Women’s Fund from the South / Fondo de Mujeres del Sur (FMS)

The Women’s Fund from the South (FMS, for its acronym in Spanish) was created in 2007 to promote women’s rights through the investment in women-led grassroots organizations. The FMS is the only women’s fund of Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay that mobilizes financial, political and technical resources to support the initiatives of women’s organizations that promote gender equality as a central strategy for social change. The FMS is part of the International Network of Women’s Funds (INWF), a membership association that links 38 Women’s Funds around the whole world to promote philanthropy with a feminist perspective through diverse fundraising alliances.

Working areas

- Economic, Social, and Labour Rights
- Environmental and Cultural Rights
- Sexual and Reproductive Rights
- Rights to Political Participation
- Right to a life free of violence
- Rights of girls and young women

Our Strategies

- **International Resources Mobilization:** This year we have worked with donors like the European Union, Mama Cash, Global Fund for Women and UN Women.

- **Local Resource Mobilization:** The FMS promoted various strategies of local development resources to achieve sustainability (Direct Dialogue Campaigns, partnerships with government institution, corporate partnership and partnership with Academia).

- **Financial Support to Grassroots Groups:** The FMS provided financial support to groups and grassroots organizations through annual donations (for organizational strengthening) and singular donations (for communication, advocacy, legal strategies, travel support, emergencies at threat or risks) with monitoring and ongoing technical support.

- **Capacity Development:** The FMS promoted the development of organizational, institutional, political and labour skills, and the resource mobilization strategies of women’s groups and grassroots organizations so they can act on an equal level with governmental institutions and private corporations. Later, they transfer their knowledge to smaller and newly formed organizations. To this purpose, training workshops and capacity development activities were steadily fostered.

- **Networking and Alliance Building:** The FMS promoted the development of networks...
and partnerships for the implementation and sustainability of national and subregional agendas on labor rights and decent work, environmental protection, and LGBTTI rights.

- **KNOWLEDGE GENERATION AND LEARNINGS MANAGEMENT:**
The FMS promoted the generation of knowledge and learnings about the situation of women and their organizations and its management, mainly through ICTs.

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**OUR TEAM**

We have a Board of 6 feminists Advisors and an Executive Team. One head office in Córdoba, Argentina. One field office in Asunción, Paraguay.

**BOARD OF ADVISORS**

- **President of the Board:** Mabel Busaniche (Argentina)
- **Treasurer:** Carmen Colazo (Paraguay)
- **Secretary:** Ana Falú (Argentina)
- **Vowels:** Estela Díaz (Argentina) and Carmen Beramendi (Uruguay)

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**EXECUTIVE TEAM**

- **Executive Director:** Mariela Puga
- **Management Coordinator:** Luz Aquilante
- **Finance and Administration Officers:** Rosa Dure and Ivan Maceda
- **Programme Officer:** Virginia Bolatti
- **Programme Assistant:** Paula Leiva
- **Local Resources Development:** Natalia Eberbach
- **Coordination in Paraguay:** Raquel Aveiro

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**WHO WE SUPPORTED**

34 groups received financial and technical support from the FMS.

4 from Uruguay, 8 from Paraguay, 19 from Argentina and 3 from Bolivia.

Composition:
- 7 Indigenous groups
- 7 rural groups
- 1 Afrodescendant groups
- 2 young feminists groups
- 2 feminist women groups against gender violence
- 5 Sewing workshop and home-based workers groups
- 10 domestic workers groups
1. **GRANTMAKING: FMS IS GROWING!!**

In terms of resources, in 2015 the annual budget of FMS has been **US$ 511,885.00**; ie, which grew by **43.8%** over the previous. In 2015, **1.5%** of total income was from individual donors (**US$ 7,675**).

2. **OUR LARGEST PROGRAMME!!**

In 2015, we began implementing our largest programme in terms of volume of resources in the history of our organization, with the FMS as a co-leader with two other middle size organizations. The Strengthening Women’s Environmental Defenders of the Eco region of the American Chaco Programme is funded by the European Union. It has a duration of 36 months (December 2014 - December 2017) and a total budget of **594,024 €**.

