well as the openness to this novelty among the villagers, both women and men (Nasreen and Yan Yan 2019). For example, as previously mentioned, conversations held with indigenous women from Mro, Chak, Khumi, Khyang and Bawm communities, which have not appointed any woman to the *karbari* position, showed that the idea of women holding traditional leadership positions remains foreign to them. Regarding indigenous peoples in the plains, women from the Garo communities - which are matrilineal communities - indicated that, in recent years, women have been able to attend dispute resolution meetings in their village and elderly women or women of social stature are often consulted when complicated issues are proposed for resolution. In their view, this change could be attributed to an increasing awareness among Garo women concerning their roles, as well as the ability they have gained to utilize women's inheritance rights to leverage participation in decision-making process (Nasreen and Yan Yan 2019).⁵⁵

54 At the time the field work was undertaken, Chakma, Marma, Tripura, Tanchangya and Pangkhua women were holding *karbari* positions while Mro, Chak, Khumi, Khyang, Bawm and Lushai women were not represented in their respective villages (Nasreen and Yan Yan 2019).

55 It should be recalled in this respect that among the Garo and Khasi peoples, who follow matrilineal traditions, only women inherit landed property. Nevertheless, women from these communities do not hold traditional leadership positions nor do they participate in the election of the village chief (Nasreen and Yan Yan 2019).

The country study on Bangladesh also reports a number of measures adopted to promote indigenous women's participation in and through organizations defending their rights. Thus, as mentioned in Chapter 2, the by-laws of the indigenous peoples' organizations at national and local levels involved in the research all provide for women's representation in the executive committees. Furthermore, these by-laws prescribe that the committees shall have a secretary for women's affairs and this position is reserved for women. Some organizations have also created "women wings" that operate under the overall coordination of the main organization. Also, at the national level one organization of indigenous women has been created, such as the Bangladesh Indigenous Women's Forum (Nasreen and Yan Yan 2019).

In Guatemala and the Plurinational State of Bolivia, significant initiatives were noted with respect to indigenous women's participation in organizations, starting with the creation of women-only organizations in the former. As mentioned in the previous chapters, for example, the *Confederación Nacional de Mujeres Campesinas Indígenas Originarias de Bolivia "Bartolina Sisa"* was created to seek an autonomous voice from the male-dominated *Confederación Sindical Única de Trabajadores Campesinos de Bolivia*. Likewise, women workers in the construction sector - the majority of whom are of indigenous origin (ILO 2017b) - have established their own association, the *Asociación de Mujeres Constructoras*, which is clearly distinct from the trade union of the sector (Zegada Claure and Canedo Vasquez 2019).⁵⁶ Likewise, in Guatemala, indigenous women have been able to establish their own organizations, such as the ones examined for the purpose of this research, including trade unions (see Chapter 1) (FLACSO 2019). According to the country study, many indigenous women are involved in the indigenous movement operating throughout the country and, in some cases, they have been successful in adding their own claims and perspectives to the broad themes at the heart of the movement's demands for recognition and respect for the cultural identity of indigenous peoples, the defence of their territories and the fight against discrimination. The country study further noted that with the increasing numbers of women working in agriculture, which has resulted from men's migration, especially to the USA, indigenous women are assuming roles once confined to men and this, in turn, is producing an impact on the scope of their participation in decision-making processes (FLACSO 2019).

Lastly, the country studies also revealed some changes in attitudes and perceptions, including on the part of men. For example, indigenous women in Guatemala reported that some men are changing their attitudes towards women's public roles and that they support the women by taking a share of the family responsibilities (FLACSO 2019). Indigenous men interviewed in Cameroon acknowledged that girls should access education on an equal footing with boys and early marriages should be prevented (Memong Meno Epse Mpoung 2019). While they remained sceptical and, to a certain extent, concerned about the prospect of a woman holding positions of responsibility, the indigenous men interviewed recognized the strengthened role of women at the community level as a positive development (Memong Meno Epse Mpoung 2019). As mentioned earlier, the appointment of indigenous women to traditional leadership positions in some communities in the CHT is also contributing to a change in attitudes and perceptions about women's participation in community decision-making processes (Nasreen and Yan Yan 2019).

⁵⁶ For more information on indigenous women in the construction sector, see ILO 2017b.

► 4.3 A rights-based framework for action

The findings of the qualitative research undertaken for the purpose of this study reaffirm that addressing barriers to indigenous women's organization and participation, and encouraging the positive developments under way require the adoption of an integrated approach. This means being mindful of the nexus between the collective and individual dimensions of the existing obstacles, as well as the multiple vulnerabilities of indigenous women related to their gender, indigenous identity and socio-economic status. Under this approach, the priorities, cosmovision and cultural identity of indigenous women should be respected and given due consideration. The findings also point to the importance of indigenous women's leadership in the design and implementation of any strategy aimed at supporting and strengthening their organization and participation in decision-making. The relevant international human rights and labour standards provide guidance and an important basis for developing such strategies. Drawing on these standards allows for the required coordination and consistency, as well as ensuring legitimacy, inclusiveness, sustainability and, importantly, accountability.

ILO Convention No. 169 and UNDRIP, enshrining a holistic approach to the respect, protection and fulfilment of indigenous peoples' collective and individual rights, provide important guidance for States' action, in collaboration with indigenous peoples' and women's organizations, to address current barriers confronting indigenous women in respect of their participation and organization. As has emerged in the previous sections, other actors may also play an important role in supporting these rights-based efforts, including trade unions and employers' organizations. Furthermore, as mentioned in Chapter 1, there are a number of other ILO instruments that are particularly relevant to the design and implementation of strategies aimed at overcoming existing barriers to indigenous women's organization and participation in tandem with ILO Convention No. 169 (see also box 1).⁵⁷ Of particular importance are the ILO's fundamental Conventions, addressing freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining and the elimination of discrimination, child labour and forced labour. ILO Member States, even where they have not ratified the Conventions in question, have an obligation, arising from their very membership in the Organization, to respect, promote and realize, in good faith and in accordance with the Constitution of the ILO, the principles concerning the fundamental rights which are the subject of those Conventions (ILO 1998).

ILO Convention No. 111, one of the ILO's fundamental Conventions ratified almost universally,⁵⁸ aims at the elimination of discrimination in employment and occupation based on race, colour, sex, national extraction, religion, social origin or political opinion. Given that women's economic empowerment is key for advancing their participation in decision-making, taking measures to promote and ensure equality of opportunity and treatment of indigenous women and men in employment and occupation is essential, as required under Convention No. 111. These measures include the recognition of the right of indigenous men and women to engage without discrimination in their traditional occupations and livelihoods, removing any discriminatory treatment in respect of working conditions, particularly through the recognition of, *inter alia*, the right to receive equal remuneration for work of equal value, and ensuring equal opportunity to access education, training and employment. They may also include recognition of the rights of ownership, possession and use of the lands that indigenous peoples traditionally occupy

⁵⁷ Please note that in this section, we will focus only on ILO standards. Other international and regional human-rights treaties are obviously relevant to the issues addressed in this study and also provide important guidance in this respect, including through the work of their monitoring mechanisms. These include the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination; and Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

⁵⁸ To date, the Convention has to date been ratified by 175 States.

or use; access to credit⁵⁹ and marketing facilities; and access to relevant training. The ILO's supervisory bodies have also welcomed strategies directed at improving the participation of indigenous women in all processes to issue and regularize collective land titles (see CEACR 2012, para. 767ff). As noted in Chapter 1, the CEACR has stressed in relation to ILO Convention No. 111 the need for governments to consult with the social partners and the groups concerned on the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of national equality policies, strategies and measures (CEACR 2019a). The CEACR has also recognized that ILO Convention No. 169 "provides important elements for overcoming discrimination against indigenous and tribal peoples and ensuring their equality of opportunity and treatment", which are key to the full achievement of the objective of ILO Convention No. 111 in respect of indigenous women and men (CEACR 2012, para. 772).

In fact, the principles, philosophy and approach of ILO Convention No. 169 are relevant also to the application of the other ILO instruments referred to previously that are particularly important for ensuring indigenous women's participation and organization. For instance, ILO Convention No. 190 and its accompanying recommendation No. 206 provide a useful framework to address one of the most egregious barriers faced by women, namely violence and harassment. As discussed in Box 2, it is important, however, that the notion of violence and harassment incorporated in laws and policies, including more particularly gender-based violence, reflects indigenous women's own perspectives and lived experiences and, therefore, that indigenous women are fully involved in the design and implementation of any strategy aimed at preventing and addressing violence and harassment against them. As the previous sections and chapters have shown, the full spectrum of the rights recognized in Convention No. 169 is central to addressing gender-based violence against indigenous women.⁶⁰

In crisis situations, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the participation of indigenous women is essential to formulate responses that are inclusive and responsive to the specific needs, vulnerabilities and risks of all people affected. The ILO Employment and Decent Work for Peace and Resilience Recommendation, 2016 (No. 205) provides guidance with regard to the development of measures aimed at preventing crises, enabling recovery and building resilience. The Recommendation calls for special attention for population groups and individuals who have been made particularly vulnerable by the crisis, including indigenous peoples.⁶¹ It also recommends that indigenous peoples are consulted and participate directly in the decision-making process, especially if the territories inhabited or used by them and their environment are affected by a crisis and the related recovery and stability measures.⁶² Indigenous women are among the hardest hit by crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.⁶³ As holders of traditional knowledge and actors with key roles in livelihoods and resilience, their involvement in the design of national responses is critical to ensure a sustainable recovery.

Finally, as recalled in Chapter 1, ILO Convention Nos 87 and 98, which are also among the ILO fundamental Conventions, set out the principles of freedom of association and the recognition of collective bargaining, which are foundational to social dialogue and vital to promote and protect workers' rights.⁶⁴ The right of all individuals to freely associate with others, including the right to form and join trade unions and employers' organizations, lies at the intersection between civil and political rights and economic, social and cultural rights. It is instrumental to the realization of these rights and, more specifically, "informs the right of individuals to participate in decision making within their workplaces and communities in order to achieve the protection of their interests" (UN 2019b, para. 4).

59 A study on indigenous women in Peru revealed that indigenous women practising agriculture may not consider credit or loans to be a viable option. On the contrary, they consider them a source of greater uncertainty, given the overall precariousness of their livelihood (see ILO 2016). The importance of indigenous women's participation in the formulation of any strategy concerning them cannot be overemphasized.

60 See, for example, Government of Canada 2019.

61 Paras 7 and 15.

62 Para. 15

63 ILO, *COVID-19 and the world of work: a focus on indigenous and tribal peoples*, 2020.

64 See CEACR 2012 and ILO 2006 for more details.

► 4.4 Building on knowledge and understanding of indigenous women's barriers: lessons learned for future research

The present study represents a first attempt to examine indigenous women's barriers to participation and organization on the basis of qualitative research and direct interaction with indigenous women themselves, with a view to sketching a framework for action. Further analyses of the barriers faced by indigenous women to participation in decision-making processes and organization is needed, however, in order to achieve a better understanding of such barriers and their impact from the perspective of indigenous women and, consequently, to develop better informed policy responses in consultation with them.

Designing and undertaking this type of research is likely to be a learning process for all parties involved. There are indeed several lessons to take away from the present study initiative to inform the design and implementation of future research. It is particularly important that future research be designed and carried out in partnership with indigenous women and their organizations.

Participation and involvement of indigenous women in the development of conceptual frameworks and methodologies for research into their situation is needed to ensure that their realities and worldviews are adequately integrated. This also helps to ensure that both collective and individual dimensions of indigenous women's lived experiences are reflected and taken into account. Their inter-generational perspectives must also be taken into consideration as the past is alive in the present for many indigenous peoples. This inter-generational dimension affects their decision-making, as ancestors and yet-to-be-born generations are regarded as integral members of many indigenous communities.⁶⁵

Furthermore, it is recommended that, in the first phase of fieldwork, priority is given to unstructured and open conversations with indigenous women to avoid focusing the investigation on pre-determined topics for discussions. Indeed, rather than being "objects" of research, indigenous women wish to guide it to make it relevant for them. Finally, given the exclusion of indigenous women from consultation processes on legislative or administrative measures (ILO 2019b),⁶⁶ such participation could be included in the scope of future research.

⁶⁵ For example, sustainable resource management among Haudenosaunee peoples is informed by the principle of the Seventh Generation: all decision-making is guided by considering the impact of one's actions on the welfare of the seventh generation to come (FIMI 2006).

⁶⁶ As envisaged in Article 6 of Convention No. 169 and articles 19 and 32 of UNDRIP.





▶ 5

**Concluding remarks
and main recommendations
for action**

Indigenous women have made and continue to make enormous efforts to have their voices heard in defence of their rights and those of their peoples. The research undertaken for the purpose of this study, however, shows that there remain significant barriers to their participation in decision-making processes concerning them and their organization. The barriers facing indigenous women are multiple and mutually reinforcing, and operate at collective and individual levels. They are rooted in the discrimination and social, economic and political marginalization suffered by indigenous peoples at the country level, as well as in the patriarchal power structures that prevail within and outside indigenous communities. When examining the array of barriers confronting indigenous women with respect to organization and participation, therefore, it is necessary to take into consideration the overall social, economic and political context concerning indigenous peoples in the countries concerned, together with the specific reality of indigenous women.

Fostering indigenous women's greater participation in decision-making concerning them requires an integrated strategy that takes into account the nexus between the collective and individual dimensions of the existing obstacles, as well as the multiple vulnerabilities of indigenous women related to their gender, indigenous identity and socio-economic status. Fundamentally, this approach must be guided and designed by and with indigenous women themselves, and must respect indigenous women's multiple identities, acknowledging indigenous women's distinct needs, challenges, aspirations and priorities as members of indigenous peoples, women and workers.⁶⁷ As argued in this study, relevant international instruments, including ILO Convention No. 169 and UNDRIP, provide important guidance for developing such a strategy. The strategy should be accompanied by the adoption of measures directed at combating prejudices and negative stereotypes against indigenous women and indigenous peoples more generally, including negative stereotyping in the media.

Importantly, the study has also revealed some positive developments regarding the participation of indigenous women in governance institutions and organizations of different kinds. It is essential to deepen knowledge and understanding of the factors contributing to these developments, with a view to supporting, strengthening and replicating them. At the same time, as suggested earlier, it remains important to continue to investigate remaining obstacles that impede or limit indigenous women's participation in decision-making concerning them and their peoples, with a view to designing informed policy responses with their participation.

Furthermore, the findings of this study confirm that women's economic empowerment and their participation are profoundly linked and, as such, they should be addressed jointly. Indigenous women should have access without discrimination to education and occupational training that is culturally appropriate and relevant to their own aspirations and demands, as well as equality of opportunity and treatment in employment and occupation, in line with the guidance provided by ILO Convention No. 111.

Building on the human-rights framework presented in Chapter 4 and taking into account the issues described in the previous chapters, it is therefore suggested that any strategy directed at addressing indigenous women's barriers to organization and participation should include at least three main areas of action with a view to tackling the barriers in a coordinated and integrated way. These three areas are:

⁶⁷ The limited availability of quantitative and qualitative information on indigenous peoples in general, and indigenous women in particular, remains a challenge in most countries. This has an impact on the formulation of adequate policy responses. Efforts should be directed at collecting quantitative and qualitative information on the living and working conditions of indigenous men and women and the extent of their political participation, in collaboration with indigenous peoples, paying particular attention to the involvement of indigenous women and girls, with a view to reflecting indigenous peoples' own notions of well-being, exclusion and lived realities, and informing policy-making accordingly.

