



RURAL WOMEN

Six stories about women,
transformation and empowerment



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RURAL WOMEN

“Thanks to the rural women of Bajo Caguán and Solano for teaching us the importance of using our voices to transform our territory. This book is dedicated to them, hoping it can reach all corners of the world where more women and girls dream and work for a prosperous territory where their voices are also heard.”

As the Cinnamon tree:

Over the course of the Connected Landscapes Program, we rediscovered and reshaped the images and beliefs we held about rural women. When we began to see their faces, when we listen to their whispers, read their eyes and followed their hints, we doubled down on our efforts to follow their pace and incorporate their desires. Some are silent, pensive, shy, charming or flirtatious, but all of them, all of the women we had the privilege to meet, are doggedly tough and hardworking. There were so many lessons, but so little time and space. These six stories convey their day to day, their unstoppable destinies. We want to inspire other women, we want to teach the youth, to show adolescents and children, that the most beautiful and inspiring thing they can see is how these women, at a particular moment, took the reins and took control of their lives.

They showed us that they were the boss when it came to expanding and sharing what they learn and what they know. They are seed conservationists—protectors of their territory and their natural resources. They have an inherent talent for pushing forward new initiatives, stretching their money, resolving conflicts and building trust. They make lives and they sow life. Our friends, sisters, mothers or partners need us to bolster their spirits and help them to step out of the shadows, to make them visible, recognizing their contributions to well-being and the economy. As the Cinnamon tree—that ancestral tree—is sacred, unique, and healing, so too are our rural women.

“I do not wish women to have power over men; but over themselves.”

Mary Wollstonecraft.

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My Jungle

My jungle

My jungle is my Amazon

My jungle is my forested surroundings

My jungle is the house where I live

My jungle is the air everyone breathes all over the world

My jungle is fresh

My jungle is beautiful

My jungle fascinates me

My jungle is full of beautiful flowers

My jungle bathes the forests with a surging river

My jungle is an environmental treasure

My jungle represents my region

My jungle is the purpose of my life

My jungle gives oxygen to the rest of the country

My jungle is the greatest treasure that God has given me

My jungle is rich in timber

My jungle is the most beautiful

My jungle is immense

My jungle inspires me

My jungle is gorgeous

My jungle is fragile

My jungle is a home to animals

My jungle is a fountain of life

My jungle is tranquility

My jungle gives the world hope

My jungle is beauty and freshness

My jungle has many medicines

My jungle has green birds among the animals

My jungle is the future

My jungle inspires the world

My jungle has rivers of clean water

My jungle is beautiful

My jungle is fresh

My jungle is vast

Written by all of the women who participated in the School for Women Leader.

RURAL WOMEN

CLAUDIA

In the powerful landscape that surrounds her, she discovered her purpose in life: working to protect the natural world and her community, making it a better place to live.



EVA

Her words are as certain as her strength: the bearer of wisdom handed down from her ancestors. A connection with nature courses through her veins and with it she will transform the world.



MARINA

Her life has been full of lessons, and through them, she found the connection that has always existed between humans and the natural world. This was how her life one day took a different path.



EDELMIRA

She moves through life with a rare energy, sharing her wisdom, enjoying the natural world and its unending beauty, overcoming challenges and turning them into strengths.



GISELA

With serenity, determination and hard work, she has been breaking barriers and cutting paths for girls and women who are inspired by her actions and commitment.



YURIANA

As a little girl, she learned to listen to every furrow in her beloved soil. Amid the rivers and mountains, she decided to put down roots and let her branches blow in the wind to reach her distant dreams.





