

English Transcript for the Q&A Session

V:

Thank you very much. We are very pleased to share the interview we did with Bertha, Yina and Marleen with all the friends and volunteers of MMEG who are with us. And now, we would like to open the floor to any questions or comments that you may have for them

I would like to mention that we have several of our grantees among our public: Rehema Abiyo, Montserrat Valdivia, Sindy Castillo, Melinda Salinas, Salmatta Ibrahim-Sandi, Guadalupe Yapud and Josefina Díaz.

If you have any questions for our grantees, please send them via the chat, or if you prefer to ask them directly, you can take the floor. For now, I would like to start with a question for the three of you:

What trends are you seeing in your professions, what have you experienced in recent years in terms of interest and the number of collaborators who work with you? have grown have decreased are maintained? and I would like some of you to talk with us Marilyn soot to Berta

Y:

I am currently the coordinator for a project that is funded by the U.S. Embassy, where we are all volunteers. It is a community development project. On the team, we have a philosopher, an anthropologist, and so on from different professions. I think that there is an increased awareness about the importance of working on rural education, but perhaps there is a lack of opportunities, of better articulation, greater knowledge. We need greater efforts to remove prejudice against people from rural areas, regarding their intellectual abilities, which is common in urban cities, and is rarely questioned. If you are well read, or you have traveled, and interacted in these areas, you become aware of the prejudice. This is important, and I have found that there are more people wanting to learn for themselves, to have their own experiences, to travel.

V:

That's good! Bertha, do you see anything similar?

B:

I also believe that, currently, there is an increased willingness for team building, as well as working on racism issues within universities, and against inequality situations that are often present. We still need to create those spaces within universities for those of us who are from native communities. It is still a bit complicated to be able to team up or to find other people who not only study racism from their position of privilege, but who have also been the subject of racism. And why? Because in universities we still can't find that diversity. We still have work to do. For me, as a professor, I feel like there is interest, but it is still complicated, because the work space is somewhat unstable regarding women and us, who come from indigenous communities. We're still lacking affirmative action, or the policy or principle that allows us to find ourselves in these spaces. We might fight one or two others. So, you begin team building with people who might be outside of your work space and start working on projects. But we still need to reflect on that. And to push from the inside to bring about change.

V:

Of course. Marleen, I know you hold many conferences, what about your audience?

M:

Thank you very much. I agree that, especially with the pandemic, the issue of indigenous languages, indigenous peoples, has become very visible. But they have been kept away in many sectors. However, media has allowed the opportunity, like this zoom, to communicate with indigenous peoples from around the world and to share current events, and to hold workshops via zoom. That has been very important. I would like to highlight something that is now happening here, in Ecuador: there are many initiatives from indigenous peoples, from young activists, to work with local governments, with educational institutions, with individuals who are interested in contributing. We have been working for over a year on some of these projects, that have been born from these community-based initiatives, arising from the inside, and that have been spreading interdisciplinary work. I have worked with many students, some of whom are now activists, of the languages. That suffered a lot with the pandemic, but I now see it flourish, and how this activism emerges from within, and that is seeks specially to integrate with the public sectors, the political levels, to engage with the issue of languages, of the speakers of languages. I think it's fabulous.

V:

That's marvelous! Let's take a question from Guadalupe Yapud. She is also a grantee. Her question is: as a researcher and teacher, what is the commitment to the communities from which we generate knowledge? Who would like to answer? Marleen.

M:

My line of work has always involved working with communities and learning together, exchanging knowledge, expertise, skills, and not taking a step further without doing it together. From an outsider's point of view, that may be harder, it might take more time, but the result of these joint research projects where we all have a voice, we can all contribute, we all give opinions, we all learn, they produce long-term achievements. Not just the results of a project. Not only numbers. Sometimes, not only even products, but the empowerment of the communities, a self-generation of power, which comes from within to be able to advance together. I think that has to be the commitment of research. We can't talk about pollsters and informers, no! I think we have to learn how to work, not just talk, but to work with joint participation, of exchange, and respect.

V:

Of course. Very well. Bertha, do you want to say something?

B:

In my case, it is also important, primordial, especially when I think of research, I think about incidence. I cannot think about research whose only purpose is to publish papers or write articles. But there has to be a way of contributing, of establishing something that can also serve the community, that can serve the group of women with whom I carry out any project. I no longer think about research in the same way I may have when I started my BA, I now have to think about research that makes an impact, that creates this relationship, this responsible way of processing, that allows people to organize themselves within their own space, and to, above all, demand the fulfillment of their rights, recognizing that we still

have many pending issues regarding our rights, as women, as young people, in Mexico. And I am also very committed to thinking not only about what a project can generate for you, but also about what I'm leaving behind for the community. How do you make an impact and create that bond with the people who live there? To not only think about making an extraction of information in order to get published, but you also have to give back to the community. What are you providing? It might be something small, simple. But it can serve them as a basis to organize, such as organizing a women's committee, having them create a neighborhood committee, something of the sort. That always moves me because it is something that helps us as women.

V:

That's right! Yina, would you like to comment on something?

Y:

In my case, I started out as a friend of this community before becoming a researcher. My relationship with these families, with the children, began years ago. I started doing a social responsibility project in this community, which didn't have a school. Together, with the community, we built the school. Once the project was done, we had become friends. I started this job with my husband, I am now a widow, and my husband's ashes are buried in this community. My bond with them is strong and wide-ranging. The research came later, because I wanted to understand and have better tools to carry out my life project, which is to work in rural education, but from a perspective that helps me to focus and question everything I was seeing and all my surroundings. I had some experience but experiencing reality with a theoretical background made me notice new things that I had missed before when I just visited these families. For example, every time I go to do fieldwork, I play games with the children, teach them some lesson, talk with the adults, we play, I go around all the families and we play with each other. For my next visit, I'm thinking about doing a movie night. I'll take my laptop, use a projector, and gather the children in the school to watch a movie because they cannot go to the cinema, actually, most of them have never gone to the movies.

