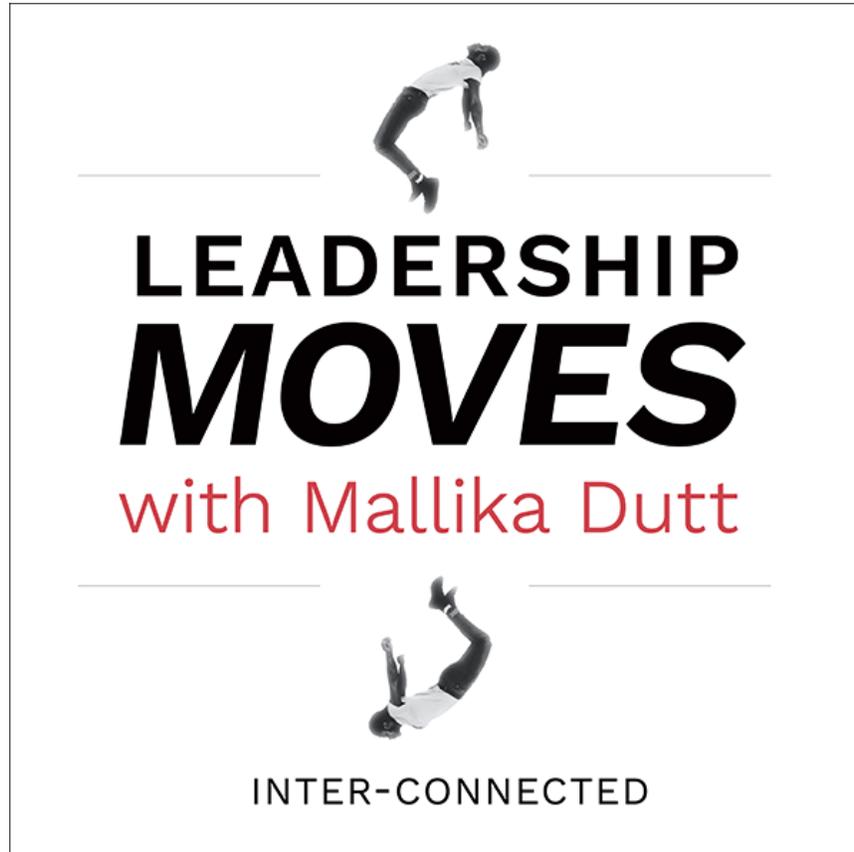


**S2 Ep07: Prioritizing Collective Leadership to Address
Physical and Environmental Threats in Indigenous
Communities with Tarcila Rivera Zea**



Full Episode Transcript

**With Your Host
Mallika Dutt**

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What does it take to go from a domestic worker to the director of an organization that represents thousands of Indigenous women in the public arena? Is that a journey of transformation you could imagine for yourself? Join me as I sit down with Tarcila Rivera Zea of CHIRAPAQ to learn how she overcame huge obstacles to emerge as a globally recognized mover and shaker in this episode of Leadership Moves.

Welcome to Leadership Moves, a podcast for visionary changemakers ready to shake up and re-envision the world. I'm your host, Mallika Dutt. Join me and my extraordinary guests as we discuss how to generate social change through leadership and the entrepreneurial, non-profit, and philanthropic fields.

Mallika: Hi, Tarcila, how lovely to see you. I am so delighted to have you on the Leadership Moves podcast to talk about the powerful leadership of Indigenous women and your powerful leadership of CHIRAPAQ. And I would love to begin our conversation with how are you today?

Tarcila: Thank you very much for this opportunity. As you know I am 71 years old. I am very happy but with very good energy to continue struggling my rights as Indigenous women. CHIRAPAQ is an Indigenous association and now we have the responsibility to lead the continental network of Indigenous women of the Americas. We are 23 countries in the region. And I am the founder and president of International Forum of Indigenous Women where we are all the world, there are seven geo cultural regions of us Indigenous women of the world.

In this condition we are investing our time, our energy with the hope to change the situation for us. First of all, we want to be visible. We want to be listened. We want to be considered as human beings because we think that we have rights to. In this condition, in this time I am investing my energy to training new leadership of Indigenous women from local to global. How we can arrive to this time, learning from each other. In this condition we think

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it's necessary to have access to education, to eradicate the discrimination and exclusion to have opportunities, economic opportunities.