META

CUEVA DE LOS
GUACHAROS
NATIONAL PARK

HUILA

ALTO FRAGUA
INDÍ WASI
NATIONAL PARK

CARTAGENA
DEL CHAIRÁ

GUAVIARE

SOLANO

CAUCA

VAUPES

SERRANÍA DE
CHIRIBIQUETE
NATIONAL PARK

SERRANIA
DE LOS
CHURUMBELOS
NATIONAL
PARK

PUTUMAYO

CAGUAN RIVER

CAQUETA RIVER

AMAZONAS



Caquetá

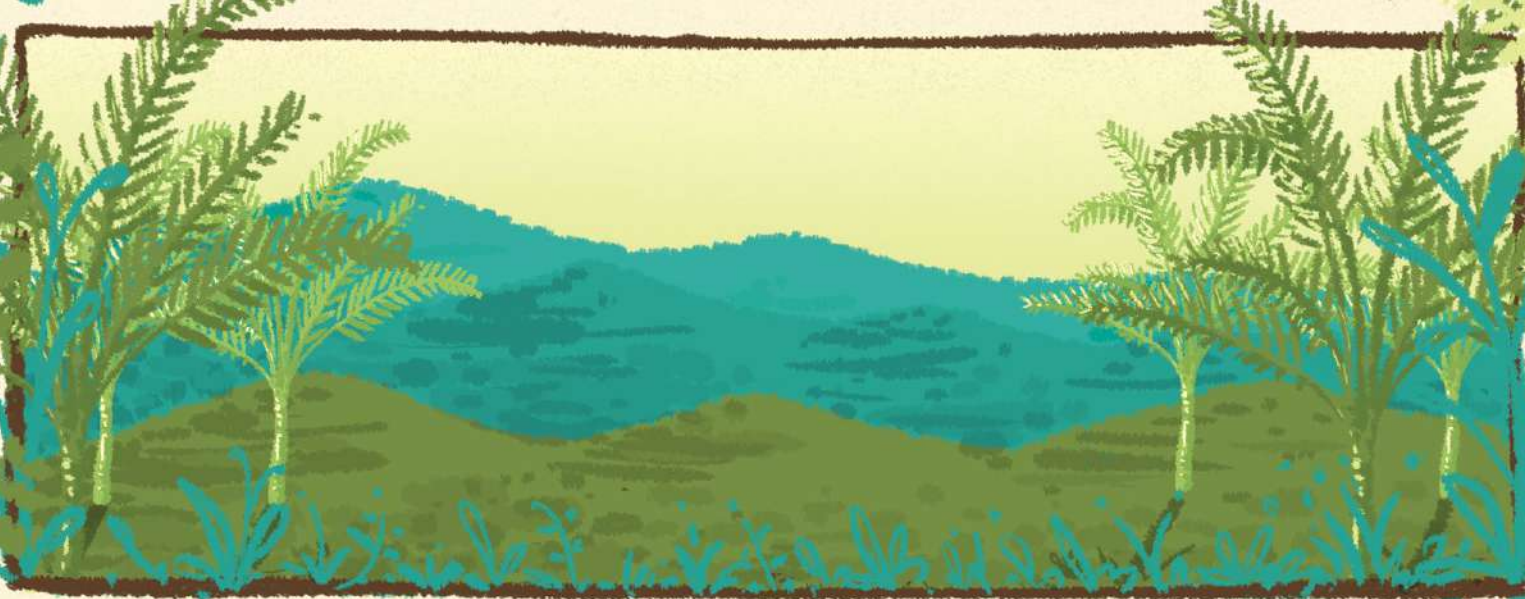
Known as “the gateway to the Amazon” and located in the south of Colombia, it is the third largest department in the country and the cradle of a vast biodiversity—over 25 species of mammals, 250 species of birds, 40 amphibious species and 20 species of reptiles. This region contains four of Colombia’s national parks as well as the Caquetá River, a powerful river that runs through Colombia and Brazil. Due to these very treasures, Caquetá is also one of the most fragile departments, affected by deforestation, extensive cattle ranching and illegal crops—challenges its residents courageously confront day by day, never losing hope that their land will be protected not only for them, but for future generations and for the animals and plants who live there.

EVA

Among garlic, corn, plantain and yucca, Eva Yela was born. Tied to her mother and mother earth, listening to their hearts and their sadness, she learned from these, her great masters.

Running through the mountains and the jungle, speaking to the birds, listening to the stories of her grandmothers, her mother and the women of long ago, Eva grew.

Little by little, these stories taught her what it meant to be a part of her community, to be a native in Caquetá, to be Inga.



One hot, rainy day she met him, and Eva decided the wisdom of her community she would share with he who had stolen her heart.

Though he was a settler, to her it did not matter, and together with him, toward a new future she set out.

At 22, she promised her love, and so, along a new path, all her energy she drove.



She developed new ideas and dreams, and having a family became her principal theme.



Time passed and three children she brought to keep the traditions, language, and wisdom that she had once been taught.

Her sons and her daughter grew up, and off to the city they went.

They had daughters and sons of their own who began to call Eva "grandmother."

She stayed in Caquetá, and with her husband to Las Palmas she came.



Together, not only did a family they build, but a great chagra too.

Onions and chives, garlic and so very many peppers, all the ingredients that could be found there.

They couldn't forget the fruit trees: all the limes, tangerines, peach palms and pineapples that grow around there.

A "chagra" is a traditional Amazonian agricultural system with ties to indigenous spiritual practices and community dynamics.

Mamo is the title for an indigenous spiritual leader, a term used across many different native communities in Colombia.

Just like her grandchildren, her chagra began to grow, becoming part of her life and the way she was known.

One day, together with those who guide her being, the elders and the Mamo, she discovered that the native seeds were her greatest riches, and her mission none other than to protect these.

And so, she began to treasure them, promoting awareness of the value they should have for humanity.



She discovered in food new ways of being, and with effort and a lot of learning, she began to sell jellies and candy. She decided to share with other women her wisdom, and in this way her trade into a business would become.

Some days Eva leaves her home to visit other women. She travels to Florencia, and almost all of Caquetá, to work with them.

Though her days are long, her conviction inspires and feeds the curiosity of others.



Eva believes in the native seeds as a source of power: people know that she treasures them and that they are the ones who protect her.

Eva returns to her home and puts on her hat, repellent, boots and rain poncho.

She gets lost in the mountains, thinking only of her *chagra*.



For Eva, there will always be challenges, and she finds the answers in the soil.

Eva lives in the mountain and her activities in the early morning get her out of bed.

Her *chagra* is her refuge and it shares with her plants all her best secrets.



With her work, Eva has been able to inspire many women like her.

She transmits the feminine power that all women can find within themselves.

For many women and men, her age belies her experience, so they call her “ancient” because of her wisdom.

For Eva and her community, women represent fertility, the power to germinate any seed so that the world it can feed.

