

IRENE: AYUUK RESISTANCE

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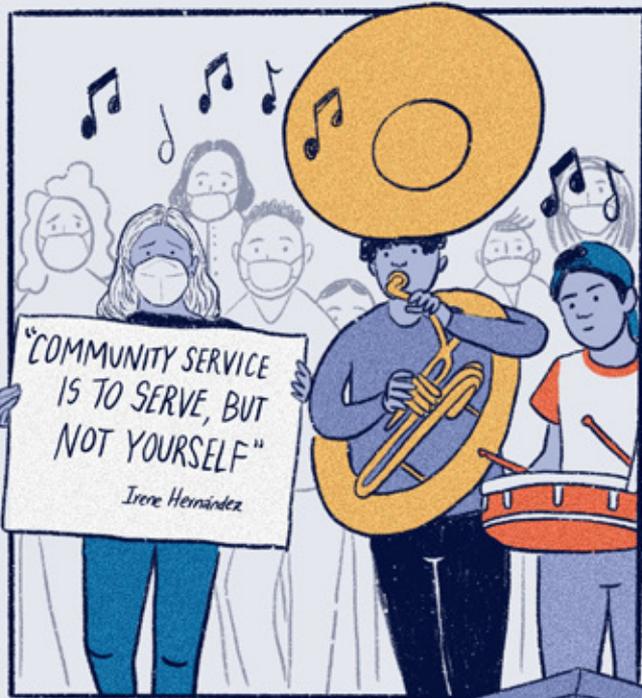
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Irene: Ayuuk Resistance of Ana Karenina and Lizbeth Hernández was developed as part of Movements and Moments – Feminists Generations, an initiative of Goethe-institut. The project aims to make visible indigenous feminist activism and protagonists from the Global South by relating their life stories in the highly accessible format of comics.



NOTHING LIKE THIS HAS EVER BEEN SEEN IN AYUTLA MIXE BEFORE...



This could only have been inspired by Irene.

I don't know what I'm gonna do without my sister.





Irene was born on 20 October 1958, here in Ayutla.



She was my aunt, but we grew up together.



And, like me, she was an indigenous education teacher until she retired in 2015.



She had a son, Chau, and raised him as a single mother.



IRENE BECAME AN IMPORTANT CHARACTER WITHIN THE COMMUNITY.

In 2007 she was chosen as the first female president of Ayutla Mixe.



I guess she was kind of a counselor for the people.

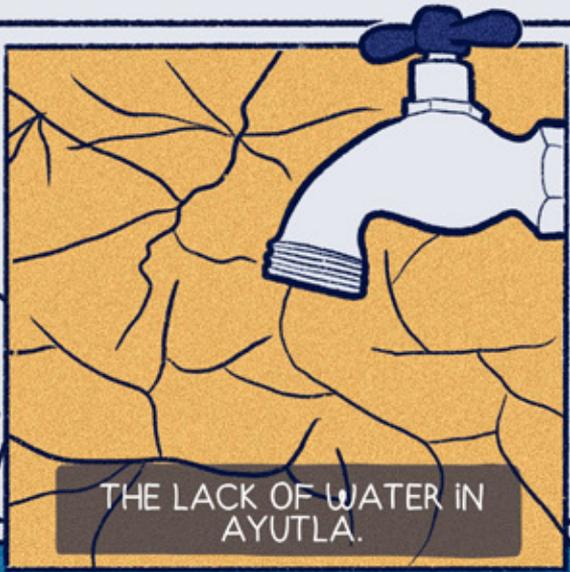
Men, youth and women looked to her for advice from political to personal issues...

Irene was a natural leader.

And she remained active in the community even after her service as president.

