

Our Strength, our Identity

Working with Young People of a repressed,
marginalized, and discriminated Indigenous
Group—the Guraní in Sucre (Bolivia)

Willma Durán Benavides, Hermann Stoffel

“Loneliness, poverty, and discrimination of young people— this reality motivated us.”

Abstract: *Between 20 and 25 young Guaraní undergraduate students in Sucre, Bolivia, live in precarious conditions, with low self-esteem and at risk of denying their cultural identity due to discrimination. They became involved in the project called “Our identity, our strength— Ñandereko jaeko mirata”, carried out in coordination with their local authorities, namely the Council of Captains of Chuquisaca.*

The project strengthened the cultural identity of young Guaraní by consolidating a community of students who got to know each other, identified their needs, spoke Guaraní within the group, and identified common goals.

This group of young people sought to become visible in the city by sharing public spaces through their art, dance, music, customs, and cuisine. They promoted their activities with intense communication efforts led by the youth themselves, which in turn strengthened their cultural roots.

The young people developed communication skills that enabled them to produce

communication materials to share their knowledge, values, and cultural practices on social media.

Keywords: *Identity; Youth; Strength; Guaraní; Art*

The Motivation for Implementing the Project

The publication of the book on the liberation of the Guaraní people in the department of Chuquisaca fostered strong connections with families from different communities. In their testimonies, they recount the difficulties their children face while studying in Sucre: loneliness, poverty, and discrimination, which often lead them to abandon their studies.

This reality motivated us to invite young Guaraní women and men to form a community in Sucre and together create an initiative that would allow them to live their culture and strengthen a brotherhood that renews the bonds experienced in community life.

We began by working on a process of empowerment and reinforcement of their cultural identity, to confront a society with limited intercultural openness—one that pressures these young people, who are an absolute minority, to deny and hide their identity and to forget their customs and language.

The Guaraní

The Guaraní people live in the Bolivian departments of Tarija, Chuquisaca, and Santa Cruz, forming the country's third-largest Indigenous nation. For centuries, they resisted Spanish colonization. It was only during the Republican era that they began to lose their ancestral territories. Guaraní families and communities were forced to work on large estates under conditions that often amounted to semi-slavery. A major shift began in the 1990s, when Guaraní families—supported by the Catholic Church and human rights organizations—initiated a process of liberation. Today, many communities have regained their freedom and now

have access to schooling up to the secondary level. Yet agriculture, their main livelihood, still lacks support, particularly in bringing products to market. Many families also lack the means to support their children's studies beyond high school.

Guaraní elders have long taught that life flourishes only through harmonious and respectful relationships—between humans, nature, ancestors, and the sacred. All beings share a living territory: people, *iyas* (spirits), animals, plants, birds, and ancestral presences. This interconnected world must be cared for, inhabited with respect, and allowed to regenerate. From this living landscape, life continually emerges and renews itself.

The Arete Guasu: A Celebration of Life

Fig. 11: The dance of the Arete Guazu, a traditional festival of the Guaraní.



©Lenny Rivera

The most important Guaraní festival is the Arete Guasu, the “Great Festival.” This ancient ritual celebrates the corn harvest, affirms cultural

identity, and honors the encounter between the living and their ancestors through dance, music, and traditional ceremonies.

Project Description and Activities

To promote an intra- and intercultural process with a group of young Guaraní, to revitalize their cultural roots and foster their recognition and dialogue with the urban world of Sucre, the project implemented training in performing arts, photography, and cultural identity strengthening.

Workshops on the knowledge and practice of communal life

Fig. 12: Workshop with the Guaraní youth about the historical aspects of the liberation process.



©Isabel Ajata

As part of the current project, two workshops were held with Guaraní youth to document and reflect on the knowledge and practices that shape communal life. During workshops on Guaraní history, participants discussed the community's liberation process and the achievements that

followed. A collective systematization titled “Our Way of Being Guaraní: Knowledge, Practices, Feelings... That We Nurture and Cultivate” was created and shared digitally with both leaders and young people.

Framework agreement to support the Guaraní culture

To ensure long-term support for cultural initiatives, a framework agreement was signed between the Council of Captains of Chuquisaca (CCCH) and the Ministry of Cultures, Decolonization, and Depatriarchalization. This agreement aims to strengthen Guaraní cultural life, with youth playing a central role.

Theatre activities

Fig. 13: Theatre performance



©Hermann Stoffel/Willma Durán
Benavides

Further Activities consisted of Theatre activities, during which a theatre instructor was hired to lead a training process in performing

arts in February. This led to the first staging of a play titled “Where I Come From”, which explores the theme of migration experienced by young people who leave their communities.