Growing chili peppers, a practice shared from generation to generation

In Caquetá, there are a wide variety of chili peppers: viche, platanuchu, chicheperro, pequeño, tigreucho... This last one, tigreucho, is never lacking in Eva's house. In fact, it has been on her table generation after generation, and now, Eva wants to share her knowledge with you.

Below, you will find instructions on how to grow this crop:

1^{er} STEP



Remove the seeds from a ripe chili pepper. The seeds should be mixed with a little bit of ash and left to sit for three days or more, when life will start to germinate.

Ingenuity

We women have the ability to create, to innovate. Listening to ourselves and trusting in our intuition is the first step on that path.

2^o STEP

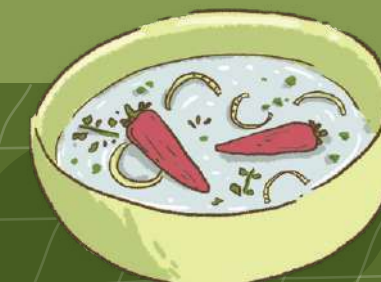


Prepare the soil for planting the seed. It would be best to choose a plot far from the bell peppers, to ensure its flavor and avoid absorption of the chili pepper spice in other vegetables.

Discipline

To reach our objectives, it isn't enough to dream, we must develop a plan that will help us get there bit by bit.

To eat them, the chili peppers must be harvested and cooked. They can also be mixed with coriander seed, onion and water and preserved in a glass jar. And when the time comes, it will be ready to be enjoyed with family or alone, thanking mother earth for the food she gives us.



3^o STEP

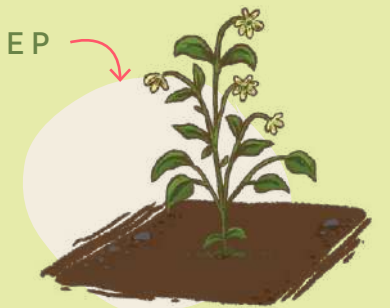


Chili peppers are a very demanding plant in regards to temperature. You should check their exposure to heat and light and inspect their growth.

Care

This is loving ourselves and being kind to ourselves so that we can help others.

4^o STEP



The plant will continue to grow according to the care you give it. Fertilize and fertilize, and after four months, you should see the flowers blossom.

Perseverance

Perseverance gives us the strength to achieve the things we firmly believe in.

EVA

Mom and Grandmother



Where does she live?

Solano



One of her fears?

The loss of indigenous knowledge, and the high concentration of chemicals in our food.



What does she dreams of?

Recovering the native foods of Caquetá and sharing them with the world.

One of her passions?

Caring for the native seeds.



One of her characteristics?

She has a rich knowledge of indigenous wisdom.



“

Mother earth gives us the fruit, and we must care for it. If we do something bad to our land, she will weaken and so shall we. She needs us, just like we need her”

EVA



MARINA

This is the story of Marina Cuenca, a woman of strength and valor.

I can still remember when she first arrived at Vereda del Café. She was three years old and a passion for life radiated from her skin. Her simplicity was captivating, as well as her ability to dream in waking life. Well, common cicadas like myself, we know how to do that quite well.

Her family quickly settled down and got to work growing coca. That was how, in her home, they did away with poverty, for a time.


“Look Cicada! You’ve never seen a kitchen so full!” Marina shouted, enjoying her food.

But one afternoon, her world was transformed. The fumigations had come, and the crop was destroyed.

Dismal, she told me, “Cicada, we lost it all.”


A few days later, I flew to her house again, and to my surprise, I was only met with her absence. I knew in my heart that Marina had decided to start a new life.

Some years later, a few cicada friends found her. They told me that she had children and a partner, that she had gone back to growing coca and had failed anew, but life had taught her something, and she, humbly, had listened.



Full of new lessons, she returned to the town. With great wisdom and powerful determination, she repeated, loud and clear, that never again would she grow coca.

Over and over, she told me, “Cicada, I was wrong to think that I could get rich growing crops without caring for mother nature. Sadness is the only thing we reap when we abuse her soil.”



When she came to understand that the pain of nature was one with her own, with devotion and conviction she met with other women and continued her search for new things to grow. Soon she discovered that protecting native seeds was her true mission and a way to give back to the earth what she had once taken.

“Cicada, if we protect and grow the native seeds, we’ll never be lacking.”

And though I knew little of planting, by her hand I learned to farm. She built a big vegetable patch where I set to work. Onions, cilantro and tomatoes began to grow in her field, and this is how we have come to enjoy healthy meals.



By her example, women and men have changed the way they toil, to protect the water and the soil. Some call her crazy, some support her mission. All the while, Marina in her garden keeps growing her true passion.

Her connection to the earth goes beyond farming. She speaks to plants and listens carefully to their joys, their tragedies. I watch her unseen when she is alone: in her notebook she translates important recipes to heal the soul and feed the spirit of whoever would partake of these.

“Drink this, Cicada, to free yourself of shame!
And never forget the power of mother earth and our
connection to her beautiful grandeur.”

Marina has transformed her life and the lives of many people around her. She lives convinced that there is always a second chance to find the path toward working in harmony with mother earth.

She gently slows her pace when others pass by. With grace, she teaches them how important it is to plant a love of the earth in their kids, that we may never again see our mother cry.