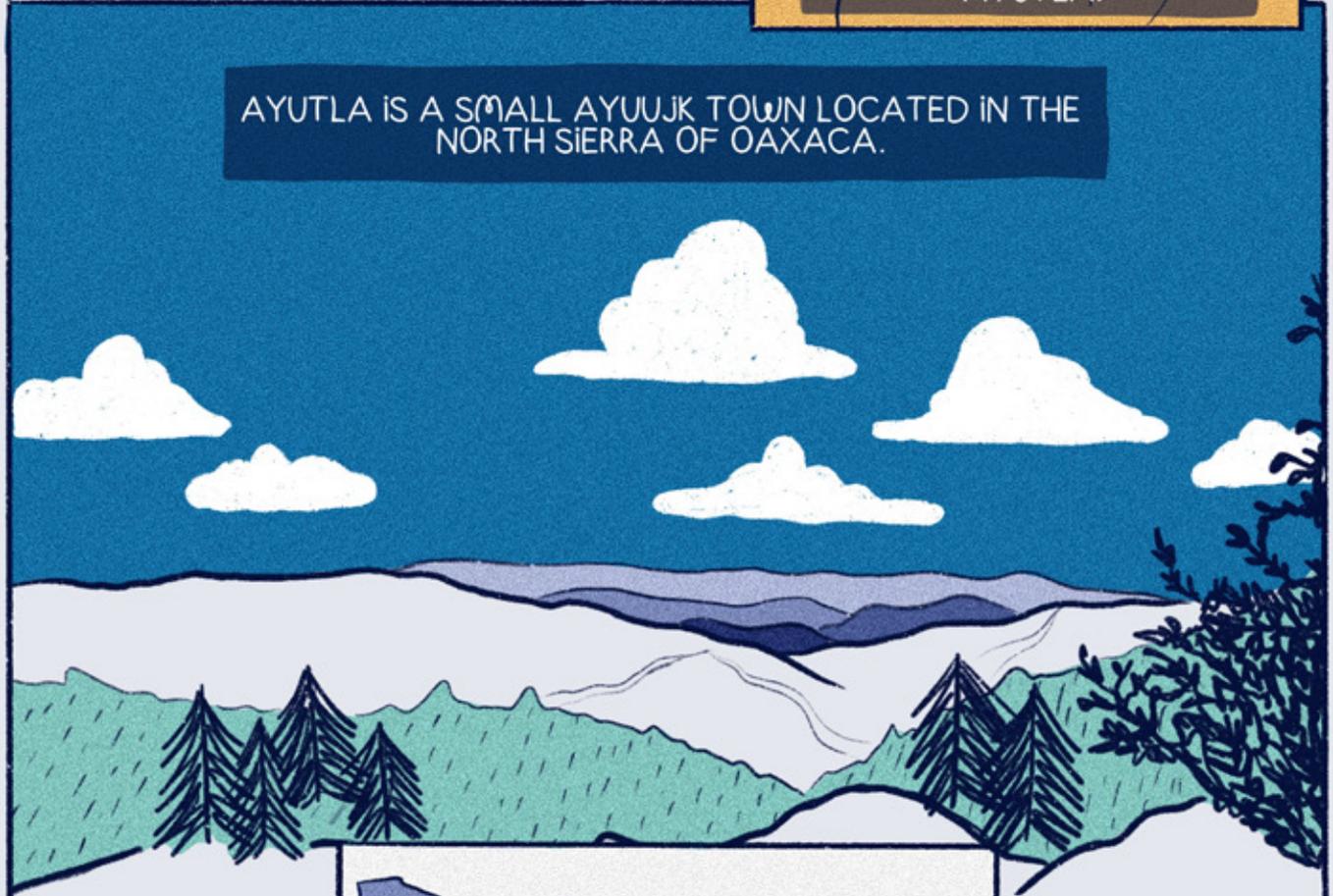


That's how she came to face one of the more difficult episodes of our history...



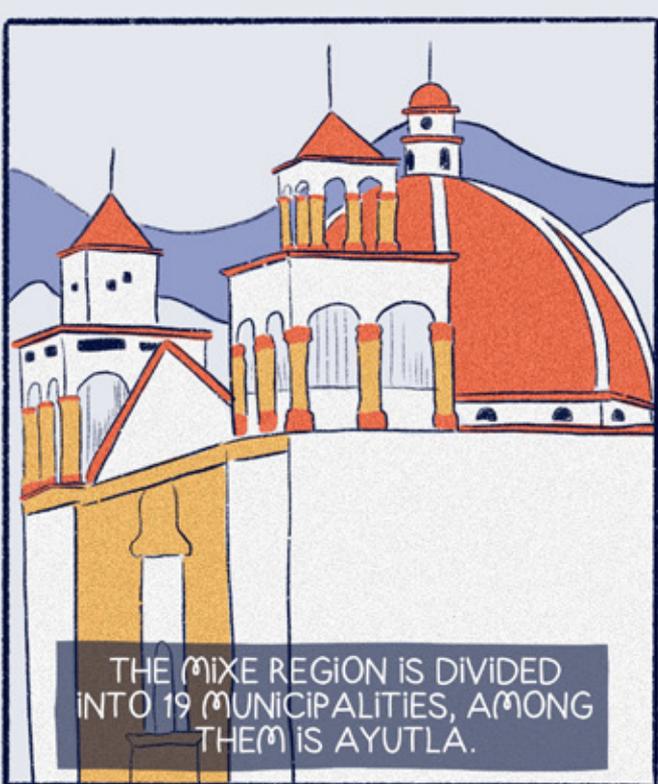
THE LACK OF WATER IN AYUTLA.

AYUTLA IS A SMALL AYUUK TOWN LOCATED IN THE NORTH SIERRA OF OAXACA.