A. Strengthening the policy, legal and institutional framework concerning indigenous peoples' rights

It is essential that States strengthen the legal recognition, protection and implementation of indigenous peoples' collective and individual rights, following the guidance provided by ILO Convention No. 169 and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and ensure effective access to justice for any violations of these rights.⁶⁸ Some specific actions in this regard that have emerged from the conversations held with indigenous women include the following:

- ▶ Tackling existing shortcomings in respect of birth registration and access to national identity cards among the indigenous population by improving the outreach of the competent authorities and sensitizing indigenous men and women on the need for these documents.
- ▶ Addressing current limited access to basic social services and infrastructure and tackling homelessness and inadequate housing conditions of the indigenous population⁶⁹ within the framework of national and local development strategies designed and implemented with the participation of indigenous women and men. Such strategies should respond to the needs and priorities identified by them and pay attention to identifying and tackling the specific obstacles faced by indigenous women and girls. In this regard, access to bilingual and culturally appropriate education, health services and support services and facilities for victims of violence, is crucial.
- ▶ Addressing the security situation affecting certain indigenous communities, paying particular attention to the distinct vulnerabilities to harassment and violence of indigenous women; preventing and addressing gender-based violence against indigenous women, in consultation with them, following the guidance provided by the ILO Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190) and its accompanying Recommendation (No. 206).
- ▶ Preventing and addressing land-related conflicts in full observance of indigenous peoples' rights following the guidance provided in this respect by the ILO Convention No. 169 and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

More generally, countries that have ratified Convention No. 169 should intensify their efforts to ensure the full and effective application of the Convention, by putting in place appropriate policy, legal and institutional frameworks that allow for a coordinated and systematic action to protect the individual and collective rights of indigenous peoples, as envisaged in the Convention.⁷⁰ Participation and consultation of indigenous peoples in the design of such frameworks, in line with the Convention, is essential. Workers and employers' organizations also have an important role to play in encouraging and supporting the adoption of measures to this end. In parallel, countries that have not yet ratified the Convention should be encouraged to consider doing so.

⁶⁸ In line with the guidance provided in ILO Convention No. 169, it is also crucial that States reinforce the institutional apparatus charged with promoting and enforcing indigenous peoples' and women's rights, providing it with the technical and financial capacity to discharge its functions in a systematic and coordinated fashion, at national and local levels, and ensuring indigenous peoples' participation.

⁶⁹ For specific guidance on the implementation of the right to adequate housing of indigenous peoples, see UN 2019a. See also more generally the Guidelines for the Implementation of the Right to Adequate Housing, set out by the UN Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living, and on the right to non-discrimination in this context in UN 2019c.

⁷⁰ For an overview on findings and recommendation made by the ILO's supervisory bodies concerning Convention No. 169 see ILO 2019c.

B. Supporting indigenous women's participation and organization

In order to support indigenous women's participation and organization, it is suggested that the following specific actions be pursued:

- ▶ Supporting the creation and functioning of indigenous women's organizations and networks, and facilitating the exchange of experiences between them, including by providing suitable spaces for their meetings and support services as needed. Such efforts should take into consideration women's family responsibilities, the security situation affecting their communities, geographical distances, the lack of means of transport and women's limited proficiency in the national languages, among others.
- ▶ Supporting indigenous women's access to communication technologies and fostering the skills required.
- ▶ Promoting opportunities for exchanges of experiences and mutual learning between indigenous peoples' and women's organizations, with a view to jointly identifying obstacles, possibilities and strategies for mutual support. In this regard, exploring and showcasing the experiences of global and regional indigenous women's networks could encourage indigenous women to continue advancing their participatory rights, while learning from others' leadership skills.
- ▶ Promoting dialogue and collaboration among indigenous women and trade unions and employers' organizations in the search for solutions to the existing problems facing indigenous women in the world of work, thereby strengthening alliances among such organizations and indigenous women's movements.
- ▶ Promoting the participation of indigenous women on executive boards and thematic committees' relevant organizations, including indigenous peoples' organizations, trade unions and employers' organizations, for example by incorporating special measures into by-laws, wherever appropriate.
- ▶ Providing capacity-building to indigenous men and women and their traditional leaders relating to indigenous peoples' and women's rights, relevant international standards and national legislation; and supporting the initiatives taken by indigenous women themselves, for instance, on gender awareness-raising and the promotion of girls' access to education, in collaboration with them.
- ▶ Ensuring indigenous women's access to information on and awareness of electoral processes at local and national levels and the rules governing them, with a view to encouraging their participation, and providing them with technical assistance and training on leadership and political skills, as appropriate.
- ▶ Exploring the benefits of introducing, as an affirmative action, quota systems to ensure indigenous women's representation in national and local elected bodies, in cooperation with indigenous peoples.

C. Enhancing indigenous women's economic empowerment, through access to decent work and social protection

Measures should be adopted to support and strengthen indigenous women's livelihoods in consultation with them by providing, for example, access to relevant skills development, market facilities and productive resources and inputs, including technology and financial services, and access to information, facilities and technical assistance for the production, processing, marketing and distribution of their products.⁷¹ As emerged from the conversations held with indigenous women in this study, the desired support includes, for example, training in entrepreneurship, marketing, project cycle management, or training in subjects such as embroidery, baking, animal husbandry, the cultivation of family gardens, or cooking and ironing in the case of domestic workers (see section 4.1.). It is equally important that indigenous women's traditional skills and knowledge are properly valued and recognized for the purpose of promoting access to and advancement in employment or engagement in an occupation of their choosing.

In addition, it is suggested that the following specific measures could be envisaged with a view to promoting indigenous women's economic empowerment and resilience:

- ▶ Supporting the collective entrepreneurial initiatives of indigenous women, both in urban and rural areas, with the support of employers' and workers' organizations.
- ▶ Promoting research into indigenous women's entrepreneurship, taking into account both its individual and collective dimensions, in order to identify the specific challenges faced by indigenous women in this regard, and promoting the exchange of experiences between them.
- ▶ Fostering development cooperation initiatives that respond more appropriately to the existing and emerging realities that indigenous women may face in rural and urban areas regarding their employment and occupations.
- ▶ Carrying out comprehensive assessments of indigenous women's specific vulnerabilities to climate change and the impact of mitigation and adaptation strategies on them; and adopting appropriate measures, in collaboration with them, to strengthen their resilience taking into account their traditional knowledge and practices.
- ▶ Promoting indigenous women's awareness of their labour rights, including their rights to equal remuneration for work of equal value, to a safe and healthy working environment and to be free from violence and harassment, including sexual harassment; promoting and supporting cooperation among indigenous peoples' and women's organizations with trade unions and employers' organizations.
- ▶ Ensuring indigenous women's access to social protection, including social protection floors, and assessing current gaps in social protection, barriers and priorities for intervention, in collaboration with them.⁷²
- ▶ Ensuring access to culturally appropriate child-care facilities for indigenous women according to their demands and exploring, together with them, the opportunity to support the design and implementation of nursery services at community level.

⁷¹ See also the guidance provided in respect of the informal economy in ILO's Transition from the Informal to the Formal Economy Recommendation, 2015 (No. 204).

⁷² For specific guidance on ensuring social protection for indigenous peoples, see ILO 2018. See also more generally the ILO's Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202)

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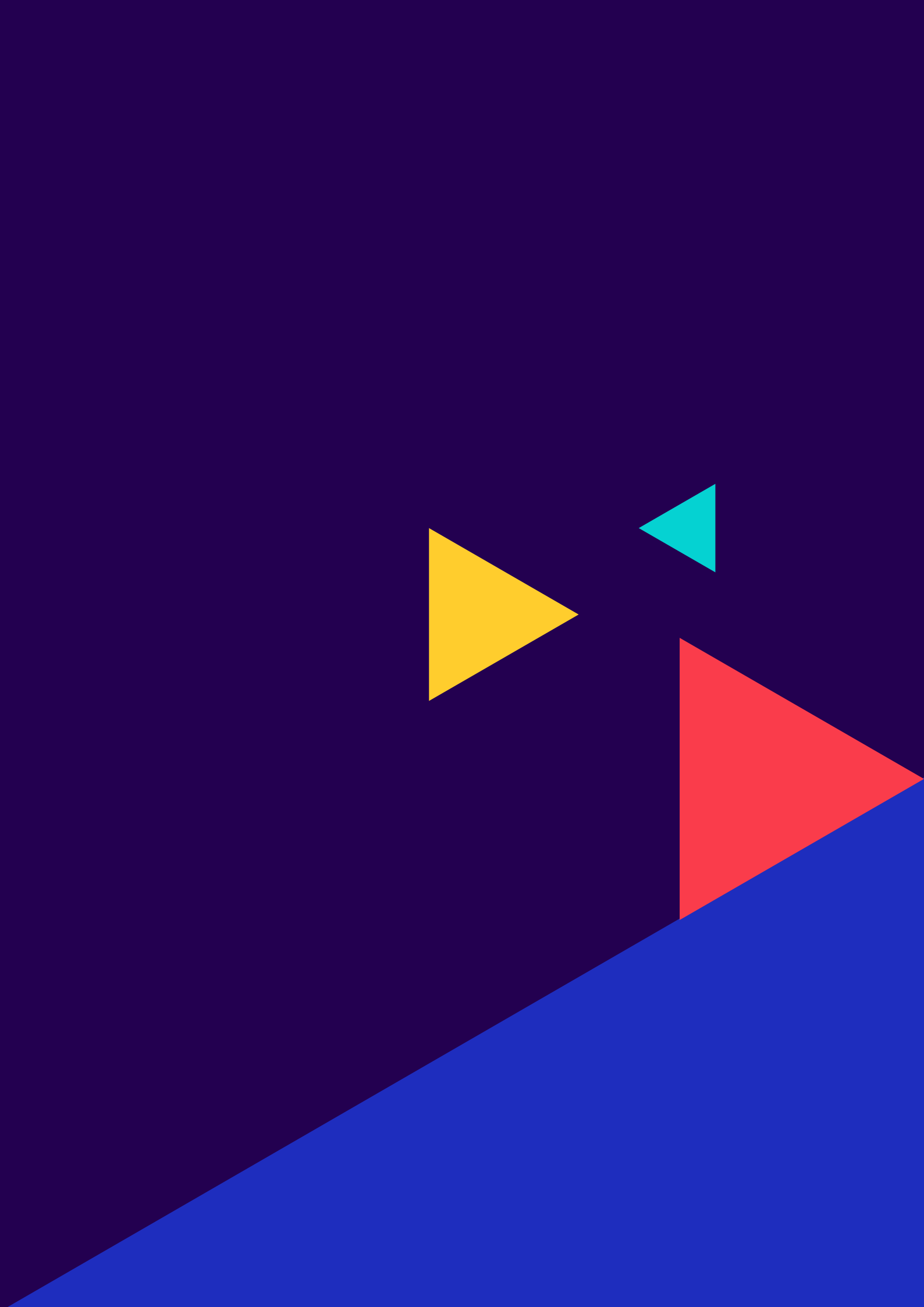
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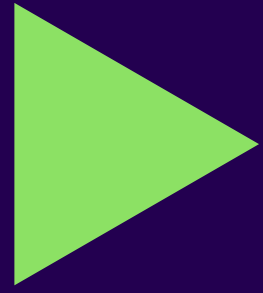
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Annex: Country Profiles

► Bangladesh

1. The national context

According to the 2011 national census, indigenous peoples¹ in Bangladesh represent 1.8 per cent of the national population.² They make up more than 50 ethnic groups,³ residing in the plain districts of the North and South East of the country and in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). Due to the lack of adequately disaggregated data in the census, a full picture of indigenous peoples' socio-economic situation in the country is not available. However, a socio-economic baseline survey conducted by a nongovernmental research organization prior to the national census showed that only 7.8 per cent of indigenous peoples in the CHT completed primary education and only 2.4 per cent completed secondary education; approximately 22 per cent of indigenous households in the CHT had lost their lands.⁴ Concerning indigenous peoples in the plains, their situation appears to be worse.⁵ The living conditions of indigenous peoples in Bangladesh have recently been summarized as follows: “[a] significant portion of the indigenous population continues to be deprived of basic socio-economic rights, including education, healthcare, food and nutritional security, access to safe drinking water, mains electricity and so forth. The situation of indigenous women, youth, elders and persons with disability is many times worse, as their contexts are often ignored”.⁶ Thus, despite the progresses made in the country with respect to, among others, poverty reduction, primary school enrolment, gender parity in primary and secondary level education and lowering the infant and under-five mortality rate and the maternal mortality ratio, indigenous peoples continue to lag behind the rest of the national population.⁷

Bangladesh has ratified the Indigenous and Tribal Populations Convention, 1957 (No. 107), the predecessor of the ILO Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169). It has also ratified other ILO Conventions that are particularly relevant to the protection of indigenous peoples' rights and the promotion of gender equality, including the ILO Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111) and the Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29). The Constitution of Bangladesh recognizes “tribes, minor races, ethnic sects and communities” and calls upon the State to take steps to protect and develop their “unique local culture and tradition” (art. 23). It also refers to a “backward section of citizens” in various articles, thus laying the foundation for the adoption of positive measures for indigenous peoples with a view to addressing their situation of disadvantage and ensuring effective equality with the rest of the population. In addition, the Constitution states that the State “shall endeavour to ensure equality of opportunity to all citizens” (art. 19) and that “women shall have equal

1 Reference is made to the identification criteria set out in Article 1 of the ILO Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169). For the purpose of this country profile, the term “indigenous peoples” is used to include both indigenous and tribal peoples.

2 According to the census, the indigenous population consists of approximately 1,586,141 persons. This figure has been challenged, however, and some argue that it underestimates the actual number of indigenous people residing in the country. See IWGIA, *The Indigenous World 2019, 2020*.

3 The list of 24 ethnic groups developed in connection with the Small Ethnic Groups Cultural Institution Act of 2010 has recently been expanded to encompass 50 ethnic groups. Some indicate, however, that indigenous peoples comprise 54 ethnic groups. See IWGIA, *The Indigenous World 2019*.

4 See IFAD, *Country Technical Note on Indigenous Peoples' Issues: Bangladesh*, 2012; and ILO, *Baseline Assessment of Skills and Employment of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Bangladesh*, 2017.

5 IFAD, *Country Technical Note on Indigenous Peoples' Issues: Bangladesh*, 2012.

6 Raja Devasish Roy and Mangal Kumar Chakma, *Indigenous People in Bangladesh: Human Rights and Sustainable Development Goals* (BIPF 2015), p. 2.

7 *ibid.*

rights with men in all spheres of the State and of public life" (art. 28).⁸ The indigenous peoples of the CHT are also subject to special legislation, following the 1997 Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord. Conversely, the indigenous peoples of the plains are only referred to in the 1950 East Bengal State Acquisition and Tenancy Act, which governs land administration in the plains, and therefore enjoy a much lower degree of recognition and protection.⁹ The National Women's Development Policy, first adopted in 2008 and then revised in 2011, is the only policy document that specifically mentions indigenous women. Given that many indigenous women are employed as domestic workers in Bangladesh, it is also worth recalling that in 2015 a Domestic Workers' Protection and Welfare Policy was adopted.