Having followed Marina along her path, if there is anything I’m sure of, it is that, should I be born again someday, I would want once more to follow her steps and walk by her side.

Recipe for making llantén tea

In nature there is a deep connection between each of its elements, a balance.

That connection also exists between our bodies and our minds, our organs and our emotions.

According to traditional medicine and ancestral wisdom, illnesses are caused by external factors, like the weather or pollution, as well as internal factors, like an emotional imbalance. Thus, respiratory problems, for example, could be associated with periods of sadness or melancholy that need to heal. Understanding and listening to our bodies and our minds is the first step toward understanding how we can take care of them and make them stronger.

Below, we will introduce you to llantén, one of Marina's favorite plants.



Llantén, a tool for fighting respiratory illness

Llantén, or broadleaf plantain, known by its scientific name as *Plantago major*, is a plant in the *Plantaginaceae* family, used in home remedies for treating fevers and the common cold.

To prepare it as a drink, one normally uses the leaves and seeds, available in health food stores, some pharmacies and in some local markets.

Llantén tea preparation

1^{er} STEP



Take seven leaves of llantén and cook them over a low heat in a tightly sealed pot for several minutes.

2^o STEP



Serve the water in a cup together with whatever condensation can be recovered from the pot lid.

3^o STEP



Enjoy your relaxing drink with good company. Make it a time for listening to your body and your heart and for taking new steps towards getting to know yourself.

MARINA

Mom

● Where does she live?

Cartagena
del Chairá.



● What does she dream of?

Sharing knowledge
about healthy eating
and helping everyone
to grow what they
want on their farms.

● One of her passions?

Natural
medicine.

● One of her fears?

The pollution of
our water sources
through the use of
chemicals.

● One of her
characteristics?

Her constant
desire to learn
new knowledge
and skills.



“

For women, it pains us to
damage nature. We take care
of the environment, we tell
our husbands to stop cutting
down the forest so that they
won't destroy nature, because
that would destroy us too ”

MARINA



CLAUDIA

Claudia feels fulfilled. She feels happy when she sees the triumphs, the struggles and the beauty of her land. Every time she swiftly paddles upstream in her canoe, toward Solano, she can be heard saying, “I wouldn’t trade the country for anything. Here we have it all.”


She is on her way home with ever stronger convictions. She has been in a meeting with the women in her class, organizing projects for the wellbeing of her community and to protect the local environment. Together with these women, she reforested jungles, rehabilitated lakes and streams. She has advanced ways of tilling the land to build a more sustainable life.

She currently leads a committee of women for Prodesarrollo, an organization in the Monunguete núcleo. In this role, she promotes women's collectives. She encourages them to propose projects and to organize themselves so that they can get representation in their rural divisions.

A “núcleo” (nucleus) is an administrative body composed of representatives from contiguous veredas (rural divisions). Whereas the veredas are official administrative subdivisions of the municipio (county), a núcleo is not an official government institution, though they are condoned and supported by government mandates.


Until a few years ago, all of these activities were unthinkable for Claudia. Her life opened up a new path when she decided to study alongside other women leaders. She learned a lot and even earned her first diploma. Learning made her feel invincible, and she lost her fear of speaking in public. She discovered a confidence inside herself that helped her grow with unusual strength, like the forests of the Amazon.

Today she is a true leader. Every project she takes on will transform and improve her surroundings. Building a comprehensive farm, purchasing egg-laying chickens and distributing them to various woman-led farms—those are some of her most recent initiatives.

A colorful illustration of a young woman with dark hair and freckles, wearing a green patterned shirt, sitting in a wooden boat on a river. She is looking towards a man on the opposite bank. The man is wearing a green shirt and pants, has a backpack, and is carrying a large stack of green suitcases. A small green bird is perched on one of the suitcases. The background is a lush green landscape with trees and a blue sky. Red petals are falling from the top of the frame.


Claudia continues along the journey to her home. Every time she gazes upon the landscape, she smiles because it all reminds her of her grandmother. This ground-breaking woman broke the cultural barriers of her time and decided to become a nurse. And, once she earned her degree, she defied her destiny and abandoned Bogotá to head downriver to find love and a life in harmony with nature.

It was her grandmother who taught her the secrets of planting, the furrows in the soil, tending to the seeds and keeping the forests out of harm's way. In these talks between grandmother and granddaughter, she explained how the environment is sustenance and refuge for everyone and that one should always protect it.

A colorful illustration of a young woman with dark hair, wearing a green patterned shirt and yellow pants, riding a brown horse through a lush green forest. The horse is standing still, and the woman is looking towards the viewer. The background is a dense forest with tall trees and a blue sky. Red petals are falling from the top of the frame.


Claudia continues along her path and soon disembarks. The journey to her home is still three hours away by horse along the bluffs. With her grandmother alive in her memory, she sighs and happily arrives at her home.

She greets her husband and kisses her children. All of them were anxious to hear the details of her day. They sit down to talk next to a garden overflowing with tomatoes, ginger, celery, plantains, yucca, cilantro, bell peppers, slipper gourds, onions, culantro and anise.

A woman with a large tree on her chest is in the foreground. In the background, four children are holding up banners that say "FORTALECER" and "LA PAZ" amidst green foliage and yellow confetti.

She tells them she had a special day with the women leaders in her class, because, along with working heart and soul on new ideas, they talked about how difficult their lives have been in times of war and how, through their collective efforts, they can contribute to upholding the peace.

