

# Women who sustain the country without guarantees

Indigenous communities in Honduras are supported by women who work without rights or guarantees.

Mercedes García was 15 years old when she realized that her dream didn't fit the ancestral patterns established by the Lenca community to which she belonged; she wanted to study. She had grown up among the cold and fog of the slopes of Silimania, a town in La Esperanza in the Intibucá department, located in western Honduras, where women dedicate themselves to farming, crafting, and even staying home serving the men in their families.

For García, studying beyond primary school was an impossible luxury.

"We don't have those educational opportunities (...) so we seek to educate ourselves through the organization," she repeats now in a calm voice. She's referring to the Association of Renewed Intibucan Women, which emerged in the 1980s when women's voices were muted and there were few spaces for participation.

According to the report "Sociodemographic Profile of Intibucá, Intibucá 2022", published by the UNAH University Observatory of Economics and Entrepreneurship, significant progress has been recorded in literacy, especially among Lenca women. The illiteracy rate, which a decade ago exceeded 12% in Lenca communities, dropped to 3% in 2022 and to 1.72% in 2023.

Today, the organization García represents has become a school of community economics, leadership, and resilience. More than 600 Lenca women are organizing to shape a different destiny.

The community leader is aware that there is still much work to be done, and that women still face basic problems.

"Water is limited here," he explains.

Indicator 6.3, which measures water quality satisfaction in the SDG 2024 [Gender Index](#), indicates that women in Honduras have one of the lowest rates worldwide.

It's worth noting that Intibucá is known for being the department with the largest concentration of Lenca people in Honduras. In 2022, the population reached 419,000 people, according to data from the National Registry of Persons (RNP).

**A table shared with pain and decision**

Some 400 kilometers away, in the Tolupán mountains of the Yoro department, indigenous leader Marta Gracia Ramos recalls with disdain how, during her childhood, the women in her community only listened and did not comment on the decisions made by men.

Outrage led her to speak out and break that rule; she is now the first female president of an ancestral indigenous organization.

“Seeing the needs we had as women, the violation of human rights, the machismo and patriarchy that prevails in our Indigenous communities, led me to embark on a leadership struggle,” she says.

Ramos points out that there is no hospital network in his community, and the existing hospitals are poorly equipped and lack sufficient staff and medications. Residents often have to walk long distances to receive basic care and are only given generic medications, such as acetaminophen, regardless of the ailment.

A study by the Pan American Development Foundation (PADF) and other reports indicate that up to 70% of Tolupán families live in poverty or extreme poverty.

The average income in some communities is approximately 20 lempiras (less than US\$1) per day, according to the Reflection, Research and Communication Team (ERIC-SJ) and the Center for Research and Promotion of Human Rights (CIPRODEH).

But far from the problems facing his community, as an indigenous leader, Ramos is the target of death threats and digital violence on social media.

The echo of their struggle resonates in indicators: SDG 16.2 of EM2030 places Honduras among the countries with the highest rates of femicide. The State offers little shelter, little justice.

In 2025, 59 femicides were recorded between January and February alone, and 95% of the cases remain unconvicted.

Risking her life, Ramos built something: a network of Tolupán women who today meet, decide, and live. This silent rallying cry is a communal revolution.

“That was a dream... and today it's a reality,” she says proudly.

## **The word that breaks the silence**

The Moskitia has no signs announcing its abandonment: it is felt in the wind that blows without electricity, in the rivers that know no roads, in the salty air and fetid misery.

Mirna Wood was born there, in the imposed silence: where women could cry, but not raise their voices.

“I had to show that we too can speak out,” she says. Today, when women cry out against injustice, they turn to Mirna.

Wood denounced the murders of Miskitos by armed forces in 2012. He halted "blue carbon" plundering projects and prevented the eviction of women and children.

“It was fierce, but we came out ahead,” he recalls.

The neglect is confirmed in numbers: in the basic services indicators of the EM2030, the Moskitia appears with a red flag. But its silence is reflected in the numbers, written in screams: births without a hospital, children without dinner, women who die in tears.

Mirna envisions an autonomous indigenous government: with schools, with hospitals, with a future. "If we remain silent, we concede." Her voice resonates.

### **The country that sustains itself without guarantees**

While Mercedes helps girls access education, Marta strengthens the women's network, and Mirna carries the voice of entire villages.

None of them have guarantees. There is no health, no security, no safe land. But they sustain the country with every step, with every voice, with every seed planted.

"Every woman must stand up and say: I can do it today," Mirna says. And that testimony resonates like an uncomfortable truth: Honduras resists because they can, even though no one guarantees them anything.