3. **STRENGTHENING OUR LOCAL RESOURCE MOBILIZATION STRATEGY!!**

After our pilot experience last year, during 2015 we strengthen our local resource mobilization strategy through the Direct Dialogue Campaigns. We successfully implemented two campaigns in two cities of Argentina (Cordoba and Mendoza) and were able to transform pedestrian into monthly donors after explaining them on the streets the importance of the FMS’ work and request their support through a periodic contribution by credit/debit card. This strategy has given a new alternative horizon to our work and development of local resources, through attracting individual donors. We have been the first Women’s Fund to venture into this form of fundraising. We hope to have enough resources to make a more serious investment in this field during 2016 and reach at least 5 campaigns. **Press:** http://bit.ly/2bIGNAq

4. **INDIGENOUS WOMEN FOR THE FIRST TIME WITH THE FMS!!**

We are very proud! We are supporting for the first time groups composed and led by indigenous women in Paraguay, belonging to three different ethnic groups: Qom, Enxet Sur and Guarani. This represents a breakthrough for us, considering that there are 19 indigenous peoples in Paraguay, characterized for being historically discriminated populations and neglected by the state and society.

5. **AN IMPORTANT INCORPORATION!!**

The FMS incorporated in September 2015 a Management Coordinator, Luz Aquilante, in order to organize the areas in which the fund works and optimize processes, overseeing that both, the specific objectives of project implementation and the objectives of the FMS on resource mobilization, are met. This position was created due to the constant growth of our organization!
1. EMPOWERING WOMEN’S ENVIRONMENTAL DEFENDERS OF THE AMERICAN CHACO PROGRAMME.

This programme seeks to strengthen grassroots women’s organizations in the Eco-region of the American Chaco (ERCHA) in Argentina, Paraguay and Bolivia. These organizations fight for their economic and social rights from a sustainable development approach and gender equality perspective in a context of permanent deforestation, pollution and barriers to access to drinking water and land tenure.

- Groups were selected from 60 organizations that applied to an open call in early 2014.
- More than 70% of the selected organizations are composed and led by indigenous women from different villages. It’s the first time they receive direct funding to develop their initiatives.
- The 11 organizations received the first donation. For 82% of them, the grant meant an unprecedented access to economic resources which allow them to decide for the first time how to strengthen their organizational processes in an autonomously way.
- During the first year, 450 women and 199 men, who actively participate defending the environmental rights of their communities, benefited directly from the programme Strengthening Women’s Defenders in the Eco Region of the American Chaco.

2. CONSTRUCTING A WOMEN’S LABOR RIGHTS AGENDA.

The programme focuses on strengthening domestic, sewing workshop and home-based workers organizations. On the one hand, domestic work and sewing workshops are an important source of employment for women in Latin America. But, on the other hand, informality, unfair wages, insufficient unionization, poor sanitation and hygiene conditions, defenselessness against their employers, and lack of social security are their reality. In many cases, working conditions resemble forced labor exploitation. The programme provides financial support to strengthen their organizational development, to seize opportunities and to advance in urgent strategies or develop skills to reinforce the autonomy of the activists. In addition, it offers different meeting scenarios where peer organizations exchange experiences in order to build networks and alliances.
Between 2014 and 2015 the total amount of grants awarded to the programme organizations were U$S 240,377

The implementation of the programme started in 2012 and ended in 2015. Some highlights during the three years:

1. In Argentina, the creation of a domestic workers national agenda was the result of an unprecedented process: it was constructed collectively during women workers’ meetings organized by the FMS and allied women’s funds.

2. Argentina passed a new domestic workers bill on March 13, 2013. In part, as a result of the political advocacy that some of the grantees organizations carried out. The law recognizes fundamental rights that were not previously recognized such as maternity leave, and restricts the working hours to eight hours per day—it used to be 12. 30 women from four organizations participated in the law debate held in the National Congress.

3. Argentina ratified the Domestic Workers Convention (189) of the International Labour Organization (ILO) on March 24, 2014. Two grantees organizations played a crucial role in advocating for the approval of the Convention.

4. In Paraguay, the Alliance of Domestic Workers Organizations, formed by three organizations supported by the FMS, managed to stop a bill that did not include their demands.

5. A historical domestic workers protest was held in Asuncion (Paraguay) to demand the adoption of the draft law submitted by the organizations. The FMS supported financially about 400 people to participate in the demonstration, from nine different cities of the country.