The following sections present findings from qualitative research undertaken in 2019 on indigenous women's participation and representation in various decision-making bodies, including traditional social structures, indigenous and tribal peoples' organizations, local government bodies and the national parliament.¹⁰ The research also examined violence and harassment against indigenous women in the world of work as a specific barrier to their organization and participation in decision-making. The research involved selected groups of indigenous peoples from the following zones and districts: (a) North-Bengal: Sirajganj, Rajshahi and Natore, (b) Central North: Netrokona, Tangail and Gazipur, (c) North-East: Sylhet and Moulvibazar, and (d) South-East (Chittagong Hill Tracts): Bandarban, Khagrachari and Rangamati. In addition, several locations with concentrations of indigenous workers engaged in the formal and informal sectors were also covered, namely Chittagong Export Processing Zone (EPZ), Dhaka EPZ and Dhaka city. The research was guided by a methodological framework focusing on identifying physical, psychological and social-institutional barriers to indigenous women's organization and participation.¹¹ Information was gathered through 24 key informant interviews with representatives of relevant ministries, relevant UN and other agencies and indigenous and tribal peoples' organizations, community leaders and activists; 52 in-depth unstructured and semi-structured interviews with elected officials in local government bodies, traditional and community leaders, activists, representatives of indigenous and tribal peoples' organizations and trade unions, line managers of garment enterprises, and workers from different formal and informal sectors; 50 focus group discussions with indigenous and tribal men, women, youth, workers, representatives of indigenous and tribal peoples' organizations, and traditional and community leaders; 11 participatory learning workshops; and five case studies on specific individuals to gather detailed personal experience and explore real-life environments and complexities. While selecting informants for the focus group discussions and the participatory learning workshops, special attention was paid to ensuring equitable representation of ethnicities, as well as representation from various age groups and socio-economic levels. In the participatory learning workshops, there was a total of 33 participants, 28 of whom were women. Concerning the focus group discussions, and more particularly the 28 focus group discussions focusing on the participation and representation of indigenous women in decision-making bodies, of the 298 respondents, 189 were women.

⁸ In this respect, it should, however, be noted that the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women expressed concerns "about the State party's failure to adopt the long-awaited anti-discrimination law and about the lack of implementation of the provisions of the Constitution and existing laws on the rights of women and girls, owing in part to prevailing patriarchal attitudes in the State party". See Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, [Concluding observations on the eighth periodic report of Bangladesh](#), CEDAW/C/BGD/CO/8 (2016), para. 10.

⁹ For an overview of the relevant national legislation on indigenous peoples, see Devasish Roy, *The ILO Convention on Indigenous and Tribal Populations, 1957 (No. 107) and the Laws of Bangladesh: A Comparative Review*.

¹⁰ Zobaida Nasreen and Yan Yan Rani, *The Situation of indigenous and tribal women's participation and representation in the decision-making bodies and violence and harassment against indigenous and tribal women workers in the world of work in Bangladesh* (ILO, unpublished). See ILO, *Exploring and Tackling Barriers to Indigenous Women's Participation and Organization: A study based on qualitative research in Bangladesh, the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Cameroon and Guatemala*, 2021.

¹¹ Paola Ballon and Paulius Yamin, *A qualitative study into barriers for organization and strategies for overcoming them: Methodological note* (ILO, unpublished).

2. Indigenous women's life: their reality and aspirations

2.1 Indigenous women within the family, community and society

The majority of indigenous women in Bangladesh are engaged in agricultural activities alongside men, for example the cultivation of betel leaf ("paan") among the Khasi people and the practice of shifting cultivation in the CHT. However, several areas traditionally occupied or used by indigenous peoples have over time been declared reserved forests or "natural parks", or have been included within privately owned tea estates. This has led to evictions of communities. The lack of recognition of indigenous peoples' land rights has produced severe repercussions on indigenous communities' livelihoods, which are land-based, and an especially harsh impact on indigenous women who are responsible for feeding their family members on a daily basis. As will be described below, land-related conflicts have also exposed indigenous women to violence and harassment. Land dispossession has been a factor behind indigenous men and women's search for alternative sources of livelihood and income as wage labourers in agriculture or migration to urban centres where they are frequently occupied in low-paying jobs with poor working conditions, often in the informal economy.¹²

Indigenous women's engagement in income-generating activities (for example, selling agricultural products and handicrafts) would give them a certain degree of financial independence and room for decision-making. Nevertheless, according to the country study, such independence is constrained by the fact that they spend a greater percentage of their income on meeting the collective needs of the family compared to men.¹³ According to the replies received by most respondents, family decisions are normally taken together by indigenous men and women but, where there is no agreement, men's opinions prevail, including within matrilineal communities. It should also be noted that indigenous women have limited access to land rights. Although in most of the communities examined for the research, women have no inheritance rights, widows' and unmarried daughters' right to maintenance is recognized, that is they are provided with the means to meet their living expenditures. However, among the Garo and Khasi peoples, who follow matrilineal traditions, only women inherit landed property. Among the Marma of the southern CHT in Bohmang Circle, women and men have an equal right to inherit paternal property, although women are entitled to smaller shares than men.

As far as decision-making at the community level is concerned, the level of indigenous women's participation is low, although exceptions are noted and important changes are under way. In the plains, leadership positions are held by men. The same holds true for membership in the various village and regional councils. In other terms, indigenous women are not represented in the traditional governance systems.¹⁴ Inquiries during the field work revealed that nobody, whether man or woman, was known to have challenged this customary rule to favour women's participation. Likewise, indigenous women are not expected nor allowed to attend dispute resolution meetings unless they are a direct party to the dispute. In the same vein, in the Garo and Khasi communities, which are matrilineal communities, women do not hold traditional leadership positions nor do they participate in the election of the village chief. Notwithstanding, women from the Garo communities have indicated that, in recent years, women have been able to attend dispute resolution meetings in their villages and elderly women or women of

¹² In urban areas, indigenous women tend to work in beauty parlours, fashion houses or as domestic workers. They are also found in the formal sector in the garment industry.

¹³ It should be noted that, in both the plains and the CHT, the indigenous women interviewed reported that women generally receive lower wages than men (for example, Tk 400-450 for men and Tk 300-350 for women per day in the plains and Tk 350-400 for men and Tk 250-350 for women per day in the CHT). It was observed that the wage discrimination experienced by indigenous women is based on their gender rather than their ethnicity because similar wage discrepancies are maintained in wages of non-indigenous men and women. It is thus noted that in both the plains and in the CHT, there is no wage discrimination between indigenous women and non-indigenous women. The same is observed between indigenous men and non-indigenous men.

¹⁴ The Oraon community represents an exception in this regard.

social stature are often consulted when complicated issues are put forth for resolution. In their view, this change could be attributed to an increasing awareness among Garo women of their roles, as well as to the ability they have gained to leverage women's inheritance rights to participate in decision-making processes.

The situation is similar in the CHT. The leadership positions (chieftainship and karbariship) are held by men and are inherited by male members of the family. The only exceptions envisaged are where the chieftain's or karbari's son has not reached the age when he can carry out the duties with due competence; or where the chieftain or the karbari assume a government position, which is incompatible with maintaining their traditional role. In the first case, the mother (the wife of the deceased or capitulated traditional leader) of the son retains the position for the future successor during the intermittent time, while in the second case, the wife of the incumbent chieftain or karbari acts as the chieftain or karbaris until a male successor in the family is identified. However, in 2014 the Chakma Chief in the Chakma Circle proposed a reform of the traditional governance structure allowing for women to become karbaris following nomination by the villagers and endorsement by the chieftain. This reform was later adopted in other communities. As a result, according to the country study, the number of women karbaris increased from six in 2012 to 514 in 2018, out of 2,780 karbari positions.¹⁵ Also, the level of indigenous women's participation in villages where women karbaris have been appointed has increased significantly, compared to the villages without women karbaris. Progress is affected by many factors, including the leadership capability of the woman karbari, the level of support she receives from the male karbari and the chieftain, as well as the openness to this development among the villagers, both women and men. For example, conversations held with indigenous women from the Mro, Chak, Khumi, Khyang and Bawm communities, which have not appointed any woman to the kabari position, showed that the idea of women holding traditional leadership positions remains foreign to them.

Concerning indigenous tea workers, they have a unique governance system, which serves as a trade union as well as a self-governing body. It is comprised of three levels, namely the Bagan Panchayet Committee at the bagan or garden level; the Valley committee, encompassing several gardens; and the central committee, the Bangladesh Cha Sharmik Union, whose vice president and assistant secretary posts are reserved for women workers. Overall, indigenous women's participation is, however, low. Women interviewed felt that women members of the Bagan Panchayet Committee, for example, held only an "ornamental" function, as they do not participate in meetings regularly or have close contact with the other female workers in the garden, thus these workers have limited opportunities to voice their problems through them.

2.1.1. Indigenous women in formal governance institutions and organizations

Turning to the local administration institutions,¹⁶ at both the Union Parishad and Upazila Parishad levels of local government, measures have been introduced, in the form of reserved seats, to facilitate women's participation. There are, however, no special measures specifically directed at indigenous women. Due to the absence of information disaggregated by ethnic origin, the full extent of indigenous peoples' representation in the local government institutions is not known. According to the information gathered for the present research concerning 11 districts, at the time of the research no indigenous woman held the position of chairperson in the Union Parishad but there were 220 indigenous women members of the

¹⁵ At the time the field work was undertaken, Chakma, Marma, Tripura, Tanchangya and Pangkhua women were holding karbari positions while Mro, Chak, Khumi, Khyang, Bawm and Lushai women were not represented in their respective villages.

¹⁶ It is worth recalling that the local government division of the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives is responsible for local governance, with the exception of district and regional level governance in the CHT, which are under the Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs. The Local Government (Union Parishad) Ordinance 1983, as subsequently amended, and the Local Government (Upazila Parishad) Act 2011 set out the main regulations for government at local level.



Union Parishad compared to 317 men.¹⁷ Indigenous women have never stood for the post of chairperson. Moreover, there seems to be a widespread understanding that general seats, including the post of the chairperson, are to be elected among men, since women are given reserved seats. In the plains, however, indigenous women face difficulties even in getting elected for reserved seats. This is linked to the generally extremely low representation of both indigenous women and men in the plains. When contrasting indigenous and non-indigenous persons' representation, however, it becomes apparent that in general indigenous women's representation is higher than indigenous men's representation in nearly all of the districts. In other words, indigenous women have a greater chance of representation within their allocated reserved seats than indigenous men in general seats.¹⁸

Indigenous women interviewed expressed little interest in participating in electoral processes because, on the one hand, it would represent for them an extra "burden" in addition to their many responsibilities and, on the other, the large majority of them believe that elections are not transparent or fair. According to the information gathered, indigenous women face threats and intimidation as a means of forcing their withdrawal. While indigenous men also receive the same type of intimidation, women feel more vulnerable and have less support from their family, and are thus more likely to back out. Additionally,

¹⁷ The data presented here are based on the results of the elections as published in the Government Gazettes.

¹⁸ It was also found that in Rangamati, an indigenous woman from the Chakma people, backed by the largest indigenous peoples' political party in the CHT, was able to secure the position of Upazila Chairperson. This is unprecedented in the history of Upazila Parishad elections in Bangladesh and was made possible thanks to the strong support received by the political party, including through intense field level campaigns. Indigenous persons' representation in political parties is generally very low, except in the districts of CHT where it is strategically important to include indigenous persons to win seats in national election as well as to have party dominance at local level government. See Section 3.

once elected as Union Parishad members, indigenous women face a number of challenges to performing their duties, including: lack of knowledge of rules and functions of the Union Parishads and its standing committees; language barriers, as the language of official proceedings is Bengali; and little impact on decision-making, since male members tend to dominate discussions, leaving little opportunity for women to speak, and final decisions do not take into account women's opinions.¹⁹ Moreover, whereas when discussing gender-related issues, women may be able to support each other regardless of their ethnic origin, when debates centre on questions that are specific to indigenous communities, it is difficult for indigenous women to gain support from other women.

Local government in the CHT is structured in Hill District Councils and the CHT Regional Council. In the Regional Council, three out of 25 seats are reserved for women, two for "tribal" and one for "non-tribal" women.²⁰ Concerning the Hill District Councils, three out of 34 seats are reserved for women, two for "tribal" and one for "non-tribal" women.²¹ However, elections to appoint members of these bodies have not yet been held. Thus, for example, the functions of the Regional Council are discharged by a government-appointed council which was formed according to the ethnic and gender ratio specified in the legislation. In the absence of elections, women have not been able to run for the "general" or "unreserved" seats to seek greater representation. Women interviewed indicated that neither indigenous women nor other women in these councils have been able to exert a real influence in the decision-making processes.

In the National Parliament, quotas have also been established to ensure women's representation in general, without, however, specific requirements regarding the participation of indigenous women. Since the country's independence in 1971, only four indigenous women, all from the CHT,²² have been elected to the Parliament. In the view of some of the indigenous women interviewed, special measures in the form of reserved seats for indigenous women are needed in order to ensure indigenous women's participation in the Parliament, especially in the case of indigenous women from the plains. On the other hand, similarly to indigenous men, since Parliament members are elected via political parties, they must abide by political parties' agendas and may not be in a position to represent and voice indigenous men and women's specific concerns or cooperate with them beyond allegiance to the various political parties.

When it comes to indigenous women's representation and participation in the organizations of indigenous peoples, according to the research conducted into some of the most prominent organizations at national and local levels,²³ indigenous women represent, on average, between 15 per cent and 24 per cent of the organizations' members. In all the organizations examined, women are part of the Executive Committees. All organizations' by-laws provide for women's representation in these committees, although only in one case a specific quota (three seats) is reserved for them. Furthermore, by-laws prescribe that the committees shall have a secretary for women's affairs and this position is reserved for women. On the other hand, the representatives of the organizations interviewed stated that finding indigenous women with the skills required for decision-making positions is not easy. Nevertheless, indigenous peoples' organizations have taken a number of measures with a view to empowering indigenous women. Some

19 It should also be noted that decisions are taken based on majority vote and the ratio of male-female members in any Union Parishad is usually 3:1. In the plains, the scenario is worse as, for example, indigenous women hold one out of 12 seats in one Union Parishad.

