

Fundación Rururbana

Mujeres de Frente



An overview of who we are and a
recollection of our projects

October, 2022

Fundación Rururbana

Mujeres de Frente

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1. WHO ARE WE?

ABOUT THE COLLECTIVE

Rururbana Foundation - Mujeres de Frente is a non-profit organization that functions around notions of collective care and cooperation among women, their children and extended families.

The community that the foundation serves is comprised by an heterogenous group of around 80 women, who identify themselves as sexually diverse, indigenous, afro-descendants and mestizas.

Most of them struggle daily with systematic discrimination and lack of economic opportunities, finding ways to make a living by becoming autonomous street traders (also referred to as 'illegal' street vendors), urban-waste recyclers, domestic workers, sexual workers, only to name a few.

The group is also comprised by students, teachers, and artists, who find in *Mujeres de Frente* a place to support positive change in the lives of women by providing them necessary tools to claim a dignified place in the world.

**To know more about us please follow this link to our website.



OUR BEGINNINGS

Rururbana Foundation - Mujeres de Frente started back in 2004 in the women's prison of 'El Inca' in Quito, Ecuador. At first, the interest in understanding the lives of in-prisoned women started as part of an action and co-research process. But it quickly developed into a sustained community of accompaniment between women inside and outside prison.



In 2008, when a massive presidential indult was given to 'petty' non-violent crimes, many women belonging to *Mujeres de Frente*, regained their freedom. At that moment, the foundation developed a two-sided approach. On the one hand, it became a safety and support network for ex-prisoned women, since their other networks (eg. familiar networks) usually get torn apart once they are incarcerated. On the other hand, the foundation started to create diverse options and programs for women to reinsert themselves into society through schooling, economic opportunities, safe spaces, etc. While the foundation still works closely with in-prisoned women, the community it served has grown significantly diverse.

Being truthful to its beginnings, *Mujeres de Frente* aim is to collectively resist against all forms of criminalization suffered primarily by racialized and impoverished women.

2. OUR SCHOOL PROGRAM

SCHOOL FOR FEMINIST AND POPULAR POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

In *Rururbana Foundation - Mujeres de Frente* we take part in the longstanding Latin American tradition of 'Popular Education' and 'Participatory Action Research'. For us, producing rigorous knowledge involves building spaces for knowledge exchange. Therefore, we engage in a constant process of individual and collective exploration, in which we aim to understand the world that surrounds us –with its possibilities and oppressions–, as well as to understand our role in sustaining the worlds that we create.



The school program serves around 40 women who participate in continuous education. The school in *Mujeres de Frente* has a twofold purpose. On the one hand, the women receive a traditional literacy program in which they learn and improve their reading and writing skills, their ability to understand cartography, improve their knowledge of the geography of their country and region, among other skills, while being closely accompanied by educators and other women of the organization. On the other hand, the school focuses on recovering each woman's life-story as a means to contextualize and (re) connect their individual stories with the broader historical trajectories of Ecuador, Latin America and the world at large.

This teaching methodology stems from a long-standing tradition known as 'popular education'. Its emergence in *Mujeres de Frente* is associated from the personal stories of women from the collective, who have experienced –in different levels– forms of forced rural-urban migrations within the last two or three generations. Due to economic hardships and increasingly poor living conditions in rural settings, women were forced to up-root and migrate to larger cities, losing in the process their familiar and survival networks, as well as their collective memory.

Including self-genealogical research as part of the women's education process has proven successful in rooting them to a shared past and strengthen their sense of belonging to a larger community, giving them a stronger footing in Quito and a sense of collectivity which they had lost in the process of migrating.



Collectively produced collage: shows the intricate care-networks that are part of women's lives and histories - Produced in the school edition of 2020.

2. OUR SCHOOL PROGRAM

SCHOOL EDITION OF 2020

The School for Feminist and Popular Political Development is a space that we have created with other educators from diverse social movements in order to position our individual and collective experiences within a socio-historical context. This allows us to understand our realities as part of structural construct related to the colonial/capitalist and patriarchal order.



In the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, the school brought us together in our diversities and inequalities. This time with the will to place our experiences and knowledge(s) in a national, regional, and global horizon. We built this school as an inter-organizational dialogue, inviting women from other organizations and opening sessions publicly, in order to expand and share fundamental dialogues.

The school also served as a way to resist the isolation we were suffering during the first year of the pandemic. In that sense, we learned to use Zoom and looked for times and spaces in our homes to virtually meet and search with our comrades. Our reflections at the 2020 school revolved around issues such as: the criminalization of independent street trading, the abandonment of women in prisons and the breakdown of family ties, racism and discrimination in work and life.

All classes were recorded and can be viewed in this [link](#).

SCHOOL EDITION OF 2021

Throughout 2021 we met with comrades from other local and regional to reflect on shared perspectives regarding the 'Colonial Capitalist Patriarchy' subject. These encounters allowed us to discover our multiple and varied capacities for facing collective struggles. Moreover, we decided to highlight our unique differences and our specific inequalities by stating that we all Beyond the state and its punitive management of life, taking into account our inequalities and valuing our differences, we build our collective perspective, in which we all have an important place.



General assembly with all the women that are part of the school -

This year 2021, we chose a hybrid model for the school. Each module was introduced virtually, before we meet face-to-face for three consecutive weeks at our headquarters, La Casa de las Mujeres, to discuss questions, reflections and feelings.

All recorded classes are available in this [link](#).

2. OUR SCHOOL PROGRAM