6. With the FMS financial contribution the subsidiary Rocha (Uruguay) of the Sole Union of Domestic Workers became the first subsidiary to have its own building.

EXPERIENCES

The foundation (FMS) helped us to get organized and to participate in networks in order to work our labor rights. Many of us used to work in sweatshops but now we have health insurance and make retirement contributions. That might not seem like much, but our lives have changed. The possibility to contact other colleagues from other provinces and other countries gave us strength to not give up. Now, we are helping other colleagues to form their own cooperatives.

Maria Cristina Mendoza, member of Amuyen, a textile cooperative from the populous district of La Matanza, Buenos Aires, Argentina.
The support has been very important. It goes from receiving economic resources to learn how to transform a group of women into an organization. We were able to buy, for instance, a computer and a printer. We also learned to use the computer, as we did not know how it worked. A new law for domestic workers was passed as we pressured through our unions; changes never happen alone. Our struggle today is to reach small towns of our province, where there are cases of severe labor exploitation and abuse.

Sandra Isabel Leiva, member of Neuquén Workers Association of Private Houses, from the province of Neuquén, Argentina.

3. BUILDING NETWORKS AND PARTNERSHIPS PROGRAMME

It is a Programme for support that aims to strengthening groups of women that are at initial stages of setting up organizations in Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay. It provides support to groups of women from urban, rural and low-income sectors. It mainly consists of groups of indigenous and rural women, grassroots women’s groups and also women’s groups within other community-based organization.

We permanently support eight groups led by women: 7 Indigenous groups, 7 rural groups, 1 afrodescendant group, 2 young feminists groups and 2 feminist women groups against gender violence.

GENDER LENSES IN A NEIGHBOURHOOD FROM URUGUAY

The organization La Pitanga, from Uruguay, is one of the groups supported through the programme “building networks and partnerships”. During 2015, La Pitanga worked on a project titled “Seeing my neighborhood with gender lens”, providing workshops in some secondary schools. Under the slogan, “Sexism kills. Gender lenses allow us to see. Let’s act”, the collective La Pitangaimplemented gender and photography workshops at the Lyceum 52 Villa Garcia, UTU, Home Maristahome and Neighboring Group.

We wanted [...] to think among the youth from our territory on sexism and femicide and propose a point of view from a gender perspective so they can understand, with thinking and heart, that the death of a woman is the dramatic consequence of a system of domination and female submission due to our patriarchal culture. We all are part of this culture. Let us all be part of the solution! (La Pitanga representative)

We all are part of this culture. Let us all be part of the solution! (La Pitanga representative)

Women from La Pitanga and young people built cardboard glasses and worked gender notions before walking around the neighborhood.

... With a camera and with ‘new’ eyes we get out from our everyday life, neighborhood and school in search of clearly sexist images, like some graffiti or any other image that reflects signs that there are persons –male or female-, saved from male and female roles and models according to what is expected from us only because of our biological sex ..., they explained.

Once the cycle finished, the participants/student sevaluated the experience together. As a result of this cycle, the group elaborated a Manual for women suffering situations of gender violence. The manual aims to promote discussion, raise awareness on gender violence and train local authorities, professionals and the community in general to develop appropriate strategies to deal with perpetrators, assist victims and reduce gender violence in their communities.
Some other little big results

Launch of the Environmental Justice Observatory.
The Environmental Justice Observatory (OJA) is a platform that aims to give visibility to the living conditions of the women in the American Chaco. The first bulletins about environmental defenders organizations in the region has been already published.
See: observatoriomujeresdelchaco.org

The Women Team of the Peasant Movement of Formosa (Argentina) broadcasts spots about the risks of agrochemicals for their health and denounces fumigations over rural inhabitants on their community radio.

The Group Guarani Indigenous Community Tabacal Station (Argentina) purchased technology equipment, such as a camcorder, which has allowed them to register community meetings and the V Continental Meeting of the Guarani Nation. The tool is also essential to generate evidence on their territories demands.

The Group of Women Amuppodes, from Yacuiba (Bolivia), conducted a campaign aimed to increase awareness on the impact of climate change along with proposals for women’s access to natural and economic resources.