THE MIXE PEOPLE CALL THEMSELVES AYUUKJÄ'AY BECAUSE THEIR LANGUAGE IS THE AYUUK, WHICH MEANS "PEOPLE OF THE FLOWERY LANGUAGE".



THE MIXE REGION IS DIVIDED INTO 19 MUNICIPALITIES, AMONG THEM IS AYUTLA.



AND THERE ARE ABOUT 6,000 PEOPLE LIVING HERE.

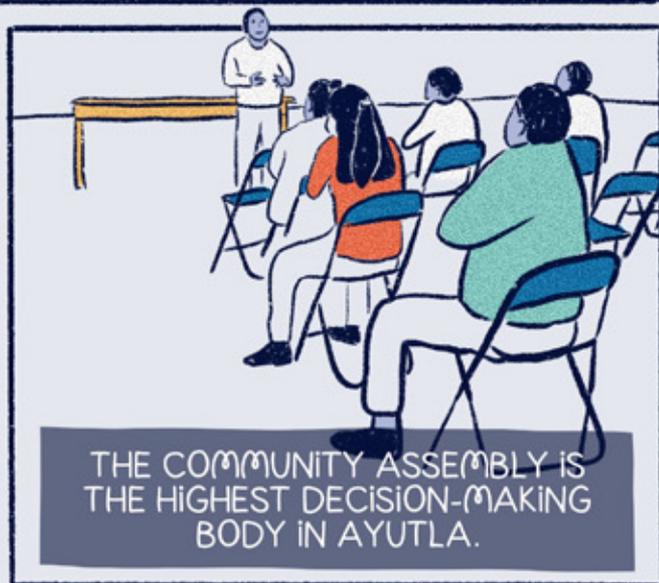


THEY GROW CORN, BEANS AND ZUCCHINI THEY SELL EVERY SUNDAY AT THE STREET MARKET, AND THERE ARE A LOT OF MERCHANTS TOO.



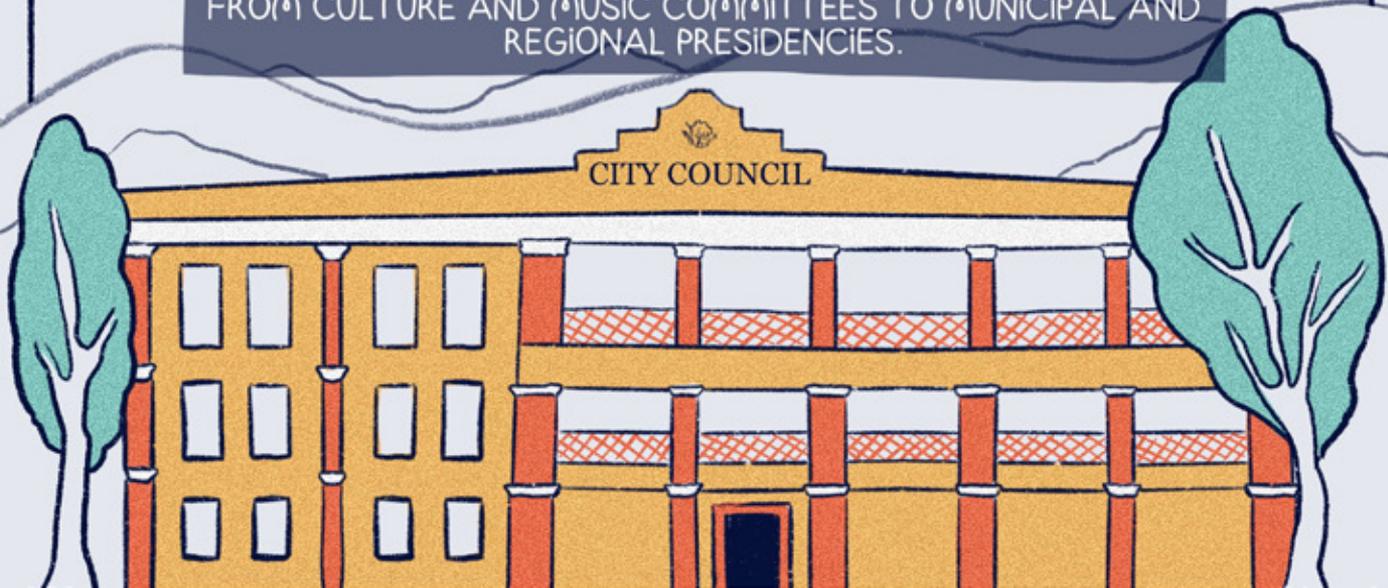
ITS PEOPLE DANCE, PLAY MUSIC, AND HAVE GREAT FESTIVITIES.

