Guatemala has a violent history of civil war and dispossessing Indigenous peoples of their lands, leaving them without access to basic amenities such as land, water, and health services. The 1996 Peace Accord sought to remedy the situation by defining commitments to legal reform to improve the agricultural crisis and restore indigenous peoples’ historical right to land.

In implementing the agreement, the government created a land fund to facilitate access, adjudication, and land regularisation for Indigenous peasant communities. Comité Campesino del Altiplano (CCDA) worked with the Indigenous peoples and youth of Pomarrosal to recover and manage seventy-eight farms on ancestral territories in the area.
### Competencies

#### Areas
- Communities, Indigenous and Religious Institutions and Rights
- Women’s Land Rights and Gender Justice
- Youth

#### Skills
- Advocacy and Campaigning
- Land Conflict Resolution
- Establishment and Strengthening of Local Institutions

### Background

More than half of Guatemala’s population is indigenous, and they still experience high poverty, malnutrition, and lack of access to basic amenities such as land, water, and health services. Additionally, Guatemala has a history of armed conflict and discrimination against Indigenous peoples, and the 36-year civil war resulted in many Indigenous peoples losing their lands. Despite the government’s undertaking to address the land question upon signing the 1996 Peace Accord, Guatemala remains an unequal country, with land concentrated in the hands of agribusinesses. For instance, the largest 2.5% of farms occupy two-thirds of agricultural land, while 90% are on only one-sixth of the national agricultural land.

### The Challenge

Youths take up a significant proportion of Guatemala’s demographics - 68% of Guatemalans are below 30. However, the country’s rural and agricultural policies fail to respond to the needs of young people. War-related land conflicts remain unresolved, making it difficult for the youth to access land and have tenure security, thus affecting their prospects to invest in agriculture. In 1999, the government created a land fund as part of the Peace Accord. According to its regulations, the fund consisted of national lands, vacant lands, illegally occupied lands, and lands purchased by the state for subsidised sale to Indigenous peoples and peasants to ensure access to land. The fund includes an adjudication and regularisation mechanism through which Indigenous and peasant communities recover their pre-war lands.

However, the fund became a mechanism for commercialising unproductive lands, failing to meet its redistributive and egalitarian objectives. Additionally, the fund’s requirements to access land are often unattainable for young people, especially young women who face additional challenges caused by patriarchal norms that exclude women from land-related decision-making spaces. Additionally, young people’s lack of participation in community processes results in their exclusion from youth-related land decision-making bodies and community actions.

### Overcoming the Challenge

The Comité Campesino Del Altiplano (CCDA) is an Indigenous peasant organisation committed to sustainable rural development, gender equity, and youth empowerment through social, economic, cultural, and political initiatives. To ensure youth inclusion in land-related decision-making platforms, CCDA established youth assemblies that organise activities and represent young people at the organisational level. It became evident during the land recovery processes that the young people’s skills were necessary for successful recovery. CCDA trained the youth on land governance, leadership, politics, land and agroecological management, and alternative reporting strategies.

They recognised the importance of young people participating in land governance and land-related decision-making. During the pandemic, many adults could no longer participate in the judicial processes; thus, young people took a leading role in the land recovery process. The Q’eqchi youth led the ancestral land recovery processes in Lancetillo, Northern Guatemala, using their newly gained agroecological production skills to advocate for food sovereignty and environmental protection. The youth led the successful recovery of the Palma Rosal farm during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown.

### Moving Towards People-Centred Land Governance

CCDA represents more than 100,000 families across 20 departments in Guatemala. They advocate changing agricultural policies to benefit rural Indigenous peoples and peasant groups, including supporting the recovery of ancestral lands. CCDA used the state’s land fund to recover 78 farms for indigenous communities.