The Craftswomen of Santa Rosa (Paraguay), belonging to the Qom community, participated in key areas, such as the Inter-institutional Board (State and civil society). Due to their advocacy strategies, the Tekopora grant (a conditional cash transfer programme) reached the women with dependent children of their community. They also managed to process their ID.

The Mismoindígena Women Organization (Paraguay) received for the first time training about environmental rights of indigenous peoples in enxet sur language.

The Group “KuñaretaJapovae” - Roots Women (Argentina) managed to stop a threat of eviction from the territories that are claimed by the Guarani community to which they belong. They were able to pay a lawyer and file an appeal for protection.

The Free Women of the North of Cordoba (Argentina) is creating a network of rural women that works on the right to water and fight against gender violence in rural areas. The network aims to overcome geographic isolation and lack of information and access to justice suffered by the women of the region.
Some workshops and meetings

+**THREE WORKSHOPS** called “Developing financial resources and sustainability with grassroots women’s groups” were held in Argentina, Paraguay and Bolivia as part of the Women’s Defenders of Environmental Rights programme. The activities involved 111 women of 20 organizations from remote and isolated places in the region.

+2015 TRINATIONAL MEETING OF THE WOMEN’S GROUP OF THE AMERICAN CHACO. The meeting was held in Cordoba, Argentina and was organized by Plurales Foundation with the participation of 124 indigenous, rural, urban-popular and migrant women of 48 grassroots organizations from the American Chaco.

+COP 21 (PARIS, DECEMBER 2015). The FMS participated in the 2015 UN Climate Change Conference (COP 21). This allowed us to show the importance of the gender perspective in environmental struggles. In addition, the FMS built networks with Global Greengrants Fund, publishing a story about a group supported by us in a magazine compiled by Global Gender and Climate Alliance.
Early in the morning we, meaning a team of four from “Fondo de Mujeres del Sur”, leave the city in order to visit one of our new grantees in the North of Córdoba, Argentina. I have been working as an intern in the foundation for the past four months and I have read a lot about the conditions the grantees of our new Project “Strengthening Women’s Defenders of Environmental Rights in the American Chaco” have to face. I read the stories about displaced indigenous communities which suffer the loss of their lands and are forced to live in poor outskirts of cities and about isolated peasant communities which lack access to water and electricity. However this is the first time I actually get to visit one of these groups.

In “San Jose de la Dormida” we meet up with our project partners from “Plurales”, who have known the women we will be visiting for a long time. Together we continue our journey on dirt roads until we reach our destination in the middle of nowhere. We are welcomed warmly by the “MUJERES LIBRES DEL NORTE CORDOBÉS”, the “free women of the north of Córdoba”. Later they will explain that just while applying to our project they started identifying themselves as an actual group and gave themselves this name. It was a key moment in their development as a group.

We sit down with “mate” and cookies and all my attention is drawn to the stories the women have to tell. The house we are gathering in is the house of a mother of 5 children who manages the household, animal care and parenting for the most part all by herself since her husband is working in another town. If there is no sun, there is no electricity and if there is norain, they have to start their journey to pick up water from far away. The past seven years were dry years. Life in the romantic landscape doesn´t seem to be that romantic.

They tell us that they took some of the money they received through the project to participate in the demonstration “Ni unamenos” against gender violence, which took place on a national level. While participating in the demonstration they started to realize that they are not alone, that they are connected to a big network of women speaking out for their rights from all over Argentina. “We talk about violence towards women in our meetings a lot. We hear about it all the time but the fear women feel in their situations keeps them quiet. And if a woman reports it, the police don’t take her seriously or they blame her for not acting right”, one of the women explains. “That’s why we have to stand together. The reason we started this group was to fight for ourrights, our rights as women and as “campesinas”. The women are economically dependent on their husbands. This makes it almost impossible for them to leave the situation. But we believe that we can change something”, the conductor of the group says.

Out in the country their homes are situated far from each other. With the money they received they already were able to buy cell phones to communicate in an easier way. They want to use the money to encourage more women to join the group. They want to offer workshops on gender and environmental issues to raise awareness among women and empower them. Through the program they will have the chance to participate in conferences where they meet groups which face similar problems. They will be able to learn about ways to impact politics in a sustainable way.