

SIF attends Central American conference on Communication and Technology for Indigenous and Rural Women

by Michele Frix: Program Officer, Seattle International Foundation

Guatemala City, Guatemala—Last week I had the pleasure of taking part in the [‘Taller Mesoamericano de Comunicación con Mujeres Indígenas y Rurales: Mujeres en los medios para construir ciudadanía’](#) (*Mesoamerican Workshop on Communication for Rural and Indigenous Women: Women in the Media to Construct Citizenship*), organized by [Sinergia No’j](#) and [Just Associates \(JASS\)](#). Over two dozen women from around Central America and Mexico, gathered to discuss the challenges facing rural and indigenous women of the region and strategies for confronting these difficulties through effective means of communication—including print media, community radio, video, and online tools, such as blogs.



Panamanian participant shares with the group about her ancestor who has inspired her to continue to do community development work with her community. [Photo courtesy of SIF](#)

Sinergia No’j and JASS facilitators incorporated dynamic activities throughout the three-day workshop, including an opening activity known as the ‘mural de ancestras’ (*mural of ancestors*; see photo to left). Conference participants shared with the group about a woman who has inspired them to continue working towards gender and racial equality in their home countries. Various women gave homage to their mothers and sisters, many who were involved in armed conflicts throughout the region, as well as prominent feminists, indigenous leaders and human rights activists, such as [Myrna Mack](#).

Women, Communication, and Rights

Workshop facilitators led conversations around a woman’s right to equal and fair communication including topics such as:

- How to approach sexist language
- How media can perpetuate stereotypes around women, particularly rural and indigenous women
- A historical overview of women’s presence throughout various media outlets
- How feminist movements and women’s groups in the region can collaborate to “break the silence” and encourage women to speak out for their rights

Experiences of Women in the Media

Conference participants also engaged in a productive dialogue following a diverse panel of primarily indigenous women from Guatemala. Panelists discussed their experiences of racism and sexism in the media, as well as their work to combat stereotypes and their use of various forms of media to promote their organizations’ work as well as a feminist, indigenous agenda. The panel discussion was transmitted live via [Radio Internacional Feminista](#) out of Costa Rica.

Panelists included:

- Fermina Chial Jiatz: [NUTZIJ](#), Sololá
- Petrona Cuy Saloj: [NUTZIJ](#), Sololá
- [Blanca Caal](#): Voces de Mujeres de Ixcán
- Rosalinda Hernandez, [La Cuerda](#)
- [Julia Sum Coyoy](#): AMUTED
- [Victoria Tubin](#): [Observatorio Racismo en los Medios](#)

To take from just one example, Victoria discussed her work at the [Universidad de Rafael Landívar](#) focused primarily on a study ([Racismo en los Medios](#)) which analyzed over 10,000 pieces of journalistic material and critiques the representation of Guatemalan indigenous communities, particularly women, including the Maya, Xinka and Garífuna communities. Not surprisingly, Victoria and her research team found that the Garífuna and Xinka communities were almost entirely overlooked in the national press, and that various stereotypes were being perpetuated about indigenous communities. Her study results indicated that indigenous women were often misrepresented in national press, particularly regarding education, reproductive health, and violence.



Panel moderator Rosa Carmela Sosa (far left) led a discussion with Guatemalan female leaders (primarily of indigenous communities regarding racism and sexism in the media. [Photo courtesy of SIF](#)

The Territory of Communication

Workshop participants also visited three local, women-led media outlets—all seeking to promote a feminist, indigenous agenda throughout Guatemala, as well as throughout Central America and onto the international community in some cases. These projects included: [Voces de Mujeres](#), [Radio Universidad](#), [La Cuerda: Periodismo Feminista](#), and [Agencia Cerigua](#).



Guatemalan participants work together to create a blog. [Photo courtesy of SIF](#)

[Sinergia No'j](#) is a Guatemalan nonprofit which seeks to build and strengthen leadership capacity among indigenous communities, women and youth. Sinergia No'j focuses primarily on working with organizations, individuals, and social movements to work towards impacting poverty, discrimination and oppression throughout Guatemala and the region.

[Just Associates](#) is an international network of activists, scholars, and popular educators working in more than 25 countries, to strengthen the voice, visibility, and collective organizing power of women.

During the final portion of the workshop, participants created a communication strategy for a new campaign designed by the entire group. The campaign focused on equality for women in Mesoamerica, particularly women from rural and indigenous communities. Facilitators from both JASS and Sinergia No'j led a training to discuss how to design a campaign from identifying your main partners and audiences, [to writing a press release](#), [creating a blog](#), as well as [shooting video](#) and radio spots. Please visit the workshop's blog entitled [La Voz de las Mujeres Indígenas y Rurales](#) (*The Voice of Indigenous and Rural Women*) to check out the work produced by the participants, as well as [photos taken by Ana Luisa Ahern of JASS](#).

Seattle International Foundation is committed to supporting organizations, based in the U.S. and in Central America, working to alleviate poverty in the region, as well as building capacity in local leaders. SIF provides funding to microfinance organizations, such as [Global Partnerships](#), in addition to regional women's organizations such as [the Central American Women's Fund](#). Seattle International Foundation is pleased to support Sinergia No'j and JASS in their efforts to empower women in Central America, to build both individual and organizational capacity among women's groups, and to strengthen local female leaders.

For more information, please contact:

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