The youth assemblies support the growing youth population of Guatemala to participate in land-related decision-making. Because of political training, young people value their ancestral lands more. As a result, more youths are taking up agroecological farming under collective land governance. Thanks to political education, they prioritise food sovereignty and improved quality of life over economic benefits.
ESTABLISHING A YOUTH ASSEMBLY
Owing to a history of land deprivation among the Indigenous peoples of Guatemala, the elderly fear that young people are only interested in land recovery for resale and financial gain. This unique social mistrust led CCDA to invest in youth capacity building in their political training schools. The political training processes contribute to the credibility of young people's fight for secure land rights in the eyes of the elderly.

The political training teaches the youth to defend their territories because of their social, economic, and political value. Additionally, they introduced the youth to critical thinking, empowering them to analyse land-related initiatives, including government-led programmes. Finally, CCDA-trained youth can advocate for youth-friendly agricultural policies.

POLITICAL TRAINING FOR YOUTH
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YOUTH-LED ANCESTRAL LAND RECOVERY
CCDA worked with anthropologists, cartographers, and agronomists in identifying the Q’eqchi ancestral lands. Since the technical reports were complex for the elderly community to understand, young people played an essential role in interpreting the information since they have higher levels of education. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic threatened to stall the land recovery process in 2020 as the elderly could not attend hearings. The youth became instrumental in facilitating the virtual hearing, giving them a leadership role in the land recovery and regularisation processes. As a result, the hearings proceeded, resulting in the successful recovery of the Palma Rosal Farm, now under the collective management of the Q’eqchi Indigenous youth and their families.

PALMA ROSAL FARM UNDER YOUTH MANAGEMENT
Many farming cooperatives tend to produce crops for export, which exposes them to market shocks while not meeting the local food needs. The rural schools’ youth training focused on the importance of protecting indigenous and ancestral lands, food sovereignty, climate smart-agroecological farming techniques and food security to curb a growing dependence on agricultural goods export. As such, the youth managing the farm now choose to grow local and indigenous crops. The rural political schools empowered the youths to focus less on on-farm employment and more on Indigenous peoples’ ownership and management of ancestral territories.

PROTECTING INDIGENOUS LAND AND ENVIRONMENTAL DEFENDERS (LEDS)
Indigenous peoples experience discrimination at the behest of recalcitrant congress members who depict Indigenous communities as invaders, stirring adverse reactions in the community. As a result, Indigenous peoples experience threats, arbitrary arrests, attacks, and killings of LEDs. For instance, in 2018, six CCDA members were killed, three of whom were under 30. In dealing with these threats and killings, CCDA invested in a legal, media, and policy strategy along with the Canadian Peace Brigades. Additionally, youth groups use alternative media strategies to share information on their land recovery programmes, addressing society’s negative perceptions about Indigenous peoples.
LESSONS LEARNED

CCDA is strategic and concentrates its efforts on the most critical processes per the economic and human resources available. Secondly, although foreign aid is welcome, international development agencies and foreign governments may finance specific government programmes innocently, yet the government misdirects the resources to curb civil society dissent.

FIND OUT MORE

CCDA website
https://www.ccdagt.org/

Community feminism

KEY FACTORS OF SUCCESS AND REPLICABILITY

- Youth involvement
  Youth involvement in land recovery programmes is essential as young people have crucial competencies integral to the process. Thanks to their higher educational level, they understand legal processes and use technologies to attend judicial procedures and share information about their land recovery. Additionally, as the youths take ownership of the land, they prove their commitment to the collective and sustainable management of their ancestral territories. Thus, they introduced innovative technologies in agriculture while preserving traditional knowledge.

- Adopting a National Women’s Commission
  The National Women’s Commission empowers young women with technical and facilitative skills on topics around women’s rights, harmful social practices, and possible solutions. Furthermore, CCDA facilitates community feminist study groups led by young women with the support of experienced women.

- Promoting gender equality
  Young women and men are treated equally in the youth assemblies as CCDA continues training the youth on gender equality to eradicate male chauvinism in the communities.

As a result, gender-related disputes are minimal, and women are acquiring more significant leadership roles in the indigenous communities.