Her throat occasionally gets tight when she remembers those painful days in Colombia. But in Claudia's heart, there beats a "woman of oak," so she manages to quickly compose herself, like those powerful green trees along the banks of the Caquetá.

A group of people are sitting around a table eating. In the background, two white birds are flying in a blue sky with stars and a crescent moon. The scene is decorated with pink petals and green foliage.

Suddenly, the sun begins to set behind the mountains and she remembers the Caquetá chicken soup—made with irresistible peppers flakes—that she had left in the oven.

All of them sit down to eat in front of the garden, just as the sky begins to fill with stars. Claudia is thankful for her life as she repeats, from the bottom of her heart, that she wouldn't trade the country for anything, because here, without a doubt, she has everything and more.

Recipe for Caquetá Sancocho Campesino

If Claudia loves anything, it's sharing food and experiences with her family. One of her favorite recipes without a doubt is sancocho. Here we have her magic recipe.

Ingredients for the recipe:



Chicken



Yuca
(cassava)



Corn



Auyama
(buttercup squash)



Potatoes



Plantain



Culantro
(Long coriander)



Homegrown
green onion



Ground chili
peppers



Salt

Ingredients for inspiration:

- Courage
- Caring for the Environment
- Strength
- Love
- Solidarity
- Empathy

When your sancocho is ready, we invite you to:

• Share it with your family or the people you care about most. There is nothing better than adding a little love and friendship to your foods, the final touch.

• Take a moment to talk about moments when courage and solidarity have played an important role in your day.

• Share your ideas about activities and projects for taking care of the environment, inside and outside the home, and for improving life in your community.

Preparation:

1

Dress the chicken, leaving it in salt overnight.

2

Let the chicken cook in a pot on the stove until it starts to get tender.

3

Add yuca, corn, auyama and potatoes.

4

When it begins to boil, add the plantain, but not until then. This avoids a darkening of the broth.

5

Add diced culantro and onion; chili and salt to taste.



CLAUDIA

Mom

Where she lives?

Solano

One of her characteristics?

Her strength and her fighting spirit.

One of her passions?

Conservation and caring for the land.

What does she dream of?

Passing on her love of planting and taking care of seeds to more women and new generations.

One of her fears?

Struggling to build a decent future full of possibilities for her family in Caquetá, so that her children can follow their dreams in that beautiful land.

“

I would like it if many more many more women learned about the things that make me great... and I could learn things from them too. We women have rarely been listened to. Now has come the time when we want to be heard, and we want to be given a chance to study and do better for ourselves”

CLAUDIA



EDELMIRA

Edelmira declares she is a proud woman of Caquetá. She has lived her life in a powerful environment overflowing with jungles, mountains and rivers. This was the universe where she discovered that the embrace of nature is an eternal shelter. It was in this land where she learned that the trees are thanking her for every step she takes to protect them.



For you see, Edelmira has spoken with trees since she was a girl. It all began one day when she was picking corn and she fell on a big root. The disks in her hips were damaged and an immense pain settled into her bones.

But she picked herself up right away. Something happened in her body and her convictions that filled her with strength, that gave her the powerful and indomitable energy of the trunks and the eternal wood.



She decided she would join the struggle of her companions to protect the jungle. Those were days of studying together and learning from each other's wisdom. A time when they decided they would connect all of the forests that were left, the aggrieved survivors of profound predation.

As a collective, they went out to the ravines to plant more trees, and they even managed to be heard by local governments, creating a respectful lifestyle, a sustainable use of the forest.



Since then, the thickets shine forth brilliantly, untouchable, and no one else has cut them down. Sublimely, the trees thank Edelmira and the women of her lands for taking such good care of them.

Out of this work came more incredible events, like when she was elected vice president of her núcleo, a difficult job for a woman to attain but that she knew how to earn through endless work and innovative ideas, managing to overturn the absurd prejudice that says only men should be in those leadership positions.

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Today, Edelmira bravely takes to the microphone to speak in front of big audiences, sharing all of her experience and knowledge about conservation, food sovereignty and water management.

There are days when she is reminded that the pain still lives in her bones. But she feels revived by working with communities. And then her face becomes one big smile.

Collective learning and organizing activities to improve the quality of life have been her incentives. She discovered, through her development as a leader, that nothing can stop her.

Today, driven by the desire to transform her beloved Caquetá into a place of fairness that respects the environment, she busies herself protecting the streams, the springs and the crops.

Since becoming a community leader, she has met more and more women. This has given her more knowledge, and it has confirmed for her that they all have a right to make decisions, to actively participate in their regions.



"The land is a good living, so we have to protect the earth," she can be heard saying as she smiles with a microphone in her hand. The applause that follows her words is carried echoing on the wind, along the Sevilla stream next to the Ortigüaza River, in the green landscape of Solano.

Edelmira looks to the horizon of the Las Mercedes núcleo, and she can see the mountain hugging the trees while the sun braids every ray over her fortunate, smiling face. She feels reborn every day and the path of her struggle still has a lot of beautiful miles to go.

Protecting the water, a job for everyone



Water is life, and without it, our planet would be very different. The diversity of animals and plants in places like the Colombian Amazon wouldn't exist.

