

Women's Funds in action: Indigenous women lead the way in Paraguay

Indigenous women are protecting natural resources and their way of life. Extractive industries and industrial agriculture pose a threat to Indigenous peoples around the world. Women in Paraguay are fighting back.

Almost five decades have passed since the Tekoha Sauce community, made up of 40 some families of the Avá Guaraní Nation of southeast Paraguay, was forcibly displaced from their ancestral homeland to make way for the construction of the Itaipu Dam between Brazil and Paraguay - at the time the largest hydroelectric power plant in the world. They expected their seized land would be flooded by displaced water from the Paraná River, but the land was instead used to cultivate soybeans.

In spite of years of continuous legal claims to try to recover their land rights, the community grew tired of the State's unfulfilled promises and returned to their ancestral lands in August 2015. The Tekoha Sauce community was again evicted without notice on 30 September 2016 - this time with the use of extreme violence.

The community took temporary refuge in the nearby Limoy Ecological Reserve. They continue to live there, without water and electricity and no government assistance. The Reserve's conservation policies limit their ability to provide for themselves through, for example, fishing or farming.

Weary of their situation, a group of women decided to form the Tekoha Sauce Women's



Commission (TSWC) in 2016 to defend community land rights and revalue their way of life.

At this time, Fondo de Mujeres del Sur (FMS), a women's fund based in Argentina, Paraguay, and Uruguay, started to work closely with TSWC, supporting them first with urgent funds to access humanitarian aid for families and to get the new group running.



The families that comprise the Tekoha Sauce community in Paraguay.
Photo by Leticia Galeano.

“...the experience we had, it was the evolution of women in the community to express their opinion, to speak, to participate. As a leader I was opened up to new knowledge. Now I am not afraid...to defend our people, our land, our environment, to be able to guide women, to be independent and to fight, especially for their lands.”

Amada Martínez, leader of the Tekoha Sauce Women's Commission (TSWC)

The Tekoha Sauce Women's Commission (TSWC) has emerged as a powerful legal and advocacy group under the leadership of Amada Martínez, Elsi Martínez and Angela Martínez, and as a member of the Sauce Pytyvohara Action Platform, a collective of international and national organisations supporting community leaders.

The staff of Fondo de Mujeres del Sur (FMS), one of TSWC's funders, report that Indigenous authorities have started recognising women's leadership, as have national and international bodies. They are called to participate in national and international meetings and forums to make known their struggle and experiences as defenders of the territory.

A recent case study found that FMS's support was critical as TSWC was forming as an organisation. FMS' unique contribution to their success was found in:

- Recognising and trusting in TSWC's potential when no other organisation had done so before;
- Coordinating strategic actions with other organisations providing critical support to the community's legal case; and
- Accompanying TSWC members to continuously strengthen their advocacy capacity to lead and pursue legal and judicial actions.

Thanks to Raquel Aveiro of Fondo de Mujeres del Sur (FMS) for her contributions to this profile.



↑ Members of the Tekoha Sauce community meeting together. Photo by Leticia Galeano.