



WE LEAD:

**We Decide, We Resist And We Exist
From Radical Tenderness**

Demands of young LGBT women, disabled women, women living with
HIV and affected by displacement





CREDITS

This document includes the reflections, contributions and political positions from young lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex women, women living with HIV, with disabilities and those who have been affected by displacement in different spaces and activities carried out by member organizations of the Community of Action (CoA) of the We Lead Program during the 2021-2022 period.

The document portrays the bodies and stories of young right holders who attended different SRHR dialogues.

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“There are not two sexes, but a multiplicity of genetic, hormonal, chromosomal, genital, sexual and sensual configurations. **There is no gender truth**, of the masculine and feminine, outside a set of normative cultural fictions.”



- Beatriz Preciado -

INTRODUCTION

We Lead is a new, inspiring, innovative, and powerful program that aims at improving the sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) of young women. The actions we generate from this space make the four specific groups of young women, those who live with HIV, those who have a disability, those who identify themselves as lesbian, bisexual, trans, or intersex and those who are affected by displacement become prominent participants. In this way, greater impact and sustainability is brought to the demand actions in favor of SRHR. The programme is implemented in nine countries in Africa, the Middle East and Central America. The We Lead consortium is made up of six civil society organizations (Positive Vibes, Restless Development, Marsa, FEMNET, Fondo Centroamericano de Mujeres, Hivos).

In Guatemala, We Lead's Community of Action is made up of fifteen civil society organizations (IDEI Association, Tan Ux'il, Alianza Política Sector de Mujeres, Vidas Paralelas, Incidejoven, Cuirpoetikas, Mujeres con Capacidad de Soñar a Colores, Mujeres en Movimienta, Otrans-RN, Redjuamugen, Redmmutrans, RedMPA, La Revuelta, Las Lémuras and Pop No 'j). Restless Development, Fondo Centroamericano de Mujeres and Hivos, are part of the organizations of the We Lead Consortium that work in the Central American region and these are also part of the Community of Action.

In We Lead, we position the recognition of gender equality, diversity and inclusion as the principles that guide the political action of the program. Therefore, and in the plural attention to the specific demands according to the experiences that women rightsholders go through, we propose the strategy of building and transforming individual and collective rightsholders leaders so that we enjoy greater political autonomy, which will help us position ourselves individually and collectively, as political subjects.

This document is the consolidation of narrative elements that will contribute to strengthen the shared political discourse of rightsholders in the Action Community for the We Lead Program to address Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) of young women with disabilities, HIV, LGBTI and migrants or affected by displacement, based on the systematization of the approaches, reflections, contributions and political positions made by young women in different spaces promoted by our organizations within the framework of the program.

**WE LOOK TO POSITION
THE RECOGNITION OF
GENDER EQUALITY**



**WE ARE QUESTIONED FOR
EXERCISING OUR RIGHT**





**TO EXPRESS OUR
AFFECTIONS FREELY.**



THINKING (OF US) THROUGH OUR IDENTITIES

Beyond the otherness to create collectiveness

We, young women, lesbian, bisexual, trans, intersex, with disabilities, living with HIV and affected by displacement, disrupt public space with our diverse bodies, often socially assumed to be strange and sickly. We rebel against the binary view of gender and move beyond the masculine and feminine, because we know that there are multiple ways to assume our identities. We embrace the different, the “weird” and what is out of the norm.

We are young lesbian and bisexual women who live lesbophobia and biphobia in the flesh, who are questioned for exercising our right to freely express our affections. We are the bisexuals, labeled as “indecisive,” who are at a stage that we will surely overcome at some point. We are lesbians, constantly subjected to torture processes called “conversion therapies,” where we are violated and forced to have sexual relations with men, even if we do not feel attracted to them.

We are young trans women, who risk our lives every day to excel in a world that denies us job opportunities, limiting ourselves to being sex workers, stylists or working in a maquila (factory). We are the ones who suffer aggression in the streets and disrespect from

society and the authorities. We are forced to deny who we are because we must fit in with the work and customs rooted in our family. They force us to live in denial because we do not have the spaces to develop ourselves as we would like. Our existence is in itself a death sentence and we, hardly, exceed 35 years of life.

