

COMMUNICATING WOMEN-LED CLIMATE SOLUTIONS IN CENTRAL AMERICA

PRODUCING FOOD IN IMPOSSIBLE LANDS

Miskito women with their boots on in the face of climate change
Community of Tansin, Municipality of Puerto Lempira, Honduras



November 2023



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To adapt to the impact of climate change, the indigenous Miskito women's organization Tansin Kika Mairka Aslika (TAKIMAS) began farming in a place that no one thought could be fruitful: the plains. For the people of Tansin, the plain was only for living and not for working, so they had their production in other communities. They had to travel outside the community and be away from their homes for months at a time. "Now they are making the plain that nobody believed in productive. Thanks to Tierra Viva and GAGGA, the families brought the garden to the house," says Florentina Wood, president of TAKIMAS.

"When we began to produce the land for food, we felt that we gained access to resources. Being subjects of rights as indigenous women, mothers, daughters, we feel empowered. We work and produce on land where we thought we could not, because there was no fertilizer, where we thought that land was only good for living or selling. Now people can't sell that land because if they sell it, they won't have food gardens," Florentina says.

Among the environmental problems they face as a community are the impact of climate change, land invasion and environmental damage from deforestation, forest burning and resource extraction from the community's lagoon.

With the contamination of the Tansin lagoon, which provided them with an important source of sustenance, home gardens became a necessity to ensure food security for indigenous Miskito families.

"The decrease in fishing is a very strong problem because fish is part of the daily meals and commerce of the community," emphasizes the indigenous leader.

The organization also sought institutional solutions: it set up meetings with the authorities and other organizations in the Moskitia. "As a women's organization we want to ally with other organizations to strengthen the development of solutions against climate change, we do not want to be seen as beneficiaries," says Florentina. "Tierra Viva showed us the importance of adding more and more local solutions," she added.

Tierra Viva also supported the regulation promoted by the women of TAKIMAS. This is a regulation to stop the extraction of Kawacha fish, as well as the extraction of mollusks and jellyfish from the mangrove forest by a Chinese-owned company located in Kaukira.

"The regulation covers forest and lagoon. The prohibition is to prevent outsiders from coming in and taking resources from Tansin Island. So far, the naval authorities have seized nets used for fishing," Wood explained. In addition, the organized women of Tansin carry out clean-up brigades in the lagoon, although they regret that the following day the problem returns because on the shores a type of grass grows that diminishes the species of the lagoons.

The lands on the plain where they began to cultivate are plots of land that now belong to the women's organization. "It was a way to protect and continue protecting because that way we safeguarded it from fires and land grabbers," explains Florentina.

As a result, they now have fewer fires and, according to Wood, this has to do with the task of raising awareness so as not to damage crops and trees by burning grass.

In these plots, they plant fruit trees, timber trees and also rescue trees that are endangered. In addition, the backyards of the houses were converted into food gardens. "The experience from managing food gardens in their own backyards has a major impact on the communities. It has motivated many families to join in and say, 'I can do it too and I need to contribute'. Women now care about having a plot of land that produces even a small part of their food. More and more women and even men are joining in to work in the production of food in their plots of land located on the plains. Now they say that the plains look like the bush because it produces everything," says Wood.

Florentina explains that climate change also directly affects crops. "When there is rain and suddenly the sun comes out, it boils the roots of the plants that the women sow, and the sudden strong winds damage fruits. When there are hurricane winds, mangoes, marzipan, or any fruit, even if it is green, are lost," she says.

The women of Tansin do not use agrochemicals on their plots because they know the impact it has on the soil. "Using chemicals would be like supporting climate change," says the Miskito leader. Florentina says that they received training to produce organic fertilizer and insecticide.

"We developed organic fertilizer, made beds and furrows for planting so that the plants do not drown in the erratic rains. We have been testing this way of planting for a year now and we have found that the water does not rise up to where the crop is."

On the island of Tansin, many women are heads of household because their husbands are disabled from diving in precarious conditions to catch lobster for medium and large scale traders. "It is the wives and children who work because the husbands are in wheelchairs," explains Florentina. It is also the women who must face the impacts of climate change due to erratic rains and loss of crops.

Florentina says that she has often been criticized for being the head of the household. "They made fun of me and said, 'what are you doing with your boots on'. I try to show that it is possible to work, that the land is producing, and I am proud to make the land productive and proud of the many women who also believed and today have created the Tansin Island Women's Network. We are in the process of legalization and once we achieve it, I will be able to say: mission accomplished".



TANSIN KIKA MAIRKA ASLIKA (TAKIMAS)
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