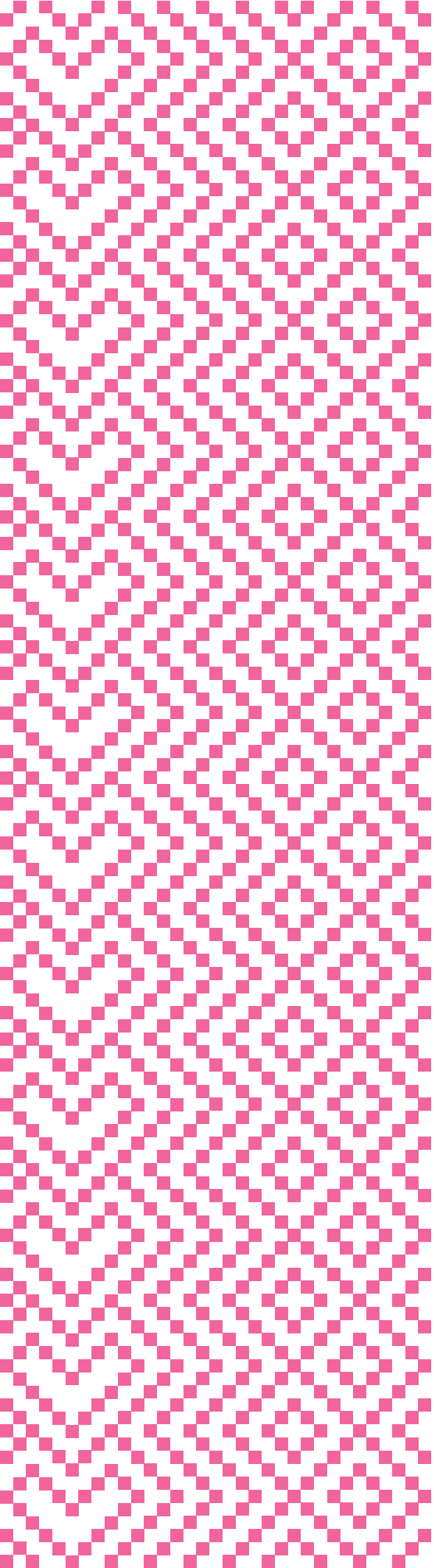




Case study: Amuted

Guatemala





The political context in Guatemala has been marked by a complex history of armed conflicts, violence, and a constant search for stability and justice. One of the key moments in Guatemala's recent history was the signing of the Peace Accords in 1996, which put an end to a civil war that lasted more than three decades and left more than 200,000¹ people missing or dead, mainly indigenous populations.

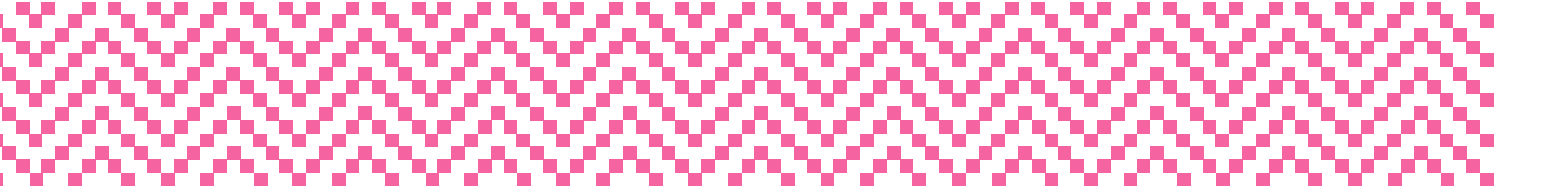
The Peace Accords, the result of negotiations between the Guatemalan government and the left-wing guerrilla, represented by the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG), established a number of commitments to address social inequality, lack of access to land, and the rights of indigenous peoples. In terms of gender, it limited itself to incorporating actions related to the active participation of women, viewed as an “essential element for the economic and social development of Guatemala”.² The Government undertook to “recognize the equal rights of women and men at home, at work, in production sites and in social and political life, and to ensure them the same

possibilities as men, particularly for access to credit, the awarding of land and other productive and technological resources.³ Among the institutional architecture which was created, the Ombudsman for indigenous women was established to provide legal and social advisory services.⁴

Despite these provisions, the effective implementation of the Accords has been a challenge in Guatemala, so much so, that society began to call them “The Memories of Peace”.⁵ The fight for gender equality and the eradication of violence against women continues to be a pending objective in the country. Machismo in public and private life, structural poverty, and particularly racism against indigenous women are the main barriers that prevent their active participation in political arenas and public debate.⁶ In addition, although the position of the Ombudsman for indigenous women is still in place, almost 30 years later it still does not contribute substantially to the fulfillment of women’s rights in the peace and security agenda.