THEY PRACTICE A TYPE OF SELF-GOVERNMENT SYSTEM THAT REGULATES THE LIFE OF THE INDIGINEOUS COMMUNITY.



THE COMMUNITY ASSEMBLY IS THE HIGHEST DECISION-MAKING BODY IN AYUTLA.

THAT'S HOW ALL THE POSITIONS ARE CHOSEN AND ELECTED. FROM CULTURE AND MUSIC COMMITTEES TO MUNICIPAL AND REGIONAL PRESIDENCIES.





BUT FOR MANY YEARS WOMEN WERE NOT ALLOWED TO PARTICIPATE IN THE COMMUNITY ASSEMBLIES, AND THEY COULD ONLY HOLD MINOR POSITIONS.



We just want to be part of this community too.

SO DURING THE 60s AND 70s WOMEN STARTED TO SHOW UP AT THE ASSEMBLIES AND TAKE SOME POSITIONS IN THE COUNCIL.



it's time!



AND WHEN HER FATHER PASSED AWAY, AT AGE OF 18, IRENE PARTICIPATED IN THE COMMUNITY ASSEMBLIES FOR THE FIRST TIME.



AS TIME WENT BY, HER INTEREST IN POLITICS GREW.



SHE WISHED COMMON WELL, AND DECIDED TO TEACH.



SHE MET A LOT OF MOTHERS WHILE SHE WAS A TEACHER.



He came drunk last night.

THAT'S HOW SHE GOT TO KNOW STORIES OF GENDER VIOLENCE.



You have to make a complaint. I could help you.

*Look girls... There's no law that advocates for us.

**So you have to defend yourselves against men and arbitrariness.

Ukpatmētōot, ka't pēn atōm xnēkuwā'ānyē'n, ka't pēn xnēpayō'eyē'n.*

Kē'm te'n mnyānēkuwā'nēt jēts ka't xkupēktēt ku ja jētyējk eyxē'n mtunēt.**



IRENE'S DECISIONS AND ACTIONS WEREN'T RANDOM. SHE HAD THE EXAMPLE OF HER MOTHER.

*Arrest me, but i won't be silenced!

Ey ějts xjatsumt ka't ějts ameny ntany.*

AND HER MOTHER WAS AN INDIGENOUS WOMAN WHO REBELLED AGAINST THE ABUSE OF POWER.

SO, IRENE STARTED FIRST WITH A POSITION IN THE TOWN COUNCIL AS A FUNDRAISER.

AND SOME TIME LATER AS TREASURER, WHERE HER POSITION WAS QUESTIONED.

it was a bad decision to choose her.

She won't be able to do it.

A woman can't hold that position.

LATER, IN THE FESTIVITIES' COMMISSION.



This is an honor.

BUT SHE KEPT WORKING AND DOING SERVICE, AND IN 2007 SHE BECAME THE FIRST FEMALE MAYOR IN THE MIXE REGION.



SHE UNDERSTOOD HER COMMUNITY.

Three basic rules: 1) Don't let political parties intervene in our politics...

2) Don't condition peoples' needs.

And 3) Don't profit from your service.



AND CENTERED HER ONE YEAR SERVICE ON FIXING A ROAD.



FEEDING POOR FAMILIES.