We travel together and with our families. Our transit happens individually, but also in society and, therefore, it also happens collectively, transforming the relationships of our near and far context. We are constantly violated and repressed by the State ever since we are young girls, preventing us from expressing our identities and our affections. Our families, schools and public institutions must recognize our transitions, despite the rules that are imposed on our dissident bodies.

We are young women with disabilities, who are denied the possibility of living our sexuality freely because we are considered asexual beings, becoming totally dependent on our families, who make the decisions for us. We are the ones who, to have a courtship, are forced to decide between “the chair or our partner”. We are constantly subjected to psychological violence and are always told that “we can’t” or that

“we don’t have a chance.” With us, sexuality is never talked about and we are denied the possibility of deciding on our bodies and exercising motherhood, being submitted to sexual violence and forced sterilizations.

We are young women living with HIV, who are denied the full exercise of our sexual and reproductive rights, and the possibility of deciding with whom to relate affectively, erotically and socially. We are the ones who do not have access to timely information about sexuality and about appropriate treatment for HIV. We do not have access to medicines and sexual and reproductive health services. We are constantly victims of discrimination and stigma because we carry the HIV virus and we are not a priority for the authorities when it comes to health care.

We are young migrant women and women affected by displacement, who have been forced to migrate or move to other departments and other countries in search of better opportunities to access conditions that allow us to live a dignified life. Young women who as the only way out to find personal, family and community development are forced to migrate irregularly, assuming responsibilities that do not correspond to us, violating our human rights, including our sexual and reproductive rights.

We are diverse young women who have had to leave our families because of reactions to making our sexual orientation visible. Not finding ourselves safe in our own homes has led to forced displacement. They take us out of our family and then out of our country.

We are constantly discriminated against socially and institutionally and do not receive adequate care. Violence is exercised on our bodies in its many manifestations. Many of us get prepared before we embarked on our journey, taking birth control pills, resigned to being victims of sexual violence along the way.

We migrate because of situations of violence, racism and discrimination that we face daily in our country. We join the migrant caravans to travel collectively and not individually. We are constantly victims of human trafficking, being completely unprotected by a State that excludes us and expels us from its territory.



“ WE MAKE THIS JOURNEY COLLECTIVELY ”

**ALL EXPERIENCES OF DISCRIMINATION, INSTEAD
OF WEAKENING US, STRENGTHEN US, ALLOW US
TO REAFFIRM OUR DECISION TO MOVE BEYOND
THE MASCULINE AND FEMININE.**





“Is there a good way to categorize bodies? **What do the categories tell us?** Categories tell us more about the need to categorize bodies than about the bodies themselves.”

- Judith Butler -



**WE ARE HERE AND WE EXIST
IN OUR OWN BODY.**

WE DECIDE, WE RESIST AND WE EXIST

We, young women from our diverse identities, resist a system that imposes heterosexuality on us, which, more than a sexual “preference”, is a political regime that serves to deepen male dominance and is part of the mechanisms through which we have been controlled as young women (such as patriarchal motherhood, the traditional family and economic exploitation). Many of us receive sex education from the perspective of that heterosexual regime, focused solely on sexual reproduction.

We resist a system that offers us violence and psychological torture as education, that subjects us to experiences that, often times, have led us to think about the possibility of suicide. We do not recognize ourselves in this heteronormative world. We question the reality and stereotypes they impose on us so that we meet standards of beauty and stereotypes of socially accepted bodies as valid.

We refuse to have to fit into a single body model that can affect our physical and psychological health. In a society that imposes a way of dressing like lesbian women, we assume the freedom to decide how to dress, beyond the feminine or masculine. We are not going to change or hide. Our identities and



our bodies are valid, and we choose to enjoy our sexuality and our life.

While patriarchy tries to rob us of the right to live a dignified life, young trans women resist by making a double effort to fit in and be respected in a society that nullifies and discriminates against us. They deny us a lot of things. We do not have access to quality health services, so we are forced to go to private health centers that we cannot afford.

As young trans women, we give up our male privileges in a patriarchal, macho society; and that same system makes us a statistic of HIV, death, and sexual violence. We choose to live our lives, knowing all that comes with being a trans person in Guatemala. We use the support of our families, but also of the daily rejection we receive, of that permanent questioning that is made of our bodies. All situations of discrimination, instead of weakening us, strengthen us, allow us to reaffirm our decision to move beyond the masculine and feminine.