In this context, women’s civil society organizations have developed initiatives that directly contribute to the application of gender measures of the Accords and the promotion of women’s participation in the post-accord scenario. For example, the Asociación Mujer Tejedora del Desarrollo (AMUTED) led the initiative: “Strengthening the political participation of indigenous women from the western highlands for peace and security”, supported within the framework of the Rapid Response Window (RRW) of the Women’s Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF). Through this initiative, the women of AMUTED created department-wide women’s networks, developed advocacy skills, promoted the Peace Accords, and created opportunities for local indigenous women’s organizations, thus opening paths towards their visibility and political participation. Next, the main achievements, the best practices and the opportunities for the future that the development of this initiative produced are analyzed.

Major accomplishments



Although the Accords stipulated “Respect, promote, support and institutionalize women’s organizations in rural areas and in the Capital”,⁷ the women’s movement continues to experience enormous difficulties for free association. Participation assurances are so limited that women lack the conditions to have time and resources to participate. Even worse, as a result of their activism, they are exposed to situations that violate their security and integrity.⁸ Therefore, the AMUTED initiative stands out for **creating and promoting networks and alliances of women who share an interest in building peace, protecting the environment and gender equity in their territories.**

Consolidating this type of network contributes, on the one hand, to broadening the social base of the women’s movement. As one leader said: “we were able to learn about the reality of women in other regions, because although it is true that there are commonalities, we live differently. So, we met and created gender awareness and a stronger sisterhood”⁹; and, on the other hand,

to open new economic, social, and cultural scenarios for women, as stated by a woman participating in the process: “our base grew, because now there are friends who help to sell the products in other regions, and we created an embroidery group and we have a spiritual guide for us. That brings an opportunity to exchange knowledge and culture.”¹⁰

Additionally, the AMUTED initiative stands out for its excellent methodological and pedagogical commitments to **contribute, in a tangible and practical way, to strengthen hard and soft skills around peace and democracy from a gender and ethnic perspective.** “Education and training” are the main pillars through which the Accords seek to promote the participation of women in the economic and social development of Guatemala.¹¹ However, women leaders have stated that the Guatemalan education system has not promoted or established education processes around the right of women’s participation. In fact, an indigenous woman participating in the initiative stated: “The Guatemalan education system does not

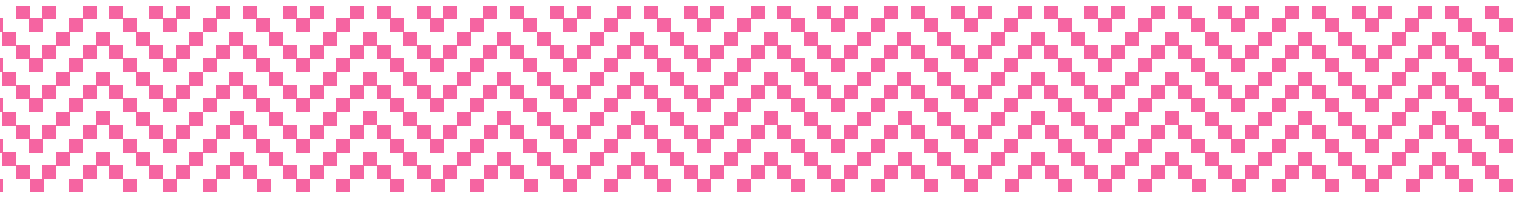
Creating and promoting networks and alliances of women who share an interest in building peace, protecting the environment and gender equity in their territories.

promote critical thinking, nor has it given us the knowledge that the autonomous political schools for women have given us.”¹² In addition to this, it is important to consider that many indigenous women with time limitations or who do not speak Spanish, have difficulties even accessing these autonomous spaces for political training.¹³ Therefore, any effort that seeks to expand the knowledge and capacity of indigenous women, recognizing their particular contexts, is a direct contribution to the Accords and, therefore, to build peace in the country.