20 See the CHT Regional Council Act, 1998.

21 See the Hill District Councils Act, 1998.

22 This can be explained by the higher percentage of indigenous population in the CHT compared to the plains.

23 For the purpose of this research, the following organizations were examined: Jatiyo Adivasi Parishad (National Indigenous Peoples' Council); Tribal Welfare Association; Parbatya Chattogram Jana Sanghati Samiti, PCJSS; Pahari Shromik Kalyan Forum (Hill Workers' Welfare Forum); Bangladesh Adivasi Forum (Bangladesh Indigenous Peoples' Forum), BIPF; Bangladesh Indigenous Women's Forum, BIWN; and Bangladesh Indigenous Peoples' Network on Climate Change and Biodiversity, BIPNet-CCBD. The structures, composition of executive committees and by-laws of these organizations were reviewed and focus group discussions and interviews were carried out to assess the level of representation and participation of indigenous and tribal women in them.

of them, for instance, have created “women wings” that operate under the overall coordination of the main organization. Thus, for example, the Parbatya Chattogram Jana Sanghati Samiti (PCJSS) and the Pahari Shromik Kalyan Forum (the Hill Workers' Welfare Forum) have separate “women wings”, namely: Parbatya Chattogram Mahila Samity (CHT Women's Association) and Pahari Mohila Shromik Kalyan Forum (the Hill Women Worker Welfare Forum). Also, at the national level, one indigenous women's organization has been created: the Bangladesh Indigenous Women's Forum.²⁴

2.2 Indigenous women looking ahead

While the majority of indigenous women interviewed in the plains indicated that men should maintain their traditional positions as head of villages, cluster villages and different councils, some expressed the view that indigenous women should be given the same opportunity as men.²⁵ All respondents felt, however, that community members may not be ready to accept such a change. Women also felt that men were more knowledgeable and capable of dealing with public affairs than women, and thus more suitable to holding traditional leadership roles. While some men interviewed supported the idea of encouraging women's participation in village meetings, most of them shared the same opinion as women concerning the latter's lack of skills and capacity. With regard to the CHT, while important changes have occurred in some communities concerning the appointment of women to traditional roles, as described in the previous section, in some others, like the Mro, Chak, Khumi, Khiyang and Bawm communities, indigenous women do not feel the need to have women karbaris in their villages and have mixed opinions about allowing women's participation in meetings.

Concerning women's participation in organizations, indigenous women expressed the view that more needs to be done to encourage their participation by addressing the barriers they face and filling the current capacity gaps (see the next section). It was also emphasized that raising women's awareness of their rights is very much needed but organizations lack funds to undertake these kinds of activities at the local level. While in the CHT the reforms described in the previous section have triggered some interest in development actors who are investing resources to support training for women karbaris and awareness-raising on gender equality, in the plains funding scarcity remains acute and prevents the realization of similar activities.

3. Barriers to indigenous women's organization and participation

Indigenous women face multiple and mutually reinforcing barriers to their organization and participation, operating at the individual and collective levels. A number of these barriers will be described below as they emerged from the interaction with indigenous women. These barriers have been classified according to the methodological framework guiding the research into three main categories, namely physical, psychological and socio-institutional determinants. However, barriers described below may be “cross-cutting” and at the same time constitute a physical, psychological and socio-institutional obstacles. Indigenous women may also perceive them in different ways. In addition, barriers are generally deeply linked to and rooted in the socio-institutional context in which indigenous women and their communities live. In this connection, it is also worth noting that the conversations held with indigenous women in the context of the research were guided by a questionnaire which may have prioritized certain specific aspects.²⁶ In order to understand vast array of obstacles faced by indigenous women with respect

²⁴ This organization, however, depends on external support from other organizations on secretarial and financial matters, among others, because its members lack capacity to secure funding and organize events.

²⁵ Indigenous women working for NGOs or as teachers or having participated in the activities of some organizations tended to be of the view that traditional governance structures needed to evolve to accommodate women's participation in meetings and access to decision-making positions.

²⁶ For more information on the type of questionnaire used, see ILO, *Exploring and Tackling Barriers to Indigenous Women's Participation and Organization*, Chapter 1.

to organization and participation, the findings presented here should therefore be read against the backdrop of the overall social, economic and political context concerning indigenous peoples in the country as well as the specific reality of indigenous women as briefly described in the previous sections.

3.1 Physical determinants

Indigenous women's financial dependence on their husbands or other male members of their family represents a challenge to their engagement in public processes, as women would normally be unable to afford, for example, the costs of conducting a campaign prior to elections, nor would they be in a position to sustain the costs of a public representative function. The link between land rights and financial dependence on men was particularly highlighted, as in some indigenous communities women have limited rights to land.²⁷ Thus, without the support of the male members of the family, it is not possible for indigenous women to engage in the formal governance system.

3.2 Psychological determinants

Indigenous women appear to have internalized a strong feeling of inferiority vis-à-vis men. The prevailing perception among both women and men is that women "lack intelligence" and their opinions are irrelevant. Many women interviewed for the research who expressed no interest in women's participation in decision-making processes based their considerations on the belief that women lack knowledge of communities' customs and practices. Furthermore, many respondents regard tradition as immutable. Consequently, men and women alike see changes in the traditional practices as "corrupt" and are reluctant to encourage or accept them. Some indigenous women have showed a certain degree of awareness, however, that their lack of knowledge and confidence is the result of their historical exclusion from governance institutions and that, if given the opportunity, women can acquire the knowledge needed to occupy positions of responsibility. Women *kabaris* in the CHT have in fact indicated that prejudices against women and the negative perceptions regarding their abilities are gradually changing in their communities since they were appointed.

Indigenous women's lack of knowledge of customary laws and regulations governing formal governance structure as well as, more generally, their lack of awareness of their rights is also seen as a significant barrier to their participation in decision-making processes concerning them. It has been observed that in the CHT, for example, where civil society is more vibrant and indigenous women have long been part of the indigenous rights movement, women are more likely to express support for indigenous women's representation in traditional governance structures compared to indigenous women in the plains who have had less opportunity to participate in awareness-raising programmes or other activities on indigenous peoples' and women's rights. Furthermore, indigenous women's lack of education²⁸ and limited fluency in Bengali impede their participation in formal governance institutions in practice, both in the plains and in CHT. It should be noted that language barriers are an even greater obstacle in the plains where Bengali people represent the majority of the population. Indigenous women also indicated that the fear of losing their jobs is a barrier to their organization (see below under social determinants).

3.3 Social-institutional determinants

The traditional gender-based division of roles and responsibilities within indigenous peoples' communities represent a significant barrier to women's organization and participation. Indigenous

²⁷ It is worth recalling here that women have limited rights to land (see Section 2).

²⁸ Indigenous women's access to education is limited. In a context marked by poverty, families prefer to invest their limited resources in boys' education, which results in a higher rate of dropouts of girls from secondary school compared to boys. Thus, higher education among women is rare. While illiteracy is widespread among women's older generations, younger generations are able to complete primary education.

women are responsible for the care of children, the elderly and sick members of the family and for feeding them, in addition to performing other economic activities as illustrated in the previous sections. This leaves them with very little time to devote to other activities, including engaging in public affairs. While indigenous women interviewed do not question the current distribution of roles within their family, they identified it as a major obstacle to their participation and considered that obtaining support, both emotional from the male members of their family and physical, such as assistance from other able family members, is crucial to address it. In the current situation, many indigenous women do not contemplate participating in public life, including running for elections, because this would represent an additional burden on their already very busy daily routine.

Concerning the electoral system, indigenous women referred also to the lack of support and commitment from political parties as a barrier. Ensuring representation of different sections of the population is in general not a priority on the agenda of national political parties, unless it has some strategic value. In the plain land, where indigenous peoples are in a disadvantaged position owing to their small numbers, party backing is essential to win in any election. Hence, without the commitment of political parties, ensuring indigenous women's representation in elected bodies remains challenging.

In the case of trade unions - for example the Pahari Shramik Kalyan Parishad, an organization formed to organize garment sector workers of indigenous origin from the CHT -, according to the information gathered, indigenous women's participation is minimal due to their family responsibilities and the fear of losing their jobs.

A further obstacle lies in the context of insecurity in which indigenous women may find themselves. As previously mentioned, indigenous women who run for elections are frequently victims of threats by the supporters of competing candidates. According to the information gathered, when they file complaints with law enforcement agencies about the threats received, little if anything is done, so most of them eventually decide to withdraw from participating in the election process. Furthermore, it is worth recalling that indigenous women face a high risk of being victims of violence and harassment, especially in the CHT, more particularly in the areas where land-related conflicts exist between indigenous peoples and non-indigenous settlers. Indigenous women interviewed from the CHT reported having experiencing inappropriate touching and derogatory remarks of a sexual nature by non-indigenous men. All of them had knowledge of at least one incident of sexual harassment against indigenous women or girls that had occurred in their areas. No one, however, indicated that they had sought justice or that they knew of any victim who had. Generally, it was reported that this was due to the prevailing lack of trust in the formal legal system.

Concerning indigenous women who have engaged in various wage-earning employment (for example, beauty parlour workers, domestic workers, tea garden workers and fashion house workers), the respondents mentioned violence and harassment as one of the greatest barriers to organization. The majority of them have not filed any complaint about the harassment experienced and many were reluctant to talk about it. Several reasons have been mentioned as to why harassment represents a barrier to women's organization, including fear of being subjected to further harassment or losing their jobs, concerns about their safety outside of the workplace, and lack of support,²⁹ which is only provided in the case of the most egregious situations, such as rape and murder. In the case of tea garden workers, women also feared reprisals against their family members. Concerning indigenous women workers in the agricultural sector in general, they have emphasized the overall context of violence and harassment against indigenous women in the country.

²⁹ In some cases, this also includes a lack of support from colleagues because of indigenous women's ethnic origin.

4. Strategies and recommendations for strengthening indigenous women's organization and participation in decision making for decent work and economic empowerment

As described in the previous sections, indigenous women from the CHT and the plains are confronted with multiple obstacles to their organization and participation that intersect and mutually reinforce each other. These barriers are of varying nature and are rooted in the discrimination and social, economic and political marginalization suffered by indigenous peoples as well as in the patriarchal power structures that prevail within and outside indigenous communities. Positive developments have been observed, however, including the increased participation of women in community meetings, playing an advisory role in dispute resolution mechanisms, covering traditional leadership positions at village level, such as the karbari, and participating in organizations in defence of their rights, among others.

Addressing barriers to indigenous women's organization and participation and encouraging the positive developments under way should entail an integrated approach that is mindful of the nexus between the collective and individual dimensions of the existing obstacles. It is also important to take into account the multiple vulnerabilities of indigenous women related to their gender, indigenous identity and socio-economic status, while being respectful of their priorities, cosmovision and cultural identity. It is key that indigenous women themselves participate in the design and implementation of any strategy aimed at strengthening their organization and participation in decision-making.

Recommendations

- Strengthen the legal recognition, protection and implementation of indigenous peoples' collective and individual rights, following the guidance provided by the ILO Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169) and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Particular attention should be paid to the rights to consultation and participation, the right to define and pursue priorities for development, the right to land and natural resources, as well effective access to justice when rights are violated.
- Ensure indigenous and tribal peoples' access to education and other basic social services within the framework of national and local development strategies. These strategies should be designed and implemented with the participation of indigenous women and men, with particular attention to identifying and tackling the specific obstacles faced by indigenous women and girls. Measures envisaged or adopted within the framework of the National Women's Development Policy with respect to indigenous women shall be responsive to their needs and priorities.
- Establish State institutions in charge of promoting indigenous peoples' rights and gender equality with the technical and financial capacity to discharge their functions in a systematic and coordinated fashion at national and local levels.
- Ensure indigenous women's participation in the formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of public policies that concern them, including in areas such as equality and non-discrimination, education, employment and occupation, social protection, climate change, and gender-based violence.
- Further investigate the factors contributing to the positive developments described above enhancing the participation of indigenous women, with a view to supporting their promotion and further unfolding.
- Support the creation and functioning of indigenous women's organizations and networks and facilitate the exchange of experiences among them. This could include support for the creation of suitable meeting spaces and support services, taking into consideration family responsibilities on women, the security situation affecting their communities, transportation needs, and women's limited proficiency in the national languages, among others.

- ▶ Pursue capacity-building for indigenous men and women and their traditional leadership on indigenous women's rights and support the initiatives taken by indigenous women themselves, for instance, on gender awareness-raising and the promotion of girls' access to education.
- ▶ Ensure indigenous women's access to information on and awareness of electoral processes at local and national levels and the rules governing them, with a view to encouraging their participation, and provide them with technical assistance and training on leadership and political skills.
- ▶ Explore the possibility of introducing quota systems to ensure indigenous women's representation in national and local elected bodies, in cooperation with indigenous peoples and women, and hold elections for the Hill District Councils and the Regional Council in the CHT.
- ▶ Support and strengthen indigenous women's livelihoods in consultation with them, including by providing, for example, relevant skills development and support to collective entrepreneurial initiatives.
- ▶ Promote indigenous women's awareness of their labour rights and facilitate the cooperation between indigenous peoples' and women's organizations and trade unions.
- ▶ Take proactive measures to address the security situation affecting indigenous communities, in collaboration with the people concerned, paying particular attention to the distinct vulnerabilities to harassment and violence of indigenous women, in line with the guidance provided by the ILO Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190) and its accompanying Recommendation (No. 206).
- ▶ Prevent and address land-related conflicts in full observance of indigenous peoples' rights, in compliance with Indigenous and Tribal Populations Convention, 1957 (No. 107), and in line with the guidance provided in this respect by the ILO Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169) and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.
- ▶ Ensure prompt investigation into the threats and acts of harassment and violence against indigenous women and men, and adopt all necessary measures to prevent and address them, in consultation with the peoples concerned.

► The Plurinational State of Bolivia

1. The national context

According to the 2012 national census, indigenous peoples represent 40.6 per cent of the Bolivian population aged 15 and over, and indigenous women constitute 50.4 per cent of the total indigenous population. Disparities in well-being persist in the country between urban and rural areas and on the basis of gender and indigenous origin.³⁰ The average gender gap in education, for example, between a poor indigenous woman and a non-indigenous man from the richest quintile is ten years, with indigenous women attaining around two and a half years of education. It is estimated that more than half of the indigenous population has no access to education.³¹ Health infrastructure is concentrated in urban centres resulting in only half of the population claiming to resort to the public health service in case of illness.³² According to the 2017 household survey, informal employment is widespread among the indigenous population (90.9 per cent). The percentage of indigenous persons occupying high skill and stable jobs is two to three times smaller than the percentage of non-indigenous people; an indigenous person likely earns nine per cent less in urban settings, and 13 per cent less in rural areas. For indigenous women the situation is worse: indigenous women earn about 60 per cent less than non-indigenous women for the same type of jobs.³³ Furthermore, cases of forced labour and servitude practices also persist, mainly in sugar cane and nut harvesting, and in plantations and stock-breeding ranches, which particularly affect indigenous populations of Quechua and Guaraní origin, notably indigenous women and children.³⁴ Episodes of violence against indigenous peoples have also occurred in the context of the socio-political tensions in the country.³⁵

The Plurinational State of Bolivia has ratified the ILO Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169).³⁶ Convention No. 169 is an integral part of Bolivia's legal order, at the rank of constitutional law.³⁷ It has also ratified other ILO Conventions particularly relevant to the protection of indigenous peoples' rights and the promotion of gender equality, including the ILO Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111), the Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29), and the Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189). The Constitution of the Plurinational State of Bolivia recognizes indigenous peoples' right to autonomy and self-government, their culture and institutions, and the consolidation of their territorial entities (art. 2); sets out, in Chapter IV, the "Rights of the Nations and Rural Native Indigenous Peoples"; guarantees everyone and all collectives, without discrimination, the free and effective exercise of the rights established in the Constitution, the laws and international human rights treaties (art. 14); prohibits and punishes all forms of discrimination (art. 14); states that "spouses

30 See, for example, UN, Common Country Assessment: Bolivia, 2017.

31 According to the 2017 Household Survey, 53.8 per cent of the indigenous population does not have access to education compared to 21.8 per cent of the non-indigenous population. In the case of indigenous women, 64.8 per cent of them have no education.