I once realized that the teacher gave them a lesson on cavities, but she didn't know, and I did, that the children don't have toothbrushes. So, I heard the lesson, as the teacher told them how to prevent getting cavities: brush your teeth daily. But the teacher didn't think to ask them if they had a toothbrush, and they don't! They can't brush their teeth every day and end up doing the only thing within their means, which is to remove the tooth with a cavity, and they are losing teeth. It is a common practice, the amount of people who remove their teeth in rural areas is very high and it is an issue that gets lost among so many problems, but in the long run there is a health issue that should be addressed by the state. So, I have this thesis, but my relationship with the community is much stronger than that.

V:

Of course! They are a part of your life. Thank you very much.

We have a question from Suran, who is a member of the bank's family network, and of MMEG's US/Canada program Selection Committee. She appreciates all of your work, everything you have done in the three countries where you live, and she can relate to you a lot; your situations sound very similar to what she sees in her own country, Nepal. She's truly excited to see your passion and to see that you continue your work despite all the challenges you face. She would like to ask you: what motivates you to

continue to be so positive, despite all these challenges? Can you see a light at the end of the tunnel, or at any point? Who would like to begin? Bertha.

B:

I'd like to start. I am very motivated by the idea that I should always share with new generations what life has given you, the path you have created. It has not always been easy, and sometimes it has meant a lot of effort, but if you have already created a small path and you know how to get there, I believe it's my responsibility to share that knowledge with the generations that come behind me. And with that vision, I work at the university trying to share with the students, with the girls who are studying, the spirit of "you can do it," even though it's not easy, definitely, it might take you a little longer to go down a path before finding the next path you should follow, but you should not give up. I'm inspired by the idea that I need to share my path, because it may help someone else, and I'm also committed to creating those paths for the generational replacement that needs to take place, and which will happen at any moment.

What was the other question?

V:

What inspires you and can you see a light at the end of the tunnel?

B:

Right. Fortunately, we are meeting companions along this journey with whom to weave a network, with allies who want to join us at certain moments and walk, and contribute, in a respectful, united way, always in solidarity. And above all, this continuous learning and unlearning of certain practices, which seems vital to me in these times. That's the path I see towards the light, as I find more determined people, more colleagues who want to come together to make that change, or to start building something that did not exist, even if it means laying the groundwork to make this happen.

V:

That's wonderful! Yina?

Y:

In my case, my strength comes from love, which is a great force. To be able to learn with them, to learn from them, to teach as well. And since I've worked for years in educational policy, I have a better understanding of what it looks like from above. The connection to this specific place where I go every year, and where I'm now doing my thesis, grounds me. I can see how decisions that go into the Ministry's policies are made, then how these policies are actually implemented, and their real effects. And how certain politics that you thought had no connection are linked in reality; how a doorman affects school lunch policies. When I'm in school, I can see how those factors, which can be very hard to consider from the outside, are in fact related. And the final result can be quite different. I feel like I'm a bridge, with the ability to use what I see in my fieldwork towards the work I do for the Ministry or in the decision-making process of the government. I feel that we need more bridges, that provide feedback for those processes.

V:

That's great! Marleen?

M:

The truth is that, to me, this is no longer a job, it's a way of life, that has grown and has been nourished, sometimes with tears, sometimes with pain, physical pain, spiritual pain, due to everything you see. But I also have many joys that can come from very simple things, like when you arrive in a community and the children embrace you, or when the young people in the community tell us: now we want to make a football team that bears our names, and we would also like to write the cheers in our language. Or when there are these larger movements, like the one I was telling you about, by activists mobilizing local governments, radio, and television networks, to return to the land. Like they say, to awaken the earth. And to continue developing the knowledge that was being forgotten. So that's a constant motivation. Actually, I really don't have the option of falling, because I see these lights, like little fireflies that suddenly appear and show you the way to a small path, which is going to get longer. "Let's walk down this path."

Tomorrow morning, I can send you the invitation, to a solidarity meeting by a group of young activists, to create awareness in rural and urban populations so we don't lose these voices. And the need to start listening to those voices that are already there but we don't hear sometimes. That motivates us day by day. I hope that we can continue to motivate new generations. When I find that some of my students motivated like this, working with communities, not only on the issue of language, but on the issues of the life of indigenous worlds, I feel that I have done something along the way, and I hope to do much more. There is no time to get discouraged! As I told you in the video, it's time to carry on and to inspire!

V:

Definitely, the three of you are clearly leaving your mark. Greatly appreciated!

I have a comment in the chat from Rehema Abiyo, who is a grantee from Africa. She says she's very happy to know that you are studying something very similar to what she studies, and that the challenges are very alike, as it relates to multilingual education. That's very interesting. And she suggests that you might co-author an article, comparing her African experience with your context in Latin America.

Thank you, Rehema, very nice sentiment.

To close this event, I would like to thank Yina, Marleen and Bertha again, for all their time with us in this event that we organized as part of the celebration of the 40th anniversary of MMEG. Thank you for sharing with us all the work done by the three of you, which is so important. You truly are extraordinary women who embody the values that Margaret sought to promote: professional women, seeking the improvement of the lives of women and children in developing countries. Let's make use of this initial contact that we have made between you and other grantees with similar professional areas, so that you can expand your network and even at some point collaborate. That would be fabulous! We congratulate you for all your achievements, and we wish you every success in all your future projects. Please keep in touch. You have a good fan base here. Many congratulations and thank you!