Through a methodology planned to address the direct needs of women, AMUTED **took important steps in its education process and political leadership.** Beyond generating opportunities for reflection on the Peace Accords, the rights of indigenous women, the formulation of projects and the construction of agendas, it exposed women to practical situations that strengthen their security and empowerment to develop political advocacy actions in larger scenarios. In this regard, an indigenous woman said: *“in an exercise they had us write a strategic plan, and some of the*

colleagues were writing for the first time, but later when we reviewed what we had written, we said “wow” we are producers of knowledge. After that we feel much more comfortable when we present the plan to key stakeholders in the municipality.”¹⁴ This capacity building also allowed local women’s organizations to act more autonomously for their own processes: “We no longer have to pay through the nose to write a project, we can now do it alone”¹⁵, said one of the participants.

Best practices

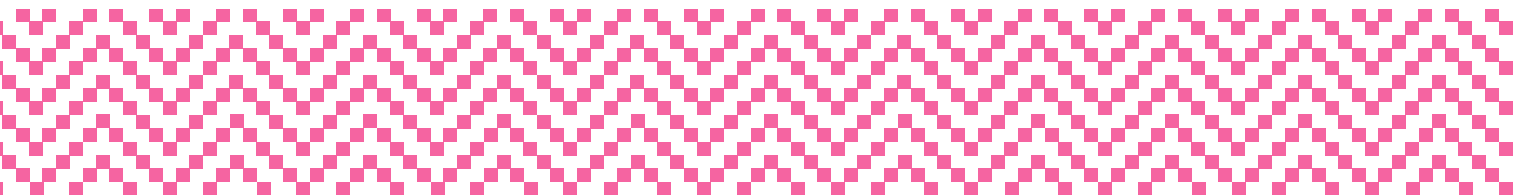


One of the reasons why the achievements obtained can be attributed to them, is AMUTED's ability to **build and implement processes with an intersectional approach** from gender and ethnicity. The proper application of an intersectional approach is evidenced by including important practices for indigenous women within the methodology. For example, the spiritual and "healing" aspects provide an important foundation for political action by women. In this sense, an indigenous woman stated: *"not working on healing makes (us) continue to divide because we have many deep wounds to heal, and that has collective implications."*¹⁶ Therefore, it is essential to continue promoting training opportunities that not only recognize, but also promote the organizational characteristics of indigenous women.

In short, AMUTED's **closeness to local organizations and its ability to listen to better understand the situation and needs of women**, was also essential to achieve results. In addition to working in an articulated manner with the same local organizations in different advocacy processes, their strategy to identify women community leaders gave rise to "two-way support", where AMUTED empathetically and completely assured all guarantees of participation and strengthening of their leadership, while local organizations replicated the knowledge acquired and promoted the sustainability of agendas built at the community level. According to AMUTED, *"by identifying these leaders, the agendas were built by the same management and continuity of women."*¹⁷




Opportunities for the future



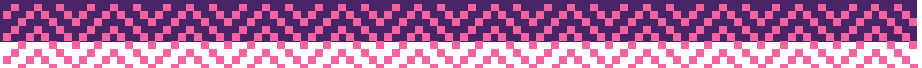
Based on this experience, AMUTED has a great opportunity to **continue expanding the connections of the women's movement from the local and departmental levels**, and in this way, increasingly promote the participation of women by strengthening the networks created and promoting regional meetings, where an agenda of Guatemalan indigenous women's movement can be built. Although there is currently a diversity of agendas due to the polarization among women's organizations, it is of the utmost importance for women *"to articulate as a movement to achieve the positioning of a single agenda"*.¹⁸

Without a doubt, AMUTED has an important territorial base, consolidated by its close community ties over the years, but now, it has the enormous challenge of **involving decision-makers in the processes and influencing higher-level democratic spaces**. In this way, the aim is to open more

opportunities for indigenous women to participate in the peace and development of the country. For this, AMUTED **could provide constant support to strengthened local leaderships**. Although it seeks to build installed capacity, the importance of providing adequate follow-up to the leaders who assume the role of replicating the training and implementing the agendas created at community level must be recognized. Such support is also important to broaden women's participation at regional and national levels. In this regard, a participating woman stated: *"More direct accompaniment is needed to help us materialize ideas. This is necessary to go beyond the national level and articulate ourselves adequately in order to position our aims at high decision-making levels."*¹⁹ However, it is important to say that in order to achieve this accompaniment, it is essential for the international community to continue supporting AMUTED technically and financially.