32 UNDP, *Informe Nacional sobre Desarrollo Humano: El nuevo rostro de Bolivia*, 2015.

33 The World Bank, *Indigenous Latin America in the Twenty-First Century* (World Bank 2015).

34 See, for example, the comments by the ILO's Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations (CEACR) under the Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29).

35 See OAS, resolution no. CP/RES. 1142 (2268/19), Rejecting Violence in Bolivia And Calling for Full Respect of the Rights of the Indigenous Peoples in the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Adopted by the Permanent Council at its regular meeting of December 18, 2019.

36 For an overview of national laws and policies relevant to the implementation of the Convention No. 169, see ILO, *Leyes y políticas públicas al respecto de pueblos indígenas y tribales: Perfiles de países de América Latina que han ratificado el Convenio sobre pueblos indígenas y tribales, 1989 (núm. 169)*, 2020.

37 ILO, *Application of Convention No. 169 by domestic and international courts in Latin America: A casebook*, 2009, p.9.

or cohabitants have the duty, in equal conditions and by common effort, to attend to the maintenance and responsibility of the home, and to the education and development of the children while they are minors or have some disability" (art. 64); and stipulates that "everyone, in particular women, have the right not to suffer physical, sexual or psychological violence, in the family as well as in the society" (art. 15). With Law No. 3760 of 2007, Bolivia has incorporated the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples into national legislation at the rank of a Law of the Republic. In 2012 and 2013, respectively, the Law to Combat Political Harassment and Violence against Women (No. 243) and the Comprehensive Law to Ensure Women a Life Free from Violence (No. 348) were adopted.

The following sections present findings from qualitative research undertaken in 2019 on indigenous women's participation and representation in indigenous and peasants' organizations, and organizations of urban workers in the Plurinational State of Bolivia.³⁸ The research involved four organizations, namely the *Confederación Nacional de Mujeres Campesinas Indígenas Originarias de Bolivia "Bartolina Sisa"* (CNMCIOSB "BS"); *Confederación Nacional de Mujeres Indígenas del Oriente Boliviano* (CNAMIB); *Asociación de Mujeres Constructoras* (ASOMUC); and *Federación Nacional de Trabajadoras Asalariadas del Hogar* (FENATRAHOB). While the first two organizations are more "political" in nature and encompass claims related to the defence of indigenous peoples' territories, the others are sectoral organizations (construction and domestic work), focusing on labour rights in urban areas. The methodological framework guiding the research focused on identifying physical, psychological and social-institutional barriers to indigenous women's organization and participation.³⁹ Information for the research was gathered through a variety of methods: focus groups with an average of ten participants from each of the organizations selected, involving in total 45 women and three men; in-depth interviews with two leaders from each organization; in-depth interviews with five specialists working at the national level with women's organizations; and structured participant observations.

2. Indigenous women's life: their reality and aspirations

2.1 Indigenous women within the family, community and society

In the Plurinational State of Bolivia, women's participation in public life has improved significantly since the 1980s, although their greater involvement has not resulted necessarily in a real influence on decision-making. In order to gain an autonomous voice vis-à-vis men's, women-only organizations have been created. This is the case, for example, of the *Confederación Nacional de Mujeres Campesinas Indígenas Originarias de Bolivia "Bartolina Sisa"*, which has sought an independent voice from the male-dominated *Confederación Sindical Única de Trabajadores Campesinos de Bolivia*, or the *Confederación Nacional de Mujeres Indígenas del Oriente Boliviano*. A similar phenomenon is observed in urban areas, where, for instance, women workers in the construction sector have established their own association – the *Asociación de Mujeres Constructoras* – clearly distinct from the trade union of the sector. Domestic workers have also created the *Federación Nacional de Trabajadoras Asalariadas del Hogar*, which is affiliated to the *Central Obrera Boliviana* (COB).

In mixed organizations, including the trade unions, patriarchal attitudes prevail and it is difficult for women to have their voices heard and respected, although their collaboration remains important to strengthen their demands before the State.⁴⁰ Prejudices about women's knowledge and abilities

38 María Teresa Zegada Claure and Gabriela Canedo Vasquez, *Barreras para la participación y representación de las mujeres trabajadoras indígenas y campesinas en la toma de decisiones y sus estrategias en Bolivia* (ILO, unpublished). See ILO, *Exploring and Tackling Barriers to Indigenous Women's Participation and Organization: A study based on qualitative research in Bangladesh, the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Cameroon and Guatemala*, 2021.

39 Paola Ballon and Paulius Yamin, *A qualitative study into barriers for organization and strategies for overcoming them: Methodological note* (ILO, unpublished).

40 This is the case, for example, for the request made by domestic workers for health insurance.

appear to confine women to secondary roles (“What would women know?” “What could they possibly negotiate?”). Women thus tend to cover predominantly marginal positions. Women interviewed indicated that another limiting factor preventing them from advancing in the organization's hierarchy is their lower education, compared to men. Additionally, some women reported that in certain cases men would hide information from them, for example about strategic negotiations which are carried out without women knowing about them.

Women-only organizations are regarded by indigenous women as crucial to help them become aware of their rights, value their working contribution (especially in the case of domestic workers), organize professional training courses and gain better working conditions. They are also useful arenas to nourish solidarity between women and exchange experiences. Yet, most indigenous women indicate that, in order to join an organization, they need their husband's approval. Additionally, their family and work responsibilities leave them with limited time to engage in the organization's work. In fact, they face a three-fold working day involving care work for their families, their employment or occupation, and work in the organizations. Balancing the three is arduous and becomes even more challenging when women hold leadership positions. Lack of support from their families therefore seriously curtails women's opportunities to advance their careers within the organizations.⁴¹ Indigenous women have nonetheless emphasized that caring for their children remains a priority for them and they are largely reluctant about leaving their children with a third person.

In the majority of cases, indigenous men remain the decision-makers of the family and manage its resources. Unless they enjoy some form of economic independence, women thus have to ask their husband for financial resources. In rural areas, indigenous women contribute significantly to the economy of their families by working in the field and raising animals. Their rights to land and natural resources are not recognized in practice, however, which heavily limits their decision-making opportunities. More generally, prevailing traditional customs and beliefs tend to limit women's ability to make autonomous decisions. Although traditional notions, such as the notion of *chachawarmi*, underline the complementarity between men and women's roles on a basis of mutual respect – “walking together in equal conditions” –, patriarchal power structures prevail in practice. In this respect, it should be noted that both indigenous women working in rural areas and those who have migrated to cities maintain a profound link to their communities of origin, and to their cultures, beliefs and traditions. In urban areas, however, this relationship weakens with time and the younger generations feel less influenced by indigenous customs.⁴²

2.2 Indigenous women looking ahead

Indigenous women reported that being able to fulfil family responsibilities represents a priority for them, followed by working in order to contribute to their families' needs and supplement their husbands' income. Participating in an organization is also considered important because, as mentioned above, it helps them strengthen their position and improve their working conditions. This aspect has especially been underscored by domestic workers, who have benefited from training sessions and awareness-raising on their labour rights. Indigenous women working in the construction sector have likewise highlighted that joining an organization is key for them to get better contracts and capacity-building. For rural indigenous women, the organizations are considered to be “vital”. In these cases, the claims are not only labour-related, but are more broadly social and political and are linked to the defence of indigenous peoples' cultural identity and territories.

With respect to all the organizations examined, it was observed that the work undertaken by the organizations is valued by indigenous women, although not all of them may actively engage with these

⁴¹ It has been observed that many women leaders end up single or divorced.

⁴² It is worth recalling the discrimination faced by indigenous women working as domestic workers in the cities, which forces them to renounce their traditional identities, for example, giving up their traditional clothes or cutting their braids.

organizations, due to some of the prioritizations and constraints previously described. In the case of domestic workers, another major obstacle is their lack of awareness of the existence of organizations that defend their rights due to their isolation in the employers' houses. Fear of reprisals from their employer may also prevent their participation in the organizations' work.

Indigenous women expressed the wish that their organizations increase their autonomy and influence, which they feel remains limited when interacting with other organizations, trade unions, confederations or the State. In their view, improving women's literacy and capacity-building relating to politics, rights and leaderships are needed. Importantly, indigenous women underscored that they continue to find it difficult to speak in public with confidence. This is regarded as a core ability that they would like to develop and strengthen in order to be able to make their voices heard and improve their living conditions. Self-confidence is an aspect that women often mention as being key to facilitating their representation and participation, but which is still weak in many cases.

Indigenous women also consider it useful to receive more specific training sessions aimed at improving their professional skills (for example, courses on cooking and ironing for domestic workers). For indigenous women belonging to rural organizations, the ability to design and manage projects has proved to be particularly helpful in enhancing their access to resources, training programmes and external support, which in turn may bring about an improvement in their living conditions, including through learning about diversification options within their agriculture-based economies.

3. Barriers to indigenous women's organization and participation

Indigenous women face multiple and mutually reinforcing barriers to their organization and participation, operating at the individual and collective levels. A number of these barriers will be described below as they emerged from the interaction with indigenous women. These barriers have been classified according to the methodological framework guiding the research into three main categories, namely physical, psychological and socio-institutional determinants. However, barriers described below may be "cross-cutting" and at the same time constitute a physical, psychological and socio-institutional obstacles. Indigenous women may also perceive them in different ways. In addition, barriers are generally deeply linked to and rooted in the socio-institutional context in which indigenous women and their communities live. In this connection, it is also worth noting that the conversations held with indigenous women in the context of the research were guided by a questionnaire which may have prioritized certain specific aspects.⁴³ In order to understand vast array of obstacles faced by indigenous women with respect to organization and participation, the findings presented here should therefore be read against the backdrop of the overall social, economic and political context concerning indigenous peoples in the country as well as the specific reality of indigenous women as briefly described in the previous sections.

3.1 Physical determinants

One of the major barriers to women's organization and its sustainability in the medium- and long-term lies in the shortage of economic resources. Indigenous women in the construction sector referred to the fact that single women lack access to credit because they cannot offer sufficient guarantees, while the same obstacles do not apply to married women. Indigenous women's organizations do not have their own offices. Frequently, they have to share working spaces with men, which leads to difficulties, especially because husbands may prefer that their spouses are separated from other men. The lack of nurseries is also seen as an obstacle by indigenous women working in the construction sector, who have emphasized the need for public nurseries to adjust their working hours to meet the needs of the construction sector, which has a very early start time, for example.

⁴³ For more information on the type of questionnaire used, see ILO, *Exploring and Tackling Barriers to Indigenous Women's Participation and Organization*, Chapter 1.



The situation may be slightly different for the rural organizations included in the study owing to their political role. For example, the Confederación Nacional de Mujeres Campesinas Indígenas Originarias de Bolivia “Bartolina Sisa” received a new office in La Paz in 2013, which also offers the possibility of hosting leaders from the local levels when they come to the capital to attend meetings, workshops or other events. However, at the local level, these organizations also lack physical means and may have to convene meetings in private houses.

In terms of access to information and means of communication, some women, such as the members of the Asociación de Mujeres Constructoras, tend to use social media to maintain a regular flow of information (for example WhatsApp groups are used to announce forthcoming meetings), although many continue to prefer direct contact, such as phone calls, as establishing mutual trust is seen as important. In rural areas, distances are considerable and transport costs pose another challenge to women's participation and organization. Women invest their own financial resources into commuting from their communities to meeting places. When meetings are held in departmental capitals, the cost may be excessive for them, thereby preventing their participation. More generally, some women mentioned the absence of housing in the urban areas and the lack of access to land in rural areas as another physical obstacle to their ability to organize and participate in decision-making.

3. 2 Psychological determinants

Uneasiness about speaking in public is one of the first challenges that women are confronted with when working in an organization or engaging in participatory processes, especially when men are also present. The fear of being discredited and having to face prejudices, as well as the feeling of “transgressing” social and cultural rules when speaking up or participating in an organization continue to be significant barriers for women. Additionally, in the case of domestic workers, women struggle with their own feelings of lack of worth and shame concerning their job, which lead some of them to try and hide their profession. Fear of reprisals from their employer may prevent indigenous women domestic workers' participation in the work of their sectoral organization.

Language also represents a considerable obstacle for all women, particularly those living in urban areas. The inability to understand certain concepts in Spanish and to express one's views in this language on themes which may be foreign to their experience, such as “empowerment” and “de-patriarchalization”, usually inhibits indigenous women when they meet with women from other segments of national society. Some underscored the importance of ensuring that discussion topics are not imposed by third parties but rather genuinely reflect indigenous women's own agendas.

Lack of information about their rights, the relevant legislation and salary levels also affects women's ability to make decisions. In particular, it was noted that indigenous women workers in urban centres who have migrated from rural areas tend to have very little knowledge, if any, about their rights, the value of money and the level of salary to which they are entitled. Women reported that in these cases support from organizations, including trade unions, is crucial. For example, the Red Boliviana de Mujeres Transformando la Economía (REMTE) produced and distributed leaflets containing information on legislative provisions and other relevant information about the domestic work sector.

Some women interviewed indicated that when men involve women in their organizations, they tend to select young women because they have less knowledge and experience and may thus be more easily manipulated.

3.3 Social-institutional determinants

As illustrated in the previous sections, prevailing gender norms tend to relegate women to secondary roles, whereas men continue to be the decision-makers. In meetings, women tend to sit in the back rows and keep silent. Women who get involved in organizations' work and participate in meetings are often criticized by women and men alike. Indigenous women interviewed reported that there is often a lack of solidarity among the women themselves. Moreover, the country study referred to one man interviewed who has observed that violence against women has increased since women started claiming their rights and challenging the traditional roles. According to the study, one of the chief obstacles to women's participation resides in the household, where men consider women as their "property" and are extremely jealous, thus impeding their public activities. It can be observed that the majority of indigenous women who participate in trade unions covered by the study are single and once they get married or find a partner, they reduce or stop their participation. Some women interviewed also reported cases of verbal harassment against indigenous women engaging with organizations' work and sexual harassment from co-workers in urban areas.

In the rural areas, where women tend to work closer to their homes, the only occasion on which they leave the familiar areas are to attend organizations' meetings, and the pressure they face from their families and communities can thus be enormous. In the urban areas, on the contrary, the pressures originate in the workplace. In the construction sector, for example, indigenous women interviewed emphasized that it has been particularly challenging for women to be accepted, as this is considered to be a typically "masculine" sector.

4. Strategies and recommendations for strengthening indigenous women's organization and participation in decision-making for decent work and economic empowerment

As described above, indigenous women in the Plurinational State of Bolivia are confronted with multiple obstacles to their organization and participation that intersect and mutually reinforce each other. These barriers are of varying nature and are rooted in the discrimination and social, economic and political marginalization experienced by indigenous peoples, as well as in the patriarchal power structures that prevail within and outside indigenous communities. Nevertheless, indigenous women have been able to create their own organizations in an effort to gain an autonomous voice and address their concerns.

Addressing barriers to indigenous women's organization and participation and encouraging the positive developments under way should entail an integrated approach that is mindful of the nexus between the collective and individual dimensions of the existing obstacles. It is also important to take into account the multiple vulnerabilities of indigenous women related to their gender, indigenous identity and socio-economic status, while being respectful of their priorities, cosmovision and cultural identity. It is key that indigenous women themselves participate in the design and implementation of any strategy aimed at strengthening their organization and participation in decision-making.