Water helps to regulate the climate, and it allows us to grow food. It is also essential for ensuring that the nutrients from the soil reach the plants, and that the nutrients from our food move through our bodies.

- Did you know that Colombia has the second largest diversity of fish and amphibians in the world (1,533 species of fish and 763 species of amphibians)?
- Did you know that every year in Colombia the rivers are polluted with more than 900,000 tons of non-biodegradable material, like bags, bottles, disposable diapers, clothes, etc.?
- Did you know that, in the city, a family of four consumes an average of between 18,000 and 22,000 liters of water a month?



Edelmira's love for her land knows no limits. This is why she dedicates her days to protecting the forests and the water. Here we share some of her advice for protecting them:

- Don't throw scraps or garbage in rivers, lakes, seas or other water systems.
- Don't mess with irrigation channels or rivers.
- Plant native species in the fields and near the springs and along river banks and creeks.
- Promote taking care of reservations and the responsible management of water resources.
- Avoid the use and abuse of agrochemicals that contaminate the water and the species who live there.
- Direct the tributaries on ranches and farms so that they are used for watering crops while making sure they flow with as little contamination as possible.
- Reduce the amount of water you use for daily cleaning and reuse as much of it as possible.

Do you have ideas for promoting water conservation?

Surely you are someone with the power to transform your community and protect the environment. What are your ideas for protecting the water? We encourage you to get involved and, together with your family and community, you can put these ideas in action!



EDELMIRA

Mom

♥ Where does she live?

Solano

♥ One of her characteristics?

Her resilience

♥ What does she dream of?

Building meeting spaces where every woman can learn from the wisdom of her peers.

♥ One of her passions?

Feeding her connection to nature, to her forests.

♥ One of her fears?

That her community, particularly children, will grow up experiencing the same challenges as her generation.

“

I tell my women colleagues that we've got to have strength and continue moving forward, regardless of difficulties. We must strive, so we won't lack anything. And, of course, also be happy, enjoy life and the beauty of nature ”

EDELMIRA



GISELA

The sun rises in Puerto Camelias. The distant murmur of the water flowing down the Caguán River can be heard three hundred meters from where Gisela lives. A light, humid breeze gently soothes the final moments of sleep for the residents of this homestead.

The heat is oppressive.

It wasn't like this before, Gisela recalls, awake before the sun comes out. Though her home is in the middle of the Amazon jungle, she sometimes feels the way she does when she visits the city: stifled. For her, this is because of climate change, deforestation, how little attention we pay to the natural world.



Gisela is unsettled when she thinks about her land. Without losing any time, she prepares for a new day: she milks the cows, gardens, clears the pastures, tends to the cattle, plays with her granddaughter ...

...preparing for her classes at the school and the activities of the association she leads for supporting women's community projects; planning her dream of creating an office for women that will give voice to their needs ...

A long day of arduous work so that Gisela will be ready, yet unbeknownst to her, she began to prepare for this when she was only a girl.



You see, at nine years old, her mother died, and her father found a way to drown his pain with alcohol. Gisela found herself obliged to forget her childhood so she could confront the challenges she faced: raising her two younger brothers.

Without a choice, she dove into the example her mother had set—a brave, hardworking woman—and she found a job. Since then, Gisela has never stopped working, first for her brothers and later for her first son, who would be born a few years later.

Further down the line, her burdens were lightened when she met her husband, with whom she had two more little babes. She established a home and built her farm, with garden and cattle.

Determined not to let history repeat itself, she promised her children that she would never let them down, a promise she kept unyieldingly, even sometimes forgetting herself.

But a few years ago, her children fully grown, life surprised her anew.