And to have, I think, good health spiritually, and physically, and environmentally. It's very important. And for us as Indigenous women it's very important to be understood, understand about our complementarity between individual rights as women and collective rights as Indigenous. That's why for us it's very important to be recognized, both collective and individual rights. Because the impact in our life is in multidimensional aspects.

Mallika: So, Tarcila, so many things in what you said, demand for recognition of your rights, to be seen, to be heard, to be witnessed. And from my point of view actually I would take it many steps further because I feel we are in a world that is in so much crisis. We are in crisis around climate. We are in crisis around our economic systems. We are in crisis around our education systems. We have conflict everywhere, discrimination whether it's on the basis of ethnicity, race, gender, sexuality.

I mean we actually, we have created a world where everything is falling apart and yet we continue to hold on to old ways. And I have come to believe that in recognizing the leadership of Indigenous women we actually have much to learn. We actually have much to learn about, for example, the balance between individual rights and collective rights. We have built societies and cultures where we focus so much on the individual that we have forgotten the collective. And we have forgotten our relationship to the Earth.

So, I'm curious, Tarcila, in your description of what you're doing right now which sounds huge with the multiple countries, multiple communities that you are stewarding at this moment, an historic time. What is really taking up your time right now? What are some of the things that you as a leader are choosing to focus on?

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Tarcila: Principally to have a new generation with Indigenous women because I want to facilitate the process for a new generation. We are talking now after 30 years in different scenarios, a long time. But we think that after now they have better possibilities. And for example, how Indigenous women can participate in the process of climate change in order to have better information about the impact of climate change in our real life each day.

When we talk about collective rights it's related with this, where are we impacted with climate change? For example, in our territories, what happened with our food? What happened with our knowledge about biodiversity? What happened for example about when we disappear because of the impact of climate change, the disappearance of medicine plants, or some specific seed for food. And we think that we need the opportunity to have to talk about what kind of knowledge we have until now.

And we want to transmit to the new generation about this as good knowledge shared with all the societies, not only for us, from collective rights, because our heritage of our cultures. That's why we try to combine both. And when we talk for example about violence we said, "We don't want to be violated in our body, in our personal aspect but, no, we don't want to be violated in our territories, killing, for example, the life of seeds or the life of medicine plants."

Because all of us want to live in peace, to have vida plena, total life is physical, spiritual, emotional and in our ecosystems with nature and people doing and living in reciprocity. Because we need some things from nature, and we need to respect that. We think it's necessary, that's why we said we need to be listened, but we are listened to from other parts because we are trying to build the concept, and actions, and the life in interculturality.

How we can have life with harmony, respecting the diversity and respecting the different cultures and try to understand how we can share the good practices from each culture to guarantee the life.

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Mallika: So, I was struck by your making the connection between violence against our bodies, and violence against seeds, and violence against the Earth, and the arc that you described of how in understanding violence in that way we immediately start to move from just thinking about the individual to thinking about the collective. And then the collective includes not just humans but also the Earth and other life forms. And that is so important.

Tarcila, I know that you are a very important voice in the global women's movement and in the feminist movement. And you have often talked about the lessons that you have learned and incorporated into your own leadership from feminism. I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about how feminist principles and the principles from the perspective of Indigenous women come together. Where are the similarities? Where are the differences?

What might be some of the new forms of feminist leadership that we might be creating when we bring the learnings and the wisdom from Indigenous women more strongly into our work collectively?

Tarcila: Okay. I think we have many similarities. We have common points and priorities. Because Indigenous women too, we struggle for our rights, as gender, as individual, as women. And we struggle against the hegemonic power and how you use the power. We think it's necessary to be the intersectionality. How the bad exercise or use of that power oppress in general to women but how oppressed the rights of Indigenous women or Indigenous girls.

Because we have the barriers about language for example, the system is only monolingual. The education monolingual. And what happened with girls to access education for example, in proper language? Or to strengthen the self-esteem because that's our problem as particularity, as Indigenous. Because we have proper culture, proper language, geographically we are

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in one place. We have our proper food. But from the system we are excluded. We are not in the public policy.