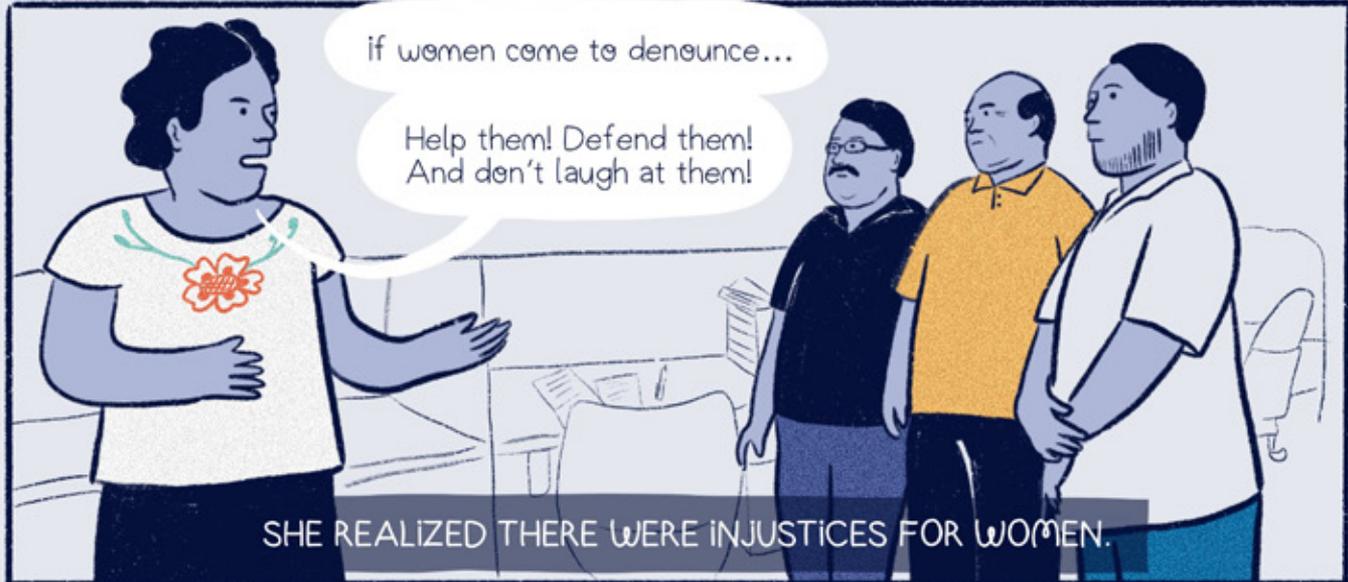


APPROACHING THE YOUTH.



i was harassed.

BUT MOSTLY: HELPING WOMEN AND FIGHTING AGAINST GENDER VIOLENCE.



if women come to denounce...

Help them! Defend them!
And don't laugh at them!

SHE REALIZED THERE WERE INJUSTICES FOR WOMEN.



AND CRITICIZED BY SOME, BUT RESPECTED BY MANY, IRENE HAD THE SUPPORT OF LOTS OF PEOPLE.



SHE STAYED CLOSE TO FEMALE TOWN COUNCILORS.

in order to rule,
you first need to
serve.



Sometimes I get tired.
But I wanna do my best, I
mean, people chose me to
lead...

It's a bunch of work, but I
know I have the support of
my family and friends.

BEING THE MAYOR WAS
ABSORBING AND
STRESSFUL. BUT SHE KEPT
COMMITTING TO HER
COMMUNITY DESPITE HER
HEALTH PROBLEMS.





She was sensitive to the needs and problems of others...



And in 2017, she had to join the women's collective to fight for the reconnection of water in Ayutla.



Women in the community have played an important role since the beginning...

it all started with a territorial conflict that led to another conflict over access to water.

ON MAY OF 2017, SOME PEOPLE FROM TAMAZULAPAM, ANOTHER MIXE TOWN, INVADIED 25 AYUTLA PROPERTIES LOCATED NEAR THE WELLSPRING.





A FEW WEEKS LATER, IN JUNE, THE PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE OF THE STATE SENT AUTHORITIES TO INVESTIGATE THE INVASION: THEY FACED PEOPLE FROM TAMAZULAPAM BLOCKING THE ACCESS TO THE WELLSPRING.

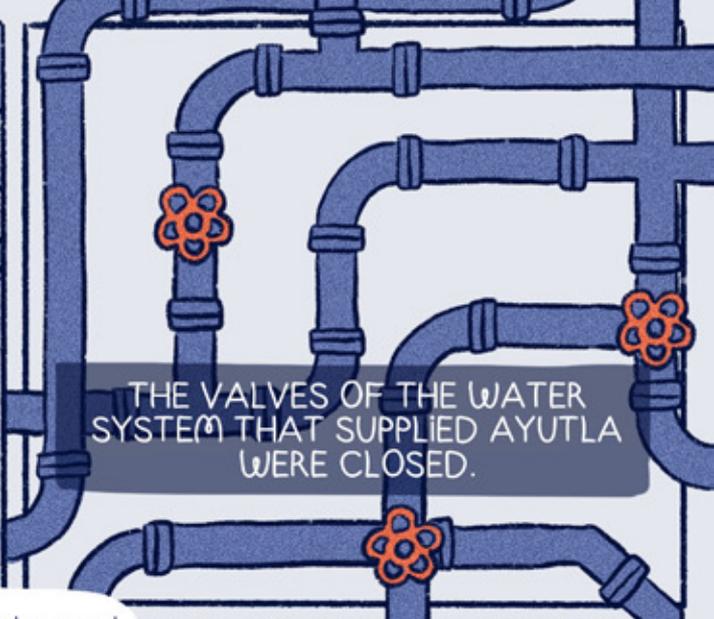
THE AUTHORITIES AND THEIR COMPANIONS WERE ASSAULTED, AND TAMAZULAPAM BEGAN AN ATTACK AGAINST AYUTLA.



ONE TIME, DURING THE ATTACKS, WOMEN GATHERED AND FORMED A HUMAN RETAINING WALL.



NONETHELESS, MANY WERE INJURED. AND A MAN DIED...