We are young lesbian, bisexual, intersex, transgender women, and visible non-binary people. We say, "We are here and we exist in our own body." We are satisfied with being able to be who we are, to be able to live as we want and to be able to identify ourselves as we want. We show ourselves from the way we see the world. We exercise our freedom to decide whether or not to assume motherhood from our dissent.

We, bisexual women, resist in a world that excludes and discriminates against us because of our sexual orientation, where we are considered half lesbian and half heterosexual. Our first rebellion is to love ourselves as we are, to let ourselves be, to flow and experience our sexuality as we want, to promote our well-being. We are free to decide with whom we share our life or with whom we express our feelings, which does not have to be fixed or immobile. We are free to publicly assume our identity.

As lesbian women we recognize that everyone is different and therefore our exercise of sexuality is different for everyone. We dismantle traditional sexual practices. Our position is that the personal is political and from there we transform the reality in which we live. We transgress the ideals of "being a woman" that have been imposed on us since childhood.

We dare to enjoy our sexuality with all its expressions. We break the patriarchal idea that lesbians cannot reproduce, that there is no possibility for us to have families or children, because there are many young lesbian women who are raising children in diverse spaces.

We recover complicity between women and resist along the way by unlearning the sexist practices and attitudes that we sometimes have among us and that can lead to abuse and violence. They are murdering us, and patriarchal justice criminalizes us when we stand

up for our rights. The patriarchal system expresses its hatred for our lives, but we resist, embrace and fight.

From various fronts, compulsory heterosexuality aims to end us. They harass us, attack us, beat us, persecute us and discriminate if we dare to make ourselves visible or when they suspect our disobedience to heterosexuality. We know that assuming our gender identity in communities perpetuates conditions of poverty, risk and violence, so many times we feel obliged to migrate to other spaces in search of better conditions.

We resist the viciousness and violence that is exercised against us and our thoughts. They attack us, ridicule us or turn us into threatening monsters for daring to show ourselves, for enunciating us and for wanting to organize among us. From our sexual and everyday practices to our political positions, we are uncomfortable for the system, so we resist.

We, young women with disabilities, live in a society that minimizes us and tells us that we can't do anything. But we resist, because we know that having a disability does not mean giving up or stopping looking for ways to get ahead in life and achieve our dreams. We decide about our lives, our dreams and our future in society. Because women with disabilities are also part of the struggle, we exist and we resist.

Young women affected by displacement, immersed in a society that prevents us from developing in a comprehensive way, that labels and marginalizes us in different ways, we also resist. We are in the midst of a cycle of violation of our human rights, where the absence or return of any member of the family usually forces us to assume an adult role that commits us and requires us to perform jobs and responsibilities that do not correspond to us.

We, young women living with HIV, continue to resist in a society that discriminates against us, excludes us and points to our diagnosis. Our families isolate us to not be affected or criticized by the community. It is very difficult to face discrimination, even to be able to relate in an affective way; that is, to have a partner and exercise our sexuality, which affects our well-being and physical and mental health.

We assume our leadership, we bet on networking from a perspective of non-discrimination and not underestimating ourselves. We push each other to exercise that transformative leadership. We are aware that we need to create spaces for us, where we can talk about sexuality, about what we feel and think as young women living with HIV. This has led us to organize ourselves to change our lives.

We resist and fight for the right to live a dignified life and for the defense of our right to decide about our bodies and our lives. We recognize that our struggle is not just because we have the HIV virus in our bodies, but that there are causes that are brought about by the patriarchal, macho, racist, homophobic, lesbophobic and discriminatory system; a capitalist economic system that impoverishes us, creating unequal relations of power between men and women, and placing us at a disadvantage in every way.



**“ WE RESIST THE VICIOUSNESS
AND VIOLENCE THAT IS
EXERCISED AGAINST US AND
OUR THOUGHTS. ”**



"I no longer accept the things I can't change, but I
change the things I can't accept."