Recommendations

- ▶ Advance the realization of indigenous peoples' collective and individual rights, including through the implementation of ILO Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169). Particular attention is needed as regards the rights to consultation and participation, to define and pursue priorities for development, to land and natural resources, and effective access to justice when rights are violated.
- ▶ Address the limited access to basic social services and infrastructure within the framework of national and local development strategies designed and implemented with the participation of indigenous women and men. Such strategies should respond to needs and priorities identified by them, with particular attention to tackling the specific obstacles faced by indigenous women and girls. Ensuring access to bilingual and culturally appropriate education is particularly crucial.
- ▶ Ensure indigenous women's participation in the formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of public policies that concern them, including in areas such as equality and non-discrimination, education, employment and occupation, social protection, climate change and gender-based violence.
- ▶ Strengthen the State institutions charged with promoting and enforcing indigenous peoples' and women's rights. This should include providing them with adequate technical and financial capacity to discharge their functions in a systematic and coordinated fashion at national and local levels.
- ▶ Support the creation and functioning of indigenous women's organizations and networks and facilitate the exchange of experiences among them. This could include support for the creation of suitable meeting spaces and support services, taking into consideration family responsibilities on women, the security situation affecting their communities, transportation needs, and women's limited proficiency in the national languages, among others.
- ▶ Provide capacity-building for indigenous men and women and their leaders on indigenous women's rights, and support the initiatives taken by indigenous women themselves, for instance, on gender awareness-raising and the promotion of girls' access to education.
- ▶ Support and strengthen indigenous women's livelihoods in consultation with them, including by providing, for example, relevant skills development and support for collective entrepreneurial initiatives.
- ▶ Promote indigenous women's awareness of their human rights, in particular labour rights, and facilitate the cooperation between indigenous peoples' and women's organizations and trade unions.
- ▶ Ensure access to culturally appropriate child-care facilities for indigenous women in urban areas according to their demands and explore together with indigenous women in rural areas, in accordance with their priorities and aspirations, the opportunity to support the design and implementation of nursery services at community level.
- ▶ Take proactive measures to address harassment and violence against indigenous women in line with the guidance provided by the ILO Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190) and its accompanying Recommendation (No. 206), the ILO Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169) and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.
- ▶ While respecting indigenous peoples' collective rights, develop mechanisms that allow indigenous women and girls pursue means of recourse against violence, including when they are unable to obtain support and access to justice within indigenous communities, and build the capacity of women indigenous leaders to advocate for the rights of women and girls to be free from violence.

► Cameroon

1. The national context

Indigenous peoples in Cameroon are estimated to represent approximately ten per cent of the national population.⁴⁴ They comprise pastoralist groups, the Mbororo, and forest-dependent people, the Baka, Bakola/Bagyéli and Bedzang, whose livelihood relies on hunting and gathering.

The Mbororo live throughout the country, but they are mostly found in the west, east, and northern part of Cameroon. Since 2016, because of the conflict affecting the north-west region, many have been forced to leave the area and have now moved to the department of Noun in the west. The Baka live in the eastern and southern parts of Cameroon, more specifically in the departments of Boumba-et-Ngoko, Haut-Nyong and Kadey. As to the Bakola or Bagyéli, they are found in the south of the country, notably in Akom II, Bipindi, Kribi, Campo, Ma'an and Lolodorf. Finally, the Bedzang live in the north-west of the Mbam-et-Kim Division, on the Tikar Plain and also in Messondo in the Centre region.⁴⁵

The indigenous peoples of Cameroon are among the groups most discriminated against, stigmatized and marginalized in the national society. This manifests in various forms, ranging from the lack of recognition of their traditional institutions, to land dispossessions and restricted access to the natural resources on which they depend for their livelihoods; and from limited participation in decision-making processes concerning them, to scarce access to basic services, such as education and health, and lack of access to decent work.⁴⁶ The situation of indigenous women is inextricably linked to the overall situation affecting their communities. The recognition of indigenous peoples' collective rights has thus been deemed by indigenous women to be a fundamental step towards the realization of their human rights.⁴⁷

Cameroon has not ratified the ILO Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169). It has however ratified other ILO Conventions particularly relevant to the protection of indigenous peoples' rights and the promotion of gender equality, including the ILO Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111) and the Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29). The Constitution of Cameroon of 1996 states, in the preamble, that "the State shall ensure the protection of minorities and shall preserve the rights of indigenous populations in accordance with the law" and that "all persons shall have equal rights and obligations". A series of general and sectoral laws further elaborates on these principles, including Act 94/01 of 20 January 1994 on forests and the Framework Law on Environmental Management of 5 August 1996.⁴⁸ Furthermore, the Ministry for Social Affairs has created an intersectoral committee to monitor programmes and projects concerning "vulnerable indigenous populations", including the Plan for the Development of the Pygmy Peoples.⁴⁹ Concerning gender equality more specifically, the Ministry for the Promotion of Women and Family is charged with

44 ILO, *Indigenous peoples in Cameroon: a guide for media professionals*, 2015. According to the Demographic and Health Survey of 2011, the indigenous population represents 2.6 per cent of the total national population, considering an age group ranging from 15 to 50 years.

45 ILO, *Indigenous peoples in Cameroon*.

46 See also ILO's Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations (CEACR), Direct Request (CEACR) - adopted 2016, published 106th ILC session (2017), Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111) – Cameroon.

47 Les droits des peuples autochtones au Cameroun, Rapport supplémentaire soumis suite au troisième rapport périodique du Cameroun, 54th ordinary session, October 2013, Banjul, Gambia.

48 Please note however that there is no specific piece of legislation prohibiting discrimination and providing for equality of opportunity and treatment. See UN General Assembly, Report of the Independent Expert on minority issues, Rita Izsák, A/HRC/25/56/Add.1 (2014).

49 The term "Pygmy" is sometimes used to refer to Baka, Bakola, Bagyéli and Bedzang people. However, this term is considered pejorative by the peoples concerned.

ensuring equality of opportunity for women in all domains. In 2012, the National Strategy to Combat Violence against Women was adopted.

The following sections will present findings from qualitative research undertaken in 2019 on indigenous women's organization and participation in Cameroon, involving indigenous peoples from the Baka community in the department of Dja-et-Lobo in the south region; the Bagyéli community in the Ocean department; and the Mbororo community in the department of Noun in the west region.⁵⁰ The research was guided by a methodological framework focusing on identifying physical, psychological and social-institutional barriers to indigenous women's organization and participation.⁵¹ Information for the research was gathered through a variety of methods: structured participant observations, in-depth interviews with 30 indigenous women from the targeted communities; and 25 focus groups, of which 20 with an average participation of ten women in each and the remaining five involving also men.

2. Indigenous women's life: their reality and aspirations

2.1 Indigenous women within the family, community and society.

Among the Baka, Bakola/Bagyéli and Bedzang people, women are regarded as the pillars of their families and communities. They are responsible for the education of the young generations, food and care provision, as well as the management of the financial resources of the family. However, major decisions affecting their families, such investments, children's school enrolments and marriages, remain with the male members of the family, that is the father and husband. In the Mbororo community, the traditional gender-based distribution of roles appears to be more marked, with women having less decision-making autonomy. In all cases, however, according to the field research, indigenous women tend to have a subordinate role, which contributes significantly to women's feeling of inferiority vis-à-vis men and the acceptance of existing discriminatory practices, including, early marriages and limited or no access to education (see the following sections). It is equally important to note that, despite their central role in food production, indigenous women do not have independent entitlements to the land they use and therefore have little voice, if any, in decisions concerning its overall management.⁵²

On a daily basis, indigenous women dedicate their time to a variety of activities that encompass work in the field, household work - including fetching water, wood and fuel for cooking - and children's education and care. In addition, the Baka, Bakola/Bagyéli and Bedzang women also go fishing and hunting to ensure food supply for their families, and produce and sell handicrafts, such as baskets and mats, for income. Some of them work as agriculture labourers for their Bantu neighbours. This is especially the case of those communities who have lost access to their lands and have thus been forced to look for alternative means of survival, often being exploited in conditions that may amount to forced labour ("kassa" practices).⁵³ As to Mbororo women, they sell milk and raise poultry. In all cases, according to the country study, the income gained is managed by the village or family chief.

The time women invest in the broad range of their daily chores leaves them, in practice, with little room to engage in other processes. Women remain the primary, if not the sole, caregivers and are traditionally

50 Elise Pierrette Memong Meno Epse Mpoung, *Renforcer la participation des femmes autochtones et tribales à la prise de décisions: Etude qualitative sur les obstacles à leur organisation et les stratégies pour les surmonter* (ILO, unpublished). See ILO, *Exploring and Tackling Barriers to Indigenous Women's Participation and Organization: A study based on qualitative research in Bangladesh, the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Cameroon and Guatemala*, 2021.

51 Paola Ballon and Paulius Yamin, *A qualitative study into barriers for organization and strategies for overcoming them: Methodological note* (ILO unpublished).

52 See, for example, Njieassam, Esther Effundem, "Gender Inequality and Land Rights: The Situation of Indigenous Women in Cameroon", *Potchefstroom Electronic Law Journal* 22 (2019), 1-33. For an overview of women's access to land under customary law in Cameroon, see the webpage of the FAO (French only).

53 See UN General Assembly, Report of the Independent Expert on minority issues, Rita Izsák, A/HRC/25/56/Add.1 (2014).

responsible for taking care of the house, the children, the husband, the elders and any sick members of their family. In this connection, indigenous women's capacity for organization and participation is heavily constrained by the absence or the insufficient and inappropriate availability of the most basic social services, notably access to drinking water, wells, sanitary facilities, electricity, and health centres and schools. Indigenous women interviewed have to walk up to three kilometres to accompany their children to school and, on average, between 500-1,000 metres, four times a day, to access water points. Although there has been some improvement in the supply of basic infrastructure to rural areas, indigenous women continue to spend approximately 40 per cent of their time on providing for their family's needs.

Indigenous women's participation in community meetings or meetings at the district level appears to be subject to the husband's consent. In addition, women are usually not allowed to speak in public. Indigenous peoples' traditional institutions are led by and composed of the male members of the communities. Nevertheless, women play an "informal" advisory role to the community chiefs. It is particularly noteworthy that in certain Baka communities, indigenous women have been called to perform the function of the village chief in his absence. Also, among the Mbororo, women have recently been allowed to participate in meetings with men, which would have been unimaginable until some years ago. Concerning formal governance institutions, women's representation in local government is extremely low. The research found only one indigenous woman member of a local council in the areas visited. People interviewed suggested that this finding was a fairly accurate reflection of the situation existing throughout the country.

The major organizations that have been established to protect indigenous peoples' rights in Cameroon, at national or local level, such as the Socio-Cultural Association for Livestock Breeders of Cameroon (SODELCO), Mbororo Social and Cultural Development Association (MBOSCUDA), *Association des Baka de Mintom* (ABAWONI) and *Association pour le Développement des Baka* (ADEBAKA), count women among their members in the majority of cases. Women mainly cover the functions of treasurer (31.8 per cent), or auditor (22.7 per cent) and are excluded from decision-making positions.⁵⁴ The majority of women stated that they do not know the rules governing the organizations of which they are members. They are often registered as members only symbolically and they lack the information or training necessary for a genuine membership.

According to the information gathered, indigenous women leaders tend to maintain good relations with indigenous women at the local level, although they do not always provide them with all the information at their disposal on relevant programmes or other activities. Concerning the leaders living in urban settings, the situation varies greatly between communities. Mbororo women leaders are found to be in closer connection with the women in the communities; they seek resources that could support them, encourage girls to migrate to cities to ensure their education and help them with settling in new places. They also regularly organize awareness-raising campaigns in their communities. Women leaders from the Baka, Bakola/Bagyéli and Bedzang people, however, are more detached from their communities.

2.2. Indigenous women looking ahead

Indigenous women have voiced their desire to be represented and participate in decision-making processes concerning them and regard the few women who have been able to engage in these processes as role models to be followed and who could support and inspire girls.⁵⁵ Solidarity among women is growing and could help channel support for women candidates to leadership positions. However, indigenous women consider that women currently aspiring to leadership roles within their communities are not sufficiently skilled and would need additional education and training in order to attain

⁵⁴ It should be noted that trade unions were not present in the areas covered by the research.

⁵⁵ At the local level, it is more likely to find women leaders in the Baka, Bakola/Bagyéli and Bedzang communities than in the Mbororo ones. Conversely, there are more Mbororo women leaders in cities.

responsibility positions.⁵⁶ Indigenous men similarly concede that girls should access education on an equal footing with boys and early marriages should be prevented. They remain skeptical, however, and, to a certain extent, concerned about the prospect of women holding responsibility positions, although they acknowledge that the increased role of women at the community level is a positive development.

For the majority of indigenous women, the priority in life is having a “good job” which would allow them to look after their families.⁵⁷ Women who are self-employed (for example, who cultivate the land, raise animals or produce handicrafts) are not willing to engage in wage-work. Rather, they wish to improve their current situation and strengthen their occupations. Many of them are thus engaged in local development projects with a view to improving their means of production or searching for sale networks. They also value the contribution of those organizations focusing on the protection of land and cultural rights, particularly in the case of the Baka, Bakola/Bagyéli and Bedzang women who suffer from land grabbing and have lost access to the forests on which they relied for traditional medicine and income. Women leaders from the communities involved in the research all participate in various organizations in defence of indigenous peoples’ rights and, to a lesser degree, in local development organizations and political parties. None of them is a member of a trade union, however, of which they know very little and do not see the relevance to their realities.

Furthermore, indigenous women are aware of their key role in seeking to improve their daughters’ circumstances by promoting their access to education, and of the need to pursue a certain economic autonomy for themselves. At the same time, they manifest feelings of “powerlessness” when having to challenge traditional gender norms on their own. Hence, their mass participation in the mutual aid associations operating in their communities. They also consider development organizations discussing women’s rights to be helpful to them. Indigenous women have furthermore expressed the wish to receive training in leadership and political skills, as well as in collective entrepreneurship and labour rights, notably the right to equal remuneration, especially in the case of the Baka women working in plantations for the Bantus (see Section 2).

3. Barriers to indigenous women’s organization and participation

Indigenous women face multiple and mutually reinforcing barriers to their organization and participation, operating at the individual and collective levels. A number of these barriers will be described below as they emerged from the interaction with indigenous women. These barriers have been classified, following the methodological framework guiding the research, into three main categories, namely physical, psychological and socio-institutional determinants. However, barriers described below may be “cross-cutting” and at the same time constitute a physical, psychological and socio-institutional obstacles. Indigenous women may also perceive them in different ways. In addition, barriers are generally deeply linked to and rooted in the socio-institutional context in which indigenous women and their communities live. In this connection, it is also worth noting that the conversations held with indigenous women in the context of the research were guided by a questionnaire which may have prioritized certain specific aspects.⁵⁸ In order to understand vast array of obstacles faced by indigenous women with respect to organization and participation, the findings presented here should therefore be read against the backdrop of the overall social, economic and political context concerning indigenous peoples in the country as well as the specific reality of indigenous women as briefly described in the previous sections.

⁵⁶ A significant difference has been noted in this regard between Mbororo women, some of which have attained university education and may hold responsibility positions at various levels in urban areas, and the women from the Baka, Bakola/Bagyéli and Bedzang people. However, none of them have received specific training on leadership skills.