THE VALVES OF THE WATER SYSTEM THAT SUPPLIED AYUTLA WERE CLOSED.



They kidnapped four women...

And the men here want to counterattack...

I'm not gonna tell you what to do...

AND THAT DAY, GLORIA -SUBSTITUTE SYNDIC- CONTACTED IRENE.

You know what to do, and right now you are in charge of our safety. I trust you!



PEOPLE MADE A REPORT OF THE EVENTS TO THE AUTHORITIES. THE WELLSRING WAS VIOLENTLY TAKEN BY TAMAZULAPAM.



Look, we can't attack them right now...

A man died, and we can't risk the integrity of the women they took.

GLORIA MADE A DECISION.



THE COMMUNITY PRESSURED THE STATE POLICE TO FREE THE WOMEN.



You are focused on safety, so you command now... You know how to do the right thing.

ONE WOMAN WAS FREED...



AND THE NEXT DAY THE OTHER THREE GOT BACK.



BUT THE CONFLICT FOR THE TERRITORY CONTINUED. THEY HAD A DIALOGUE TABLE AND DESPITE THE AGREEMENTS –IN AUGUST 2017– THE ARMED GROUP DYNAMITED THE WHOLE SYSTEM LEAVING IT UNUSABLE.



AYUTLA HAS NO
WATER SINCE
THEN...



if you're in, I'm
in with you.
Anything for the
wellness of the
community.



We need to find a way
to get water again.

DURING AND AFTER THE EVENTS
SOME WOMEN GOT TOGETHER
TO SHARE IDEAS AND FEELINGS
ABOUT THE SITUATION.

THEY WERE JOINING MORE OFTEN
AND SPOKE SEVERAL TIMES WITH
IRENE. BY THE FOURTH TIME THEY
ASKED HER HELP.

THE GATHERINGS STARTED TO GET
MORE ORGANIZED, AND THESE WERE
THE BEGINNINGS OF THE COLLECTIVE
«WOMEN OF AYUTLA».

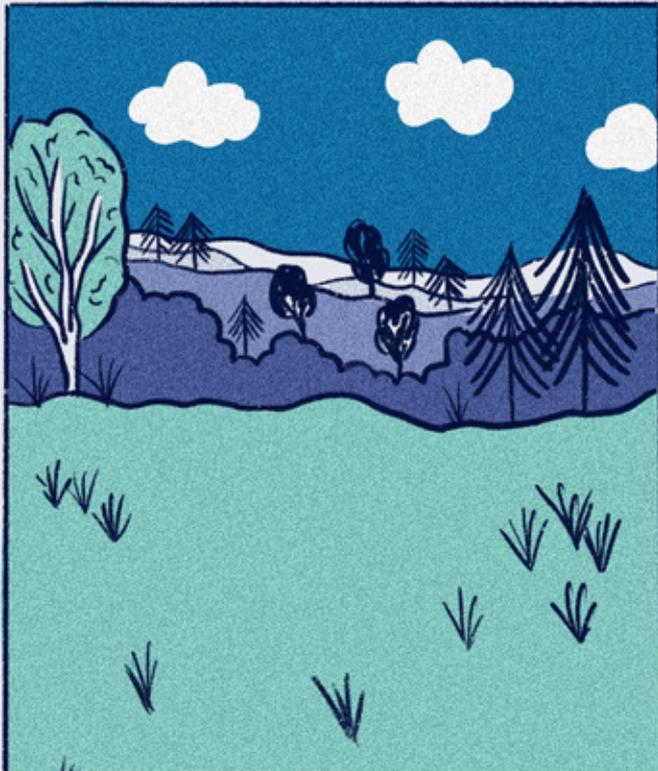


We'll focus on
defending our
territory.

And we won't
profit
economically
from our
actions...

THE COLLECTIVE
PRESENTED AN
ACTION PLAN
THAT WAS
APPROVED, AND
RECEIVED THE
SUPPORT OF THE
ASSEMBLY.





IRENE WAS RELEVANT TO «WOMEN OF AYUTLA» HELPING TO SHAPE THE COLLECTIVE AND SETTING RULES.



SHE GUIDED THE MEMBERS THROUGH THEIR FIRST STEPS AND LISTENED TO THEM...



WAS A MORAL COMPASS AND SUPPORT, AND SHE WORKED TO ORGANIZE THE COMMUNITY TO RESOLVE THE WATER CONFLICT.



IRENE TOOK THE LEAD IN THE FIGHT FOR THE TERRITORY, EVEN WHEN SHE WAS HAVING HEALTH DIFFICULTIES.

THE LACK OF WATER HAS AFFECTED EVERYONE: FROM CHILDREN TO THE ELDERLY.

Dude, my wife complains all the time now: cooking, washing, cleaning the children...