- Angela Davis -





**WE ARE BODIES THAT SPEAK,
WITH LIVED EXPERIENCES,
SHARED PASSIONS**



**AND WITH DESIRES THAT AWAKEN
OUR IMAGINATION.**



WE CLAIM OUR RIGHTS

Our bodies, our lives, our rights

We raise our voices that cross the barriers of hatred and indifference. We position ourselves and propose new ways of understanding the body, gender, the feminine, the masculine, communication, the family, and politics from other ways of living life. We are bodies that speak, with lived experiences, shared passions and desires that awaken our imagination. As a result of our collective actions in everyday life and in the public sphere, we demand the respect and guarantee of our rights.

Our demands have gone through the transformations of our thinking, empowerment, learning and tolerance between us. We condemn the violence that is exercised by the State against us, young lesbian, bisexual, transgender, women with disabilities, living with HIV and affected by displacement, in the Guatemalan context. We highlight the repression that is exercised by religious groups that influence the decision-making of the State.

We, young women with disabilities, condemn that many of our sexual experiences are violent and we are constantly subjected to forced sterilizations; that we are victims of sexual violence that, often times, result in pregnancies and forced maternities throughout our lives. That is why we defend the autonomy of our

bodies, our sexuality and our life. We vindicate our right to sexual pleasure and the right to be mothers with attention to specific needs, pre- and postpartum accompaniment and respect for our motherhood. We demand the elimination of all forced sterilization practices against us and the creation of mechanisms to punish those who practice it.

We demand our right to quality medical care, to access sexual and reproductive health services, including visits to the gynecologist, to contraceptive methods, to make spaces accessible to us young women with disabilities. We don't all have the same disability and it's important to think about our diversity. We need physical accessibility in all care spaces, both in buildings and in the availability of adapted equipment. We need to be guaranteed access to information on sexual and reproductive rights and comprehensive sexuality education. Therefore, we demand interpretation into sign language, translation into Mayan languages in simple language, material available in simple language, braille, supports and reasonable adjustments.

As lesbian, bisexual and transgender women we live in the flesh the systemic violence of a State that does not recognize us as subjects of law and that denies us the right to recognition of our identities,

access to health, education, work, housing and justice, exercising practices of criminalization and extermination towards the diversity that we are. We demand sexual dissent in the indigenous peoples. We recognize that colonialism-imposed heterosexuality and male-female binarity. We recover our experiences from non-heterosexuality.

We join each other as young women living with HIV when we test positive and don't know what HIV is or how to treat it and when we experience discrimination for being positive. The State, instead of guaranteeing our right to health, makes cuts to the budget that is destined for the care of those living with HIV. We are outraged that there is no information on how to reach young women living with HIV and how to maintain treatment. If we are under the age of 18, we do not have access to HIV testing without the consent of adults. They deny us the possibility of exercising our sexual and reproductive autonomy, also subjecting us to forced sterilizations.

We demand that young women in our diversity have a fair wage. As lesbian, bisexual and transgender women, we want nothing less than equality and a level playing field. Being trans youth the most violated, as gender identity is not legally recognized, we are denied access to a dignified life, we are limited to having a formal educational process, denying us the right to health and job opportunities that cover our needs.

We recognize our autonomy as young women, who have taken an important part in the social movement, openly naming us feminists, abortionists and positioning ourselves politically. We continue to build together with other women, adding political force for the defense of the territory, body and land, for the network of life; for a life free of violence, without discrimination.

We continue to fight until our specific needs are incorporated into the public agendas of HIV, violence against women and other agendas and our environment of respect for our rights to live a dignified life without violence, without discrimination and access to decent work is improved. We want our voice to be heard. For policies and budgets to be created to meet our needs.



“ WE DEFEND THE AUTONOMY OF OUR BODIES... OUR LIVES. ”



"I love us, hypersexualized, always looking for pleasure generators that ignite our joyful passions, looking for and finding surfaces to rub ourselves against in this anti-reproductive practice of fleeting affections."

- Numa Dávila -

**WE VINDICATE SEXUAL
DISSIDENCE WITHIN
INDIGENOUS PEOPLE**



WE TRANSFORM OUR REALITIES

We are moving from obligation to possibility

We take the floor. We articulate and walk together. We embrace each other as diverse women. We know that the system always tries to oppose us, but we also know that it is important to claim the autonomy of our bodies, that we are not alone in the middle of this ocean and that it is important to have more spaces to be able to include more young women with our diverse identities and sexual orientations, with different living conditions and different ways of seeing and living life.