⁵⁷ Reported indigenous women’s replies to a question about priorities in life pre-identifying certain specific themes/priorities. See ILO, *Exploring and Tackling Barriers to Indigenous Women's Participation and Organization*, Chapter 1.

⁵⁸ For more information on the type of questionnaire used, see ILO, *Exploring and Tackling Barriers to Indigenous Women's Participation and Organization*, Chapter 1.

3.1 Physical determinants

In all areas visited for the purpose of the research, women share a lack of dedicated space to hold meetings. They thus tend to meet mostly at the village chief's home or in other meeting rooms. This situation also seems to stem from men's decisions to attend women's gatherings and "control" what is being discussed. Indigenous women reported that the meeting space they use often lacks separate sanitation facilities for women, as well as drinking water. An additional challenge for indigenous women lies in their poor access to any relevant information. On the one hand, those who hold information, including concerning the schedules for community meetings, control its distribution and may sideline women. On the other, distances between communities and main centres at local level are vast; means of transport are not always available and their cost may be excessive for women. These aspects are seldom taken into account by the organizers of public events, including NGOs and public authorities, thus preventing women from participating. In the same veins, women are not in a position to convene inter-community gatherings of women to discuss their issues and organize around common challenges. Finally, most women do not have identity documents, which prevents them from applying for public posts in the local administration.

3.2 Psychological determinants

As expressed by one indigenous woman leader, indigenous women face three main limitations to organization and representation: "tradition, religion and poverty". Women have internalized the subordinate role that has traditionally been ascribed to them. This greatly affects their confidence and ability to speak in public, and they therefore rarely seek positions of responsibility. The mere "decorative" role that is sometimes conferred on them when they access public administration posts further undermines their confidence. Language also represents a major barrier to women's participation, if indigenous languages are not used in the meetings, since most women lack fluency in the national languages. Furthermore, interpretation services are often provided by men, thus not guaranteeing the confidentiality of women's meetings and discussions. Indigenous women reported that their lower education levels compared to men, and early marriages and pregnancies, are a considerable barrier to their participation in decision-making processes and their organizational efforts.

The field research also unveiled the limited access for indigenous women to information concerning local and national elections, as well as the procedural rules governing the process. In all the communities visited for the research, none of the women interviewed could provide information on local forthcoming elections. In practice, indigenous women are excluded from the process, unless men approach them directly to solicit their votes. Indigenous women further referred to the fear of reprisals when discussing their roles in decision-making processes (see "social barriers" below).

3.3 Social-institutional determinants

Indigenous women find it difficult to challenge men's traditional role in order to claim a greater space for themselves in decision-making. In the majority of cases, indigenous women interviewed seek men's approval before taking the initiative and they follow men's guidance within their associations. They seem to wait for changes to occur naturally, without pushing for them and risking reprisals of various kinds,⁵⁹ or paying a high price at a personal level (divorce or remaining single). The cultural and religious beliefs which form an integral part of the culture in which they are raised influence their attitudes towards organization and participation. The vast majority of women interviewed (80 per cent) maintain that they do not need to participate in decision-making processes nor do they need to hold responsibility positions in order to improve their living conditions, as this would amount to taking on men's roles. The remaining

⁵⁹ Some women voiced their fear of being accused of witchcraft if they participated in public spaces in "representative" positions.

20 per cent, on the contrary, considers that women should break these constraints and highlights that if women in decision-making positions were in closer contact with other women, women's advancement could be fostered more easily. All women are, however, of the opinion that a fair balance should be found which would allow women to progress professionally while respecting their traditions, which are not static but continually evolving. However, traditional indigenous authorities are of the view, with few exceptions, that women's traditional subordinate roles should be preserved and that their speaking in public should be restrained. Women's emancipation is still largely perceived as a "threat".

Women's family responsibilities pose additional challenges to their participation. Moreover, the times of meetings convened by public authorities or other actors often do not take account of women's multiple roles, and arrangements are not made to facilitate their engagement.

The security situation of the areas inhabited by indigenous peoples further affects women's participation, but no special measure has been adopted either to improve it by, for example, ensuring lighting along the roads, or to adjust meeting schedules to account for the safety risks to which women may be exposed.

4. Strategies and recommendations for strengthening indigenous women's organization and participation in decision-making for decent work and economic empowerment

As described in the previous sections, indigenous women from the Mbororo and Baka, Bakola/Bagyéli and Bedzang communities in Cameroon are confronted with multiple obstacles to their organization and participation that intersect and mutually reinforce each other. These barriers are of varying nature and are rooted in the discrimination and social, economic and political marginalization suffered by indigenous peoples in the country, as well as in the patriarchal power structures that prevail within and outside indigenous communities. Positive developments have nonetheless been observed in a number of indigenous communities, including indigenous women's participation in traditional institutions and local and national organizations in defence of indigenous peoples' rights, women-led awareness-raising campaigns, and the creation of mutual aid associations directed at improving women's livelihoods, among others.

Addressing barriers to indigenous women's organization and participation and encouraging the positive developments under way entail the adoption of an integrated approach that is mindful of the nexus between the collective and individual dimensions of the existing obstacles, as well as the multiple vulnerabilities of indigenous women related to their gender, indigenous identity and socio-economic status, while being respectful of their priorities, cosmovision and cultural identity. It is imperative that indigenous women themselves participate in the design and implementation of any strategy aimed at strengthening their organization and participation in decision-making.

Recommendations

- Strengthen the legal recognition, protection and implementation of indigenous peoples' collective and individual rights, following the guidance provided by the ILO Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169) and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Particular attention should be given to the rights to consultation and participation, to define and pursue priorities for development, to land and natural resources, as well as effective access to justice when rights are violated.
- Address current State failures to provide basic social services and infrastructure in the framework of national and local development strategies designed and implemented with the participation of indigenous women and men. Such strategies should be responsive to the needs and priorities identified by them and give particular attention to identifying and tackling the specific obstacles faced by indigenous women and girls.

- ▶ Tackle the poor access to national identity cards among the indigenous population, by improving the outreach of responsible authorities and raising awareness among indigenous men and women of the need for these documents.
- ▶ Establish and strengthen State institutions responsible for promoting indigenous peoples' rights and gender equality, including the Ministry for Social Affairs, the Ministry for the Promotion of Women and Family, and the Ministry of Economy, Planning and Regional Development, with the technical and financial capacity to discharge their functions in a systematic and coordinated fashion at national and local levels, and to consult with indigenous peoples' and women's organizations.
- ▶ Ensure indigenous women's participation in the formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of public policies that concern them, including in areas such as equality and non-discrimination, education, employment and occupation, social protection, climate change, and gender-based violence.
- ▶ Investigate the factors that contribute to the positive developments observed in some communities as described above, including those to enhance indigenous women's participation in traditional governance structures, with a view to supporting their further unfolding in those and other communities.
- ▶ Support the creation and functioning of indigenous women's organizations and networks and facilitate the exchange of experiences among them. This could include support for the creation of suitable meeting spaces and support services, taking into consideration family responsibilities on women, the security situation affecting their communities, transportation needs, and women's limited proficiency in the national languages, among others.
- ▶ Provide capacity-building to indigenous men and women and their traditional leaders relating to indigenous women's rights, and support the initiatives undertaken by indigenous women themselves, for instance, on gender awareness-raising and the promotion of girls' access to education.
- ▶ Ensure indigenous women's access to information on and awareness of electoral processes at local and national levels and the rules governing them, and provide them with technical support, where needed, with a view to encouraging their participation, and provide them with training on leadership and political skills.
- ▶ Explore the opportunity of introducing quota systems to ensure indigenous women's representation in national and local elected bodies, in cooperation with indigenous peoples and women.
- ▶ Support and strengthen indigenous women's livelihoods in consultation with them. This could include providing relevant skills development and supporting the institutionalization of mutual aid associations and their transformation into collective entrepreneurial initiatives, such agricultural cooperatives among the Baka, Bakola/Bagyéli and Bedzang or handcraft cooperatives among the Mbororo, as envisaged by indigenous women.
- ▶ Promote indigenous women's awareness of their labour rights and facilitate cooperation between indigenous peoples' and women's organizations and trade unions.
- ▶ Take proactive measures to address the security situation affecting indigenous communities, in collaboration with the people concerned, paying particular attention to the distinct vulnerabilities to harassment and violence of indigenous women in line with the guidance provided by the ILO Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190) and its accompanying Recommendation (No. 206).
- ▶ Prevent and address land-related conflicts in full observance of indigenous peoples' rights following the guidance provided in this respect by the ILO Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169) and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

► Guatemala

1. The national context

In Guatemala, indigenous peoples represent 43.8 per cent of the national population. According to the 2018 National Population and Housing Census, 41.7 per cent of the population self-identify as Maya. In some departments, such as Totonicapán, Sololá and Alta Verapaz, the Maya population represents the quasi-totality of the population, amounting respectively to 98 per cent, 96.4 per cent and 93 per cent of the total number of inhabitants.

Poverty and inequality in the country continue to be high, with indigenous peoples remaining particularly disadvantaged. Some have talked of “two Guatemalas”: one wealthy, one poor; one urban, one rural; one Latino, one indigenous, with wide gaps in both social and economic outcomes, which are exacerbated by the country’s high vulnerability to climate change.⁶⁰ In addition, patterns of violence persist, “keeping alive the legacy of violence and genocide dating from the time of the internal armed conflict of 1960 to 1996”, particularly in indigenous territories, where land rights are insufficiently protected.⁶¹

Guatemala has ratified the ILO Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169).⁶² It has also ratified other ILO Conventions particularly relevant to the protection of indigenous peoples’ rights and the promotion of gender equality, including the ILO Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111). The country is made up of various ethnic groups, which include indigenous groups of Maya origin, Garífuna and Xinca. The Constitution of Guatemala declares that the State “recognizes, respects and promotes their ways of life, customs, traditions, forms of organization, the use by men and women of indigenous costume, and languages and dialects” (art. 66); and provides, among others, that the lands of indigenous communities shall receive special protection from the State (art. 67). It also enshrines the principle of equality between men and women (art. 4). The Agreement on Identity and Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which is an integral part of the 1995 Peace Agreement, also sets out comprehensive commitments to ensure that indigenous peoples enjoy cultural, civil, political, social and economic rights.⁶³ In addition, various pieces of legislation have been adopted over the years that are particularly important to the promotion of indigenous peoples’ and women’s rights, including the Municipal Code, the Urban and Rural Development Councils Act, the General Decentralization Act, and the Act for the Dignification and Integral Promotion of Women. At the institutional level, a number of bodies are in place with a specific mandate on indigenous issues, notably the Office for the Defence of Indigenous Women’s Rights and the Presidential Commission on Discrimination and Racism against Indigenous Peoples.

The following sections present the key findings from qualitative research undertaken in 2019 on indigenous women’s organization and participation involving 12 organizations working on women’s economic empowerment and the realization of labour rights that are based in the departments of: Guatemala, Alta Verapaz, Baja Verapaz, Sololá, Suchitepéquez, Retalhuleu, San Marcos, Quetzaltenango, Totonicapán

60 See World Bank, Country Overview at <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/guatemala/overview>.

61 UN General Assembly, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples on her visit to Guatemala, A/HRC/39/17/Add.3, (2018), para. 6.

62 For a overview of national laws and policies relevant for the implementation of the Convention No. 169, see ILO, *Leyes y políticas públicas al respecto de pueblos indígenas y tribales: Perfiles de países de América Latina que han ratificado el Convenio sobre pueblos indígenas y tribales, 1989 (núm. 169)*, 2020.

63 On the status of the implementation of the Peace Agreement, see UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, Concluding observations on the combined sixteenth and seventeenth periodic reports of Guatemala, CERD/C/GTM/CO/16-17 (2019), para. 15.

and Huehuetenango.⁶⁴ The departments were selected to ensure a high representation of indigenous women. The organizations examined for the research are: *Sindicato de trabajadoras domésticas, similares y a cuenta propia* (SITRADOMSA) and *Asociación de trabajadoras del hogar y domicilio* (ASTRAHDOM) in Guatemala; *Asociación mujer tejedora del desarrollo* (AMUTED) in Quetzaltenango; *Asociación barillense de agricultores* and *Asociación mujeres eulalenses para el desarrollo integral* in Huehuetenango; *Cooperación para el desarrollo integral de occidente* (CDRO) in Totonicapán; *Asociación madre tierra* in Suchitepéquez; *Asociación para el desarrollo integral - Maya Ajchmol* in San Marcos; *Asociación comercializadora de mariscos* (ASOMARCH) in Retalhuleu; *Asociación K'ák Kastajem, nuevo amanecer* in Sololá; *Grupo de mujeres tejedoras organizadas* in Alta Verapaz; and *Comité de mujeres emprendedoras* in Baja Verapaz.

The research was guided by a methodological framework focusing on identifying physical, psychological and social-institutional barriers to indigenous women's organization and participation.⁶⁵ Information for the research was gathered through a variety of methods, namely 14 focus groups with management boards and women members of the abovementioned organizations; 24 in-depth semi-structured interviews with women members of the organizations, 20 key informant interviews with men and women in decision-making positions at national and local levels and/or responsible for designing and implementing public policies directed at women workers; and 14 structured participant observations.

2. Indigenous women's life: their reality and aspirations

2.1 Indigenous women within the family, community and society.

In the culture of the Maya people, men and women are seen as having complementary roles of equal importance.⁶⁶ In practice, however, indigenous women today generally hold a subordinate position. The survival of the social organization of the community is seen as dependent on women's traditional role as caregivers for family members, and custodians and transmitters of the community's culture to the younger generations. This has significant consequences on women's economic opportunities and their ability to make autonomous decisions. A limited number of women have access to formal education, as boys are encouraged to study while girls stay at home. The participation of women outside the household is also, in most cases, mediated by men, who maintain control over public spaces. It has been argued that these imbalances in gender relations within indigenous communities have been reinforced by the patriarchal nature of the neoliberal system to which indigenous peoples have been exposed.⁶⁷ In the case of indigenous women, the extent of the socio-economic disadvantage they face is exacerbated by the historical marginalization of their communities and by the discrimination based on their indigenous identity.

With the increasing feminization of agriculture, which has resulted from men's migration, especially to the USA, indigenous women are assuming roles once confined to men and this, in turn, also has an impact on the extent of their participation in decision-making processes. Many indigenous women are involved in the indigenous movement operating throughout the country and, in some cases, they have been successful in adding their own claims and perspectives to the broad themes at the heart of the

64 Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales (FLACSO), Fortalecimiento de la participación de las mujeres indígenas y tribales en la toma de decisiones: Un estudio cualitativo sobre las barreras para la organización y estrategias para superarlas (ILO, unpublished). See also ILO, *Exploring and Tackling Barriers to Indigenous Women's Participation and Organization: A study based on qualitative research in Bangladesh, the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Cameroon and Guatemala*, 2021.

65 Paola Ballon and Paulius Yamin, *A qualitative study into barriers for organization and strategies for overcoming them: Methodological note* (ILO, unpublished).

66 Xiap, Riscajché. (2014). "Cambios y continuidades en las identidades/relaciones de género, etnia y clase de mujeres y hombres mayas k'iche's en Almolonga, Guatemala". (PhD dissertation). University of Sciences and Arts of Chiapas, Centre for Higher Studies of Mexico and Central America.