That's why, for example, we try to build a bridge between non-Indigenous feminist movement and Indigenous feminist movement. Because we think it's very, very important to say about when we discuss in New York about, for example, the eradication or genital mutilation that was a very, very important point. Because all women from over the world trying to make advocacy to eradicate the genital mutilation for Indigenous or tribal women from over the world, from my region or other regions, that was very important.

The other thing is about violence. We in the region for example are with this program, the spotlight from European Union talking about eradicate the feminist [inaudible]. But when we look for information from what happened with Indigenous women or young women killed by husbands or others we are not visible in the data, no data about us. And what happened in this case?

We need to have this kind of conversation with feminist consultants, with feminist functionaries, with feminists, with power to pay attention to this specific intersectionality for Indigenous and Afro descendent girls, young or others, women. That's why I think we need only to have the opportunity to listen to each other because we are struggling both for justice, to be recognized and to access to places with decisions.

It's in the communities the same. We work as Indigenous women many years about justice in the community. And who has the power to decide about our rights? Men. And we need to change those conditions because we want to be part of the solution of the problems, not only look at as a problem. That's how come I think we have many, many, the same priorities, only need to have a specific possibility to put the eyes where?

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Because I believe for example in the solidarity between gender, between us, between women with the sensibility for justice or rights for all. And Indigenous women until now maybe without voice. And if we build this kind of solidarity we will be, I don't know how many millions because we as Indigenous women, we are near 2,050 million over the world, us Indigenous women.

Mallika: That was such a useful description of intersectionality. Why is it important for all of us who are feminists or doing social justice work for that matter to really think about power, privilege, whose voices are heard, who is seen, who is not seen, what is counted when we gather data and information? Who do we speak on behalf of? When do we not speak on behalf of and make sure that people and women are speaking on behalf of themselves?

And all of those issues are things that we have been grappling with in the women's movement for a very long time. And here we are I think learning just how much more powerful we are as you said when we come together, and when we take an intersectional perspective on what we are doing so that we are not leaving people out. And we're also learning deep wisdom from one another. You have been a leader in this space for decades now, Tarcila.

And I'm curious to know how your own personal journey of leadership began. Can you tell us a little bit about your own life? Where did you grow up? Where are you from? What were the things that led you to stand in the place that you stand today as a 71 year old elder who continues to forge new ground, new territory?

Tarcila: Okay. It's a long history, no? I was in the community until 10 years old, only monolingual. My mother decided a new life for me. She said, "You have to learn the culture of outside and to learn cultural and how to write." Okay, I went. I finished my primary and secondary school working at home as a servant at that time. But I think I belong to very strong ancestors in my

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history. I am Quechua Chanca, I am a Quechua speaker, but one region is Quechua Chanca.

The Chancas was invaded by Incas, and we answered very hard to this invasion. And my language and my culture is Quechua Chanca from Ayacucho in Peru. And when I finished the secondary school I tried to understand but I think the principle issue for me was my first travel, went outside of Peru because as you can imagine you can see rural area communities with Indigenous people in traditional clothes, traditional language, traditional way of life, for produce and the land, living modestly, not in official.

And when I went the first time to Argentina I thought how the campesinos are very good treated with education, with health service, everything. And when I came back to Peru I tried to compare, what happened with us, why our products is not a good price. And in other country, the production of the rural area very expensive. And I said, "No, it's not possible." Trying to open my mind.

But my dear, I have, or I had, the first conscience of right when I was 37 years old when I was invited to the Institute of Social in Den Haag. And I compare and find The Bill of Human Rights. And compare with the Constitution of Peru, oh my God, my exam was, I am 30 years old, and I arrive here to Den Haag to conclude that we never had rights to have rights, crying and crying. And after that I arrived to the United Nations because my place, Ayacucho from the 80s was in a very conflict army between Shining Path terrorist movement and military.

We died 15,000 Indigenous peoples in the mountains, and nobody said nothing. Nobody said in Lima, "Indigenous are dying or women, Indigenous women are violated, or Indigenous girls are captured by terrorists or armies and abused." Nobody said nothing. At that time, I received a lot of information in Quechua language, for example, one woman, Indigenous

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woman, monolingual went to look for her son or husband and finished in jail, abused, and showing the baby violation.