To achieve greater articulation among the different activities that were carried out within the framework of the initiative.



Likewise, it is essential to **address political violence in training and follow-up processes for indigenous women leaders.**

During the development of the initiative, AMUTED identified several cases of political violence against indigenous women, which highlights the need to include a pillar on political violence in its future training. This would be one of the first steps to achieve inclusion in local legislation and national measures to protect indigenous women from violence when they exercise their right to participation and representation. Within this framework, it would also be relevant to include issues related to partisan politics, since participating women identified the importance of getting further strengthened, organized and articulated not only at the local level, but also at the departmental and regional level, to face the challenges of election processes. This approach based on political violence and partisan politics would empower indigenous women in all political

spheres and provide them with the necessary tools to exercise effective leadership in decision-making spaces.

Lastly, one of the most significant lessons learned from the initiative developed by AMUTED, and which can greatly enhance its future efforts, is **to achieve greater articulation among the different activities that were carried out within the framework of the initiative.** That is to say, strategically integrate their efforts in communication and advocacy, political training and research, to enhance the proposed objectives, for example, by making women leaders know and participate in the monitoring and communication campaign carried out,²⁰ both on the participation of indigenous women in the framework of the Accords. In this way, their efforts will have greater visibility, impact, and sustainability, which will largely contribute to the necessary social change for indigenous Guatemalan women.

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02. Acuerdo sobre Aspectos Socioeconómicos y Situación Agraria. (*Accord on Socio-economic considerations and Land Status*) (1996). p. 6
03. Ibid. p. 7
04. Acuerdo sobre el cronograma para la implementación, cumplimiento y verificación de los Acuerdos de Paz. (*Accord on the Schedule for the implementation, fulfillment and verification of the Peace Accords*). (1996). p. 18.
05. Information obtained from the interview of AMUTED coordinators. (June 2023).
06. Information obtained from the interviews of women participating in the AMUTED initiative. (June 2023).
07. Acuerdo sobre fortalecimiento del poder civil y función del ejército en una sociedad democrática. (*Accord to Strengthen Civil Power and the Role of the Army in a Democratic Society*) (1996). p. 19.
08. Information obtained in interviews with women participants of the AMUTED initiative. (June 2023).
09. Interview of indigenous female leader of the Department of Totonicapán, Guatemala. (June 2023).
10. Interview of indigenous female leader of the Department of Sololá, Guatemala. (June 2023).

11. Acuerdo sobre Aspectos Socioeconómicos y Situación Agraria. (*Accord on Socioeconomic Aspects and Land Situation*) (1996). p. 7. The pillar of “Education and training” is thought out to “Guarantee that women have equal opportunities and conditions for study and training, and that education contributes to banishing any form of discrimination against them in education content”.

12. Interview of indigenous female leader of the Department of Sololá, Guatemala. (June 2023).

13. Information obtained from interviews to women participating in the AMUTED initiative. (June 2023).

14. Interview of indigenous female leader of the Department of Sololá, Guatemala. (June 2023).

15. Interview of indigenous female leader of the Department of Totonicapán, Guatemala. (June 2023).

16. Interview of indigenous female leader of the Department of Huehuetenango, Guatemala. (June 2023).

17. Interview of AMUTED’s coordinators. (June 2023).

18. Interview of indigenous female leader facilitating the AMUTED initiative. (June 2023).

19. Interview of indigenous female leader of the department of Sololá, Guatemala. (June 2023).

20. On the one hand, the investigation product was carried out: “Monitoring of the participation of indigenous women and women in decision-making spheres and the actions they implement in favor of women’s rights within the framework of the Peace Accords.” On the other hand, the communication campaign was carried out: “Indigenous women weaving peace and democracy with political participation”.