No joke, man. I went to have food at the stall, and prices went up now that they have to buy water...

THE COMMUNITY HAS FOUND WAYS TO SUPPLY WATER TO MEET THE MOST BASIC NEEDS.

THEY COLLECT RAIN WATER.



BUY IT FROM PIPES, TANKS OR BOTTLES.



OR CARRY IT FROM THE WELLSPRING.



I will personally instruct the governor of Oaxaca to solve this issue right away...

IN 2019, DURING A VISIT BY THE PRESIDENT OF MEXICO, ANDRÉS MANUEL LÓPEZ OBRADOR, TO THE STATE, HE PROMISED TO GIVE A SOLUTION.

IT'S 2021. IT HAS BEEN 4 YEARS SINCE EVERYTHING STARTED, AND 2 YEARS SINCE THE PRESIDENT'S PROMISE, AND AYUTLA IS STILL A TOWN WITH NO WATER.



YASNAYA IS A LINGUIST AND AN ACTIVIST OF THE MIXE REGION. SHE'S PART OF THE COLLECTIVE «WOMEN OF AYUTLA» AND HAS BEEN RESPONSIBLE FOR THE COMMUNICATION TO THE OUTSIDE.



How is our word going to flourish in a territory that dispossesses us?

Armed groups deprived us of the waterspring from which we historically supplied ourselves. This injustice continues today.



In my community, Ayutla Mixe, in Oaxaca, we don't have water!

Although the law says that water is a human right, it does not reach our homes...

IN 2019, THE INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES, SHE WAS CHOSEN BY THE COMMUNITY'S AUTHORITIES TO DELIVER A SPEECH IN THE CONGRESS THAT DREW ATTENTION TO THE PROBLEM.

This is a fight for our territory... So we'll try whatever it takes.

THEY CREATED AWARENESS THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA TO PUT PRESSURE ON THE AUTHORITIES.



Our message has been presented at international meetings on human rights...

We'll keep raising our voices until the water service resumes.

Yasnaya Elena
@YasnayaEG

#WaterForAyutlaNow

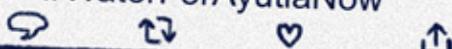


FAMOUS PEOPLE AND INTELLECTUALS
HAVE JOINED THE CAMPAIGN:



Julieta Venegas
@julietav

#WaterForAyutlaNow



Lydia Cacho
@lydiacachosi

#WaterForAyutlaNow



Gael García Bernal
@GaelGarciaB

#WaterForAyutlaNow



diego luna
@diegoluna_

#WaterForAyutlaNow



Juan Villoro
@JuanVilloro56

#WaterForAyutlaNow



THE EFFORTS ALSO INCLUDE A
LEGAL FIGHT IN WHICH AYUTLA
HAS HAD DECISIONS IN ITS FAVOR.

THE LAST ONE WAS THE RULING MADE
BY A COLLEGIATE COURT IN JUNE 2021.



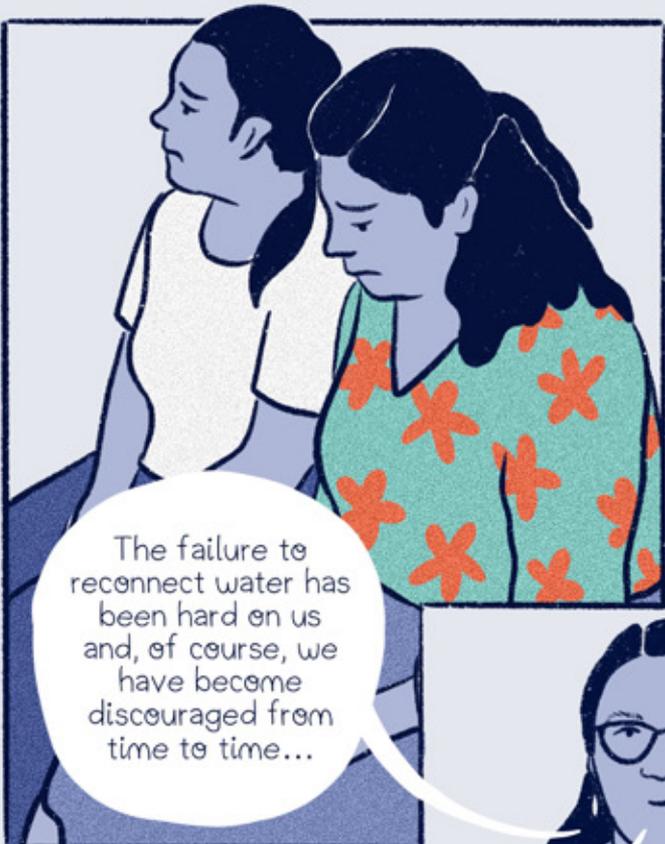
BUT THE STATE GOVERNMENT DID
NOT COMPLY WITH THE RULING.