67 Ibid.

movement's demands for the recognition and respect for the cultural identity of indigenous peoples, the defence of their territories and the fight against discrimination. Moreover, indigenous women have also been able to establish their own organizations, such as those examined for the purpose of this research,⁶⁸ including trade unions. Women have highlighted that, at the individual level, the participation in these organizations and the exchange of experience that occurs within those contexts have helped them gain more confidence and become more proactive in searching for ways to improve their living conditions and those of their families. Nevertheless, the pervading discrimination against indigenous men and women and the prevailing patriarchal culture continues to make indigenous women's representation and participation difficult overall. Moreover, when migrating to urban areas in search of employment opportunities, indigenous women frequently fall into the informal economy outside the scope of action of trade unions.

2.2 Indigenous women looking ahead

Indigenous women have expressed the wish to improve their living conditions and access the labour market without renouncing their family role. The large majority of the indigenous women interviewed⁶⁹ for the research stated that their preferred option would be to have their own trade or start an activity related to the agricultural activities of the family, which is where most women currently work (coffee production, vegetable growing and animal raising, among others), or to produce handicrafts such as embroidery, weaving, baskets production or flower arrangements. These options are preferable because they allow women to organize their working day with flexibility and involve members of their family, notably their children.

Many indigenous women acknowledge the importance of education and professional training (for example in areas such as embroidery, baking, animal husbandry or the cultivation of family gardens) in order to increase their chances of earning an additional income for their families. Indigenous women consider learning Spanish to be a key step for them. It was also noted that courses on leadership skills and self-esteem could be helpful as raising women's awareness of their potential would enable them to assess their opportunities. As far as access to education is concerned, it was emphasized that the current constraints met by women are exacerbated by lack of access to bilingual and culturally appropriate education. Women also underscored that some skills acquired through experience and taught in informal ways (such as those related to clothes design and tailoring) are not sufficiently valued, thus limiting their economic opportunities.

Indigenous women indicated that when they are able to contribute economically to the needs of their families, not only does their self-esteem increase but their ability to make decisions in the household is also strengthened, although such decisions are limited to minor issues, mainly buying food, medicines or clothes. Factors including limited finances, which are in any case intended to cover primary needs, and an emotional dependence on men, often restrict women's scope of decision-making. It should also be recalled that most women do not have access to a means of production; they only manage a small courtyard for the cultivation of vegetables. Moreover, major decisions are mainly taken collectively or at least after having consulted family members for advice since, as put by one woman interviewed, families support each other to generate income and, consequently, consult each other when it comes to deciding on how best to spend their resources. When women are married or cohabit with their partner, their husband or partner is consulted. Otherwise, women refer to other male members of the family, such as the father, brother, father-in-law or the son. When men have migrated, women invest the remittances

⁶⁸ It should be noted that, at the time the research was conducted, of the 12 organizations examined, only five are carrying out productive projects directed at women's economic empowerment, while the others lack financial resources.

⁶⁹ Others indicated that would like to work for an NGO or work in the public sector. It should be noted that these are reported indigenous women's replies to a question about priorities in life with certain pre-identified specific themes/priorities. See ILO, *Exploring and Tackling Barriers to Indigenous Women's Participation and Organization*, Chapter 1.

according to the instructions given by the husband. Similarly, before starting an economic activity, women seek their husband's consent or advice.

The majority of the women interviewed reported that the perceptions prevailing at the community level about women working outside their households are positive, as such a possibility is allowed. Some communities nevertheless hold certain prejudices. In some contexts in which employment opportunities are scarce and wages are low, and thus men's earnings are insufficient to meet the family's needs, men have been more open to accepting women's work outside the household. Women's participation is seen as contributing to reducing gender gaps, and fostering changes at the individual, family and community levels, although challenges persist. Overall, indigenous women still perceive their participation as limited. Few women hold positions of responsibility. Moreover, many women have to seek their husband's permission to attend meetings. Women report that some men are changing their attitudes towards women's public roles and they support women by taking a share of the family responsibilities. Moreover, some women have started applying for public positions at the local level: some are community mayors (alcaldesas), or participate in the Consejos Comunitarios de Desarrollo Urbano y Rural (COCODES) (Community Councils for Urban and Rural Development) or are members of the Coordinadora Local para la reducción de desastres (COLRED) (Local Coordinating Unit for Disaster Reduction). The majority of indigenous women emphasized that they need academic education to acquire leadership roles. In their view, women should also develop other skills, such as negotiation, public speaking and mediation skills, in order to be able to effectively represent the interests of their organizations and communities in any context. Self-esteem is also mentioned as an important aspect to ensure women gain a voice within their communities and organizations.

As emphasized by one of the women interviewed, organizations may help women strengthen their awareness of their rights and their capacity to defend them but this is not sufficient to overcome their poverty, which remains a barrier to participation (see below). Women particularly value the support obtained in improving their living and working conditions from organizations, such as trade unions, associations, or committees and groups for economic empowerment, particularly in the case of actions directed at improving the quality of their products, so as to meet international requirements for trade (for example fulfilling the criteria set out for organic production or the sustainable management of soil) or establishing a common trademark for export, as these kinds of actions have contributed to enhancing the financial situation of their families. Similarly, they consider the exchange of experiences with women's groups from other communities and districts very helpful in broadening their knowledge and acquiring new ideas on how to enhance their own economic opportunities. Indigenous women also regard innovating production processes as very relevant to their needs. A particular case was highlighted concerning the acquisition by an association of a plot of land which was subsequently managed collectively by women for raising poultry and cultivating vegetables, for the twofold purpose of gaining an income and providing food directly to their families. This project allowed women to work in their own communities, create job opportunities, strengthen their capacities and improve the conditions of their community, making women the actors of their own development. Moreover, the project permitted a "team work" approach, whereby the whole family was involved, and family and work responsibilities were more equitably distributed among all family members. Seeing an improvement in families' income, men became more inclined to support women's external activities.

3. Barriers to indigenous women's organization and participation

Indigenous women face multiple and mutually reinforcing barriers to their organization and participation, operating at the individual and collective levels. A number of these barriers will be described below as they emerged from the interaction with indigenous women. These barriers have been classified according to the methodological framework guiding the research into three main categories, namely physical, psychological and socio-institutional determinants. However, barriers described below may be "cross-cutting" and at the same time constitute a physical, psychological and socio-institutional obstacles. Indigenous women may also perceive them in different ways. In addition, barriers are generally deeply

linked to and rooted in the socio-institutional context in which indigenous women and their communities live. In this connection, it is also worth noting that the conversations held with indigenous women in the context of the research were guided by a questionnaire which may have prioritized certain specific aspects.⁷⁰ In order to understand vast array of obstacles faced by indigenous women with respect to organization and participation, the findings presented here should therefore be read against the backdrop of the overall social, economic and political context concerning indigenous peoples in the country as well as the specific reality of indigenous women as briefly described in the previous sections.

3.1 Physical determinants

Most of the organizations examined for the research reported that they lack an office and a dedicated space in which to hold meetings or keep documents, as well as paid staff to support their work. In addition, they frequently do not have the financial means to carry out activities.⁷¹ These factors represent significant impediments to the sustainability and functioning of the organizations, which, in turn, further discourage women's membership.

Distances and the poor road network are also mentioned as major barriers to women's participation.⁷² Roads are absent or in very poor condition, forcing women to walk long distances to reach the meeting place and possibly facing security risks along the way, which discourages them from attending. Where roads exist, transport services are scarce and unsafe and their cost represents, in many cases, a further impediment to women's participation.⁷³ Concerning indigenous women working in urban areas, they have expressed their difficulty in liaising with organizations defending labour rights because they feel particularly insecure in cities. They fear urban violence and are not familiar with the streets and public buses, which makes them reluctant to move around.

Concerning access to relevant information, the majority of women interviewed indicated that, in order to ensure a regular flow of communication, they use social media (mostly WhatsApp, followed by Facebook, Instagram and Twitter). However, they also reported that many indigenous women do not have access to the internet or lack the economic resources needed, so they remain out of reach. Furthermore, many indigenous women members of entrepreneurship support group are illiterate, so phone calls and home visits remain common means of communication. In some areas, like Alta Verapaz, community radios were used in the past to convene meetings but they have been replaced by telephone communications.

Some indigenous women interviewed also referred to the absence of information and presence of women's organizations in their communities. They indicated that existing organizations are often dispersed and lack coordination, sometimes due to jealousy and competition among them. With regard to domestic workers, some reported in particular that indigenous women are often not aware of the existence of organizations which may help them.

3.2 Psychological determinants

Women's lack of proficiency in Spanish results in their fear of expressing themselves in public and reluctance to accept responsibility positions. Even those who are bilingual may express the same fears because of a lack of experience and weak communication skills. Furthermore, many women are reluctant to accept management positions because they do not know how to draft formal documents,

⁷⁰ For more information on the type of questionnaire used, see ILO, *Exploring and Tackling Barriers to Indigenous Women's Participation and Organization*, Chapter 1.

⁷¹ It has been noted that some organizations have been financially supported by international cooperation but funds have recently been considerably reduced.

⁷² This factor also affects the trading of their products.

⁷³ In many communities, transport is only available on market days. On the other days, arranging transport services may be difficult and overly expensive.

such as minutes or petitions. In addition, the lack of negotiation skills is also perceived as an obstacle. Indigenous women reported that, while they might gradually acquire these types of skills by working in the organizations, the lack of negotiation skills remains a barrier for them, especially when indigenous women are members of mixed organizations.

Furthermore, it was noted that women's lack of access to school contributes to the perpetuation of traditional patterns of subordination, as boys and girls are often deprived of the opportunity to interact in a public space as equals and, moreover, women are in many cases left without a chance to develop as social subjects with their own aspirations. For women it is thereby very difficult to challenge the status quo. This challenge is compounded by the absence of information and support from women's organizations in their communities (see previous sub-section).

Some women reported that there may be a lack of interest on the part of women in getting involved in organizations. Given the situation of dire poverty in which the vast majority of them and their families live, their interest may arise only if they can receive some concrete benefits from their participation. In this respect, it is noted that productive projects and cooperatives are those that most attract women. Also, some organizations, for example those examined in Alta Verapaz, have been established by women who were able to identify common interests in defending their territories against extractive projects and protecting their traditional fabric design from appropriation.

3.3 Social-institutional determinants

Prevailing cultural patterns and traditional expectations concerning women's roles within the household, as described above, remain major obstacles to women's organization and participation in decision-making processes concerning them. Some women reported that within their households they are victims of intimidation and jealousy from the male members of their families, which in some cases leads to episodes of psychological and physical violence. To avoid conflicts within their families, indigenous women indicated that they choose to obey their husbands and avoid challenging the traditional distribution of roles. As recalled above, indigenous women working in urban areas also expressed their fear of urban violence and a general feeling of insecurity, which makes them reluctant to move around, including commuting in order to attend the meetings of the sectoral organizations.

Even though the number of women's organizations has been increasing, along with the number of women engaged in them, the women interviewed emphasized that women's organization and participation continue to be difficult. In mixed organizations, women remain confined to secondary functions, mainly secretaries or cooks, and are excluded from decision-making positions. Yet, some organizations have taken special measures to facilitate women's access to leadership positions, by, for example, reserving some seats on their boards for women. Women interviewed also indicated that when organizations are women-only, they arrange meetings so as to take account of women's other tasks, including their family responsibilities. Usually, Saturdays and Sundays are preferred to facilitate women's participation. Conversely, in mixed organizations, women's multiple responsibilities are not taken into consideration and women's participation is severely hindered. Indigenous women interviewed identified the absence of public policies designed to strengthen indigenous women's participation and organization as an additional barrier.

4. Strategies and recommendations for strengthening indigenous women's organization and participation in decision-making for decent work and economic empowerment

As described in the previous sections, indigenous women in Guatemala are confronted with multiple obstacles to their organization and participation that intersect and mutually reinforce each other. These barriers are of varying nature and are rooted in the discrimination and social, economic and political marginalization suffered by indigenous peoples in the country, as well as in the patriarchal

power structures that prevail within and outside indigenous communities. Positive developments have nonetheless been observed with indigenous women assuming roles once confined to men, being actively involved in the indigenous movement and creating their own organizations, including trade unions.

Addressing barriers to indigenous women's organization and participation, and encouraging the positive developments under way entail the adoption of an integrated approach that is mindful of the nexus between the collective and individual dimensions of the existing obstacles, as well as the multiple vulnerabilities of indigenous women related to their gender, indigenous identity and socio-economic status, while being respectful of their priorities, cosmovision and cultural identity. It is imperative that indigenous women themselves participate in the design and implementation of any strategy aimed at strengthening their organization and participation in decision-making.

Recommendations:

- ▶ Address current gaps in the implementation of indigenous peoples' collective and individual rights, particularly with respect to the ILO Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169). Particular attention should be given to the rights to consultation and participation, to define and pursue priorities for development, to land and natural resources, as well as effective access to justice when rights are violated.
- ▶ Address the current lack of access to basic social services and infrastructure within the framework of national and local development strategies designed and implemented with the participation of indigenous women and men. Such strategies should be responsive to the needs and priorities identified by them, and pay particular attention to identifying and tackling the specific obstacles faced by indigenous women and girl. Access to bilingual and culturally appropriate education is particularly crucial in this regard.



- ▶ Strengthen State institutions charged with promoting and enforcing indigenous peoples' and women's rights, providing them with the technical and financial capacity to discharge its functions in a systematic and coordinated fashion at national and local levels.
- ▶ Ensure indigenous women's participation in the formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of public policies that concern them, including at the local level, in areas such as equality and non-discrimination, education, employment and occupation, social protection, climate change, and gender-based violence.
- ▶ Investigate the factors contributing to the positive developments described above enhancing the participation of indigenous women, with a view to supporting their promotion and further unfolding.
- ▶ Support the creation and functioning of indigenous women's organizations and networks and facilitate the exchange of experiences among them. This could include support for the creation of suitable meeting spaces and support services, taking into consideration family responsibilities on women, the security situation affecting their communities, transportation needs, and women's limited proficiency in the national languages, among others.
- ▶ Provide capacity-building for indigenous men and women on gender equality and indigenous women's rights, and support the initiatives undertaken by indigenous women themselves, for instance, on gender awareness-raising and the promotion of girls' access to education.
- ▶ Strengthen indigenous women's livelihoods in consultation with them, including by formulating appropriate comprehensive public policies that support their collective initiatives.
- ▶ Promote indigenous women's awareness of their labour rights and facilitate the cooperation between indigenous peoples' and women's organizations and trade unions.
- ▶ Take proactive measures to address the security situation affecting indigenous communities, in collaboration with the people concerned, paying particular attention to the distinct vulnerabilities to harassment and violence of indigenous women in line with the guidance provided by the ILO Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190) and its accompanying Recommendation (No. 206).
- ▶ Prevent and address land-related conflicts in full observance of indigenous peoples' rights in compliance with the ILO Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169) and following the guidance provided in this respect by the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.
- ▶ While respecting indigenous peoples' collective rights, develop mechanisms that allow indigenous women and girls pursue means of recourse against violence, including when they are unable to obtain support and access to justice within indigenous communities, and build the capacity of women indigenous leaders to advocate for the rights of women and girls to be free from violence.

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