The play was presented in its first version at the Sombrerería Theatre to students from the Teacher Training School of Chuquisaca. It was a complete success!

Photography course

Additionally, a photography course was conducted in the communities of Huirasay, Villaflora, and San Jorge de Ipaty, involving direct practice with youth who were spending their holidays in their communities during January.

Fig. 14: Photography workshop in the community of Huirasay.



©Isabel Ajata

As part of their practical training, the participants applied what they had learned, capturing beautiful photographs that reflect the Guaraní worldview in three dimensions:

- Reflecting the Carnival Festivities in San Jorge de Ipaty

Fig. 15: Dance of the Arete Guazu, performed by kids and youth in the community of San Jorge de Ipaty.



©Pedro Miranda

- Reflecting Cattle Branding in the community of Villafora

Fig. 16: Festival of the cattle branding during carnival, that every member of the community.



©Aylin Flores

- Reflecting daily life in the community of Huirasay

Fig. 17: A typical Guaraní family talking at the camp-fire in the community of Huirasay.



©Pedro Miranda

Connection to the framework of Global Citizenship Education and the Sustainable Development Goals

The project “Our identity, our strength— Ñandereko jaeko mirata” contributes to several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by addressing the intersection of cultural identity, education, and social inclusion. It strongly aligns with *SDG 4 (Quality Education)* by creating informal learning spaces where young Guaraní develop skills in communication, arts, and critical reflection, while strengthening their cultural knowledge. The initiative also advances *SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities)* by empowering an Indigenous minority group facing discrimination and marginalization in urban contexts, fostering visibility and equal participation in public life. Through revitalizing language, traditions, and cosmovision, the project contributes to *SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities)* by promoting inclusive, culturally diverse urban spaces where Indigenous identities are recognized and valued. Furthermore, the focus on youth

empowerment, especially the participation of young women, aligns with *SDG 5 (Gender Equality)*, as it creates opportunities for self-confidence, leadership, and resistance to gender-based discrimination. The project's emphasis on cultural heritage and intergenerational knowledge sharing also supports *SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions)* by strengthening community cohesion, fostering dialogue, and recognizing Indigenous rights. Finally, through collaboration with local authorities and institutions, it contributes to *SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals)*, demonstrating how alliances between communities, government bodies, and cultural actors can sustainably support Indigenous youth and their futures.

Project results and Lessons learned:

- The consolidation of a community of young Guaraní in Sucre, created through spaces generated in workshops on cosmovision as well as in theatrical and photographic training.
- The strengthening and revitalization of their cultural roots through the recovery of their identities and the appreciation of their way of being (Ñandereko), which reflects their worldview.
- The general population of Sucre now recognizes the presence of young Guaraní students in the city. This was made possible through the visibility achieved with the theater production, intercultural dialogues, and the dissemination of the project on social networks.
- The work carried out in the artistic fields led to political impact, culminating in the signing of an agreement with the Council of Captains of Chuquisaca (CCCH) and the Ministry of Cultures, Decolonization, and Depatriarchalization to promote initiatives that strengthen the culture of the Guaraní nation, with the active participation of the youth.
- Thanks to the work and commitment of the young people, the authorities (mburuvichas and captains) expressed their support and attention to the young students living in Sucre.

The project created a community of young people who support each other and participate as a Guaraní community in the city's cultural spaces, proudly affirming their cultural roots. The Guaraní cosmovision workshops highlighted important elements of the richness of Guaraní culture, shared in daily life, and generated an atmosphere of shared responsibility and commitment to the project.

Instead of a conclusion: Two beautiful testimonies

Fig. 18: Group of young Guaraní at the presentation of the book by Yaikoavei Iyambae, “Somos libres, siempre seremos libres” (we are free, we always will be free).



©Isabel Ajata

“I find the project process very beautiful. I gained knowledge and experience alongside my peers. I am very happy to have participated in these activities, such as theater and photography. For example, in photography, I learned to use the camera and took pictures. I am also very proud to have been able to represent and showcase my Guaraní culture—how it is, how we live, how we celebrate our festivals, our food, and our traditions.”

Pedro Miranda Pino, 18 years old, Community of Huirasay

“As a Guaraní woman, I experience discrimination against women. Seeing young women in this group has motivated me, because it is very sad to see how young women back home become pregnant and the men leave them, since they are the ones who migrate the most. Here, we have seen women in university and teacher training who feel strengthened to move forward with confidence. The most beautiful thing this project has done is give us the space to proudly carry our culture high. We all speak Guaraní, and it is a source of pride for us.”
Ángela Flores, mburuvicha of the Council of Captains of Chuquisaca, community of Totorenda