And I tried to disseminate to make diffusion about that and that's why somebody invited me to the Institute of Social Science in Den Haag to do the seminar or course about human rights. And when I arrived to the United Nations they said, "Why happen this? Why our life as Indigenous women or peoples are not in the same value of others?" And we until after many years I can say we are in colonial cities until now because many people with power or high class they believe that we don't have rights like them.

The oppression of this was terrible. And maybe for us it's easy to come to the city and accept the condition of oppressors. Me no, I said, "No. Why? Why in this way?" And many people said, "Why you arrive to do this?" I can say everything, but all periods of my life was very important periods, and the steps were valuable for me. I think that my time working and the study only for school, working for school and food was very good for me because I experienced all kinds of discrimination, abuses, or now I can say racist attitudes.

But in maybe another time, another house I learned better Spanish, I had the possibility to meet or to discover the positive parts of western cultures. That's why I am not fundamentalist, I am Indigenous, I am maybe feminist but not fundamentalist. And because I think it's necessary to develop one different kind of dialog between us, that's the practice of my life. I try to listen to you, to listen to others, to listen to the new generation. I am learning many, many from the new generation, for example, to be a leader or activist in our time.

We have to work four or five times and our activist is outside of our responsibilities, is our option. But now I can listen to many young leaders say, "We want to be activists with a salary." We, my generation we said, "It's a new time for us," because they said, "Yeah, we need this, this, this. And we know that we have flowing a lot of money for Indigenous to

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empower women.” We said, “Okay, we need to include that part in our priorities.” Because yes, because we need now some funds. We need funds.

You need to pay maybe, a very small place but with dignity, to live with basic conditions. In our time my dear, we accept okay, in this place, when we arrive to, for example, to Geneva the first time, we had to sleep on the sofa of our friends and to eat with 10 francs a day between three women. And if we have [inaudible] as women, we save the money for the family. We don't take a beer, we don't take good food and we are analyzing all that how our life, and our time was to be thinking always for others, children, family, or people. But we are happy what we did.

Mallika: That's such an amazing trajectory from working in the home, being asked by your mother to leave at a young age to go and learn the language of the majority, hegemony culture, work in different homes. And then your trajectory to becoming this incredible leader, this globally recognized leader. It is really so inspiring to talk to you, Tarcila. So, we're coming to the end of the interview, is there anything that you would like to share from your own wisdom for young leaders who are entering this space now, is there any advice that you would like to give people who might be listening?

Tarcila: Yeah. We think that it's necessary to invest in Indigenous women and Indigenous young women processes because we have now a new generation with some kind of education. But if we need to talk English for example, we need to invest in English. But we think that the new generation will do better work because the condition is different. But we are trying to make advocacy to have access to funds for Indigenous women to develop this process in a better way because they need to be considered in the position of power from local to global.

In the local, for example, we need new young or adolescents, an Indigenous leader, open their mouth and giving the voice to eradicate violations, sexual violations, or abuse in the community or in the district and

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try to know how is the structure of justice and build a road to have justice. Because until now we have impunity because children, girls violated in rural areas, they don't have the same possibility to make the demand or denounce, because need money, need contacts, need lawyer, need to know the structure of justice.

We need over the world to eradicate that mind of racist and powerful only for some. We need to democratize the opportunities for all. We dream the new generation will be better, that's why I said to one young leader, I was 50 years old, and we arrive for the first time to New York to the meeting of Commission of the Status of Women.

She was 20 years old, in a winter terrible. And we with our clothes not appropriate and she said, "This is very cold. It's not possible to arrive here." I said, "Okay, you have now 20 years old, I am arriving to New York when I am 50. Where will you be when you will have 50 years old? In this case please don't talk about the cold. You have to realize that you are with 20 years old here in New York talking about Indigenous women." We need more young Indigenous women, will go very fast to change the situation.

Mallika: Thank you, Tarcila, here's to the power of young Indigenous women, local, national, global, regional everywhere to change our world. Thank you so much. This has been an incredibly powerful interview and I really appreciate your time.

Thanks for listening to the Leadership Moves podcast which is made possible by the BUILD program of the Ford Foundation. If you want more information or the resources from today's show visit mallikadutt.com, M-A-L-L-I-K-A-D-U-T-T.com. Until next time.

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