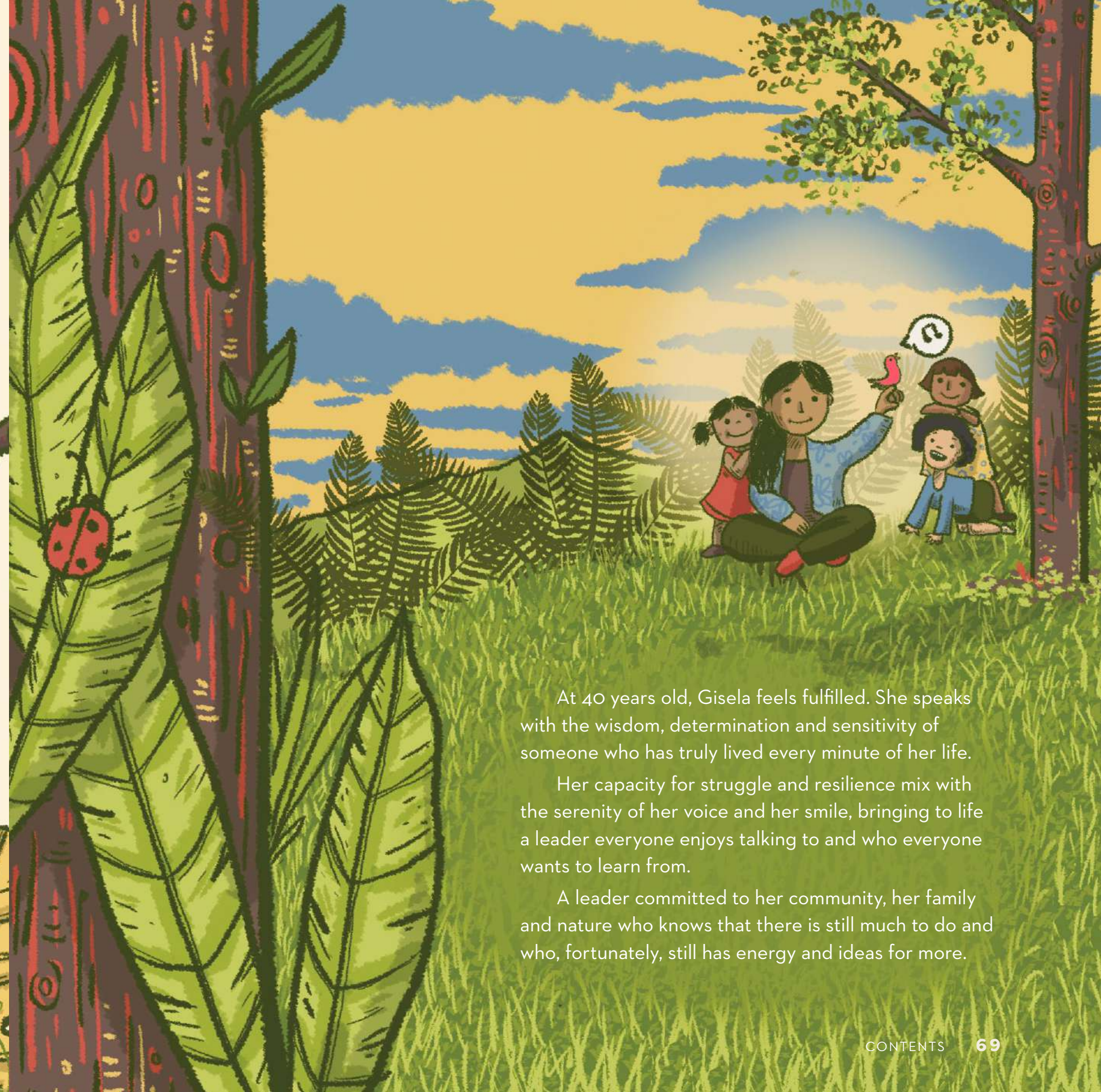
An invitation to participate in an educational course, one for improving the productivity of her farm and protecting the prairies and the jungle, would become an opportunity to reconnect with herself, with her inner strength, and to confront challenges that had been unimaginable until then.

With the confidence that this education gave her, Gisela left her house determined to conquer the public realm. She went straight to the council, knowing that she wouldn't be heard but that, by doing so, she would upend prejudices toward the role of women, proving that leadership is genderless.

Likewise, she set to work and made her dream of becoming a teacher come true. With her children's notebooks that she had kept—and that she filled much more quickly than they ever had—and the books she picked up here and there, the ones scattered throughout her home, Gisela prepares each class on animal husbandry, farming, Spanish and gardening.



In those pages and in her life experiences, there are poems, games and songs that she can use to share knowledge with her students and inspire them to be curious and creative.



At 40 years old, Gisela feels fulfilled. She speaks with the wisdom, determination and sensitivity of someone who has truly lived every minute of her life.

Her capacity for struggle and resilience mix with the serenity of her voice and her smile, bringing to life a leader everyone enjoys talking to and who everyone wants to learn from.

A leader committed to her community, her family and nature who knows that there is still much to do and who, fortunately, still has energy and ideas for more.

Walking in the earth's shoes, an exercise for understanding and combating climate change

The planet can no longer easily regulate its temperature. Its equilibrium is at risk and life as we know it as well. These climate variations are caused by the increase in greenhouse gases produced by transports, garbage, etc.

Climate change is especially difficult in the countryside, because it gets harder and harder to know when to harvest, when the rains will be stronger or when the dry season will be longer. The animals and plants are also affected by this, and they have to develop mechanisms for adapting to these changes and ensuring their survival.



What are the consequences of climate change?

- Intense heat waves and cold spells.
- Diseases.
- Floods and droughts that affect crops and food security in these communities.
- Cows are weakened by a lack of water and by excessive heat, reducing their milk production.
- Species extinction and ecosystem destruction.

Climate change is something that especially worries Gisela, who says that, despite living in the Amazon jungle—the earth's lungs—the heat is getting worse, the rains are more intense, and diseases are more common.

For more information, see the "Pass the voice" activity kit published by Fondo Acción.

We invite you to engage in the following activity with your family and/or friends:

- Grab a blanket and together with whoever else is participating, go stand in direct sunlight.
- Ask the other participants to get under the blanket and wait there for a while.
- After a few minutes, add another blanket on top of the first one. Without a doubt, the participants will begin to feel that the heat is much more intense.
- Ask them to stay there, under the blankets, for a few more minutes.
- Then, repeat the addition of a blanket.
- Remove the blankets and invite them to discuss their experiences.



What happened to the participants in the activity is what is happening to the Earth. Before, the planet had a small blanket (the atmosphere and the greenhouse gasses), which helped regulate temperature and protected us from the solar rays. However, with the arrival of cars, factories, large scale ranching, agriculture fires and deforestation, the planet began to warm and its equilibrium came under threat.

GISELA

Mom and Grandmother

• Where does she live?