We build safe spaces for everyone, where we can talk openly and express what we think and feel. Spaces where we can raise our questions and our doubts. We believe in the importance of weaving networks from young women and taking into consideration our realities, times, contexts and experiences. We are diverse young women and we are united in the fight against what is violating us, but it also separates as different people, with different dreams and aspirations.

We are aware that, in society, there are people who, although not finding our representation, we seek a way to understand ourselves and be able to explain to other people what is happening in our bodies. We build

other worlds, other ways of being, of touching and feeling ourselves, of relating, of living our identity and sexual orientation calmly and openly, out of prejudice and with much pride.

We know that we are in a context of violence and little empathy, but we also know that there are people who are having an interest in knowing the realities of young women. It is important to recognize that we are mobilizing and that there is no need to father the youngest, that we must understand them as subjects of rights policies, where it is also necessary for spaces to be given by those who have a privilege in society.

We generate spaces of self-care and collective care, safe spaces to meet and listen to each other, and to strengthen the complicity between us. We know that feeling good about ourselves inside and outside gives us an emotional pleasure, because our experience of pleasure is not only limited to a sexogenital experience, but is also experienced in how there are different conditions in various aspects of our life that allow us to lead a pleasant life, which goes through dignified living conditions.

We plan to start using and putting into practice other models such as gineseosexuality or attraction to feminities; androsexuality or attraction to masculinities; pansexuality or attraction to people regardless of their gender and also attraction to non-binary people. We like diverse humanities. Our desires are fluid, we do not marry a single identity and neither do we nullify our desire for other corporealities.

We oppose seeing heterosexuality and heteronormativity as the only possibility for our existences. We believe that it is necessary to understand sexual and gender dissent from other places, outside of male-female binary, heterosexuality and obligatory heteronormativity. It is important to recognize ourselves and see ourselves represented in the media, even in movies, creating universes that represent the ways in which we live, which generates an impact on our mental health.

We believe that love between women has to do with breaking down structures that oppress us, but it does not mean that it is something magical, but that there is an exercise of questioning and a critical exercise that we must do. When we are wrong, we have the opportunity to question ourselves and look for ways to find well-being among all. We continue to deconstruct and learn collectively.



We join together with others to act and also to question ourselves. We know that our identities are not permanent and should not be determined by social pressure. It is important to make exchanges of experiences between us because it is necessary to talk about the social violence to which we are exposed.

We understand that people transit from our corporealities, identities, expressions and sexual orientations. We accompany each other in that transit, without violating or excluding each other. We believe in the importance of not staying in the victim's space. We know that we are thinking and intelligent people who can do everything, but we can also cry and then go on.

We are committed to the creation of beautiful spaces and the transformation of those spaces where, historically, our bodies have been violated. We know that we have real and unique bodily experiences, and that it is necessary to speak to ourselves from that most human being, from that incarnated history. Many times, in everyday life, we reproduce the system, and to move from place to place, it is necessary to dialogue with each other.

One way to do justice to what has been taken from us is to give childhood the possibility to seek that those

horrible and unfair experiences that we went through, do not have to be repeated or at least not with our endorsement.

We build safe communities, where those who have doubts about our sexuality, see that it is not a bad thing, that it is not that we are confused, but that we can approach and feel accompanied. We believe in the importance of supporting ourselves, because when we support others, when we are in community we can achieve more than we can achieve alone.

We, young lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex, women with disabilities, living with HIV and affected by displacement, lead the transformation of our realities. We decide about our bodies, our sexuality and our reproductive life. We organize, weave networks, fight, propose and make future to achieve our well-being and comprehensive development.

We transgress adult-centered, conservative, homophobic, transphobic and racist imaginaries about young women. We oppose religious fundamentalism, violence and actions that undermine our human rights. We lead to access our health and to be able to fully exercise our sexual and reproductive rights. We position ourselves politically and challenge this system from radical tenderness.

**OUR IDENTITIES ARE NOT PERMANENT
AND SHOULD NOT BE DETERMINED BY
SOCIAL PRESSURE.**





WE LEAD:

**We Decide, We Resist And We Exist
From Radical Tenderness**

November, 2022