We cannot act
in this
region...

Because we
respect the
autonomy of
Ayutla and
Tamazulapam.

It's just an
agrarian social
conflict...

AND IT HAS ONLY
TRIVIALIZED ALL THE
AGGRESSIONS THAT
THE COMMUNITY HAS
EXPERIENCED.

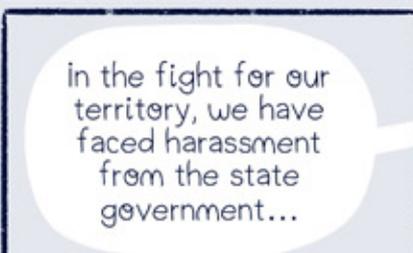


The failure to reconnect water has been hard on us and, of course, we have become discouraged from time to time...



it's not worthless...

But irene was there to uplift us and give us perspective. She could read people so well that she was always warning us and giving us the whole context...



in the fight for our territory, we have faced harassment from the state government...



And on top of that, we've had to deal with tensions from our own community.



They do have water!
Those women are liars!



Don't listen to them!



They say "it is Yásnaya's collective", MY collective, and that I manipulate the women in it, as if they could be manipulated... If anything I'm their apprentice, I learned from Irene...

But people get bothered by us. They make up things... And while fighting for the water we have to fight the machismo persisting in the community.

Irene had it clear: "Look Gloria, our purpose is also to change the situation concerning sexism" she'd tell me.



This is not a private issue. We need to talk about it more and try to find a solution.



I don't want to make a fuss out of it...

It's ok. I'll help you...

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE WAS SERIOUS AND RELEVANT TO IRENE.

SHE HELPED A LOT OF WOMEN, AND RESPECTED THEIR PRIVACY...



AND INVITED OTHER WOMEN TO INQUIRE AND LEARN MORE ABOUT GENDER ISSUES.

You wanna come to the conference on gender equality?

It's going to be interesting...

The speakers are wonderful, and we could travel to Oaxaca city together.



Domestic violence

Gender equality

Human rights for women

Feminism

IRENE LEFT AYUTLA FOR A WHILE TO WORK A COUPLE OF YEARS WITH AN ORGANIZATION FOCUSED ON WOMEN.



We have to help each other. That's sorority.

SHE APPROACHED FEMINIST NGOs AND SHARED HER EXPERIENCE AND KNOWLEDGE WITH OTHER WOMEN.



But she didn't take everything as it was. She'd analyze, and take what was practical and useful for the community...

She criticized the practices and pointed out the things she didn't agree with.

She believed in an organization of women making an impact that was based on community participation.



We didn't even know all the things she was doing... She was a pioneer in the Mixe Women's Network, and we didn't even know that existed.

She was bold, and from her I learned to have a critical stance towards the government and the political parties.

She's the whole reason I'm in this collective and doing community participation, we wouldn't call it political participation because we are governed by Normative Systems.

But she kept feeling sick...

IT WAS POWERFUL TO SEE A WOMAN RECEIVE THE BATON.
AND MANY NEIGHBORING VILLAGE WOMEN WENT THERE TO WATCH.

A woman with dark hair, wearing a yellow jacket over a white shirt and a black skirt, stands on a stage. She is holding a microphone in her right hand and a baton with a colorful, striped top in her left. A speech bubble originates from her mouth. To her left is a small table with a glass and a cup. To her right is a piece of electronic equipment with a screen. The background is decorated with colorful starburst and swirl patterns. In the foreground, the silhouettes of an audience of women are visible.

We'll improve this
community together.

IRENE FOUGHT FOR HER COMMUNITY, FOR HER FAMILY, FOR
WOMEN, FOR WATER. HER STRENGTH AND WILL SEEMED ENDLESS.
THAT IS WHY, ALTHOUGH IT WAS KNOWN THAT HER HEALTH WAS
NOT GOOD, HER DEATH WAS SO SURPRISING.



THERE WERE MOMENTS OF SADNESS AND SORROW.



BUT, EVEN IN DEATH, IRENE MANAGED TO MOTIVATE MEMBERS OF HER COMMUNITY NOT TO GIVE UP.



She was very brave, she left us her knowledge...



It is our duty and our debt to Irene to keep fighting.



On September 9, 2021, the government of Oaxaca announced the signing of an agreement between the communities of Ayutla and Tamazulapam to dissolve the commonality of land and distribution of spring water. However, community members of Ayutla indicated that they were not consulted for such agreement. The situation remains unresolved. And the fight for water in Ayutla persists.