Cartagena
del Chairá

• One of her fears?

Seeing her community,
her companions,
subject to violence.

• What does she dream of?

Continuing to work
towards empowering
women's voices and
their participation in
public spaces.

• One of her passions?

Sharing what she
knows and being
a teacher.

• One of her characteristics?

Her determination, a
quality she inherited
from her mother.



“

Nature is the greatest
beauty, an attainable
need, like oxygen or life,
a perfect and inexplicable
relationship ”

GISELA



YURIANA

Puerto Rico, Santo Domingo, Loma Larga, Puerto Camelias, Remolinos del Caguán... places she went with her parents and her sisters, that bore witness to a happy childhood, her treasured memories.

Like the journey to get to school that took over an hour, river included. There and back, travelling along the river to get to class, Yuriana took the time to dive into its warm waters, over and over again, as if there were no tomorrow.

Years later, Yuriana still lives her life with that same intensity.




In Puerto Camelias, where she lives with her children, she feels happy. Life is tranquil, the community is small, no more than fifty people, and her children can keep going to school and studying. What you learn, she insists, is the only thing you will hold onto for the rest of your life.

She wakes up early, with the music always playing. Yuriana divides her time between housekeeping, taking care of her children, the activities she comes up with to inspire her community, and her work teaching children about the importance of protecting natural resources, of protecting mother earth, who she fell in love with as a girl when she lost herself among the leafy trees and majestic waters of her beloved Caquetá.




Although being a single mother isn't easy, and sometimes she misses life as a couple, she knows that her peace of mind and liberty are non-negotiable.




Yuriana was once married to the father of her two children, but what could have been a love story soon became her worst nightmare. On a day like any other, violence snuck into her home and settled into her life. For several years, she was gripped by fear and her confidence was shaken.

Then, one morning, she looked in the mirror and found herself again. She who was made of jungle and fields, planted earth and grasses, meadows and crystalline waters—she knew she didn't deserve a life like that.



So, Yuriana gathered the strength deep down in her gut and left to find a better future for her family.

Today, Yuriana shares her experience with other women, in the hope that they won't have to go through the same things. When she tells her story, she insists that everything is possible, that after you fall down, there's nothing else to be done but to get up and keep going, alone or together, fighting, working and learning.



Master of her present and sculptor of her future, Yuriana never stops dreaming. She dreams of having a small field, with a vegetable garden like the one her parents had, dedicating her time and energy to its care. She also dreams of pursuing the technical studies that will strengthen her knowledge of conservation and teaching. And of course, she dreams of supporting her children so that they can keep studying.

She wants to keep working with her community, inspiring other women so that they can achieve their goals, and inspiring men to believe in them.

She wants to keep sharing her passion for nature with children in her village; because she knows, though the beauty of Caquetá is bewitching, its enchantment is in danger. The ravages of deforestation are clear, and the leadership of future generations is vital to protecting the earth of today, before it is too late.

Understanding ourselves and the power of our voices

The social participation of women is a fundamental human right. Nonetheless, around the world, women and girls are absent or poorly represented in decision-making spaces that affect their own present and future.

In rural settings, women play a central role in the implementation of strategies for sustainable development, ecosystem conservation, and improved food security. Ensuring that their voices are heard is a social responsibility.

When Yuriana was a young girl, she left her parents' house because she wanted to develop her autonomy and understand her strengths and weaknesses. This was fundamental to becoming a woman committed to the wellbeing of her family, her community and herself.



We invite you to try out the following activity:



1. Get a piece of paper and a pencil.
2. Draw a mirror.
3. Place your perceived characteristics in the mirror.
4. Cover the mirror and ask people close to you to write down at least one quality they see in you.



5. Then look at what they wrote. Don't be surprised if these are characteristics you don't see in yourself or that maybe only you can see.
6. Now, draw yourself in that mirror, this time with both the characteristics you already had as well as the ones they mentioned.



7. Next, push yourself to write a story where you are the protagonist.
8. Return to the mirror and the text every time you have doubts about your abilities and your value to society.

Building a sustainable future means not leaving anyone behind, and to do this, it is vital that we guarantee the voices of women and girls are heard and that their rights and well-being are protected.

Hopefully, your voice will become an inspiration for more people to discover, conserve and protect the land, and for more girls and women to rise up and follow your example!

YURIANA

Mom

✿ Where does she live?

Cartagena
del Chairá

✿ One of her fears?

That there are still
men who don't value
women and that
there is still for a
better understanding
of the power of
working together
and supporting each
other.

✿ What does she dream of?

Full of opportunities
and security.

✿ One of her
characteristics?

Joy and
strength.

✿ One of her passions?

Sharing her
knowledge with
those around her
and learning from
them.

“

Oh happy jungle,
oh happy fields!
You extend like my locks
along the length and breadth
of the beautiful night, dark
and deep as my eyes are
wide, with mountains as
smooth as my eyebrows.
Oh jungle that like my womb
has given life! ”

YURIANA



To learn more about the work of Fondo
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Rural Women pays tribute to all the rural women who transform their families and communities day by day with their courage, commitment and hard work. Connected Landscapes accompanied and supported them in their pursuit of environmental conservation and sustainable development. We invite you to be inspired by these stories and to nourish your curiosity by learning about and recognizing the power of rural women and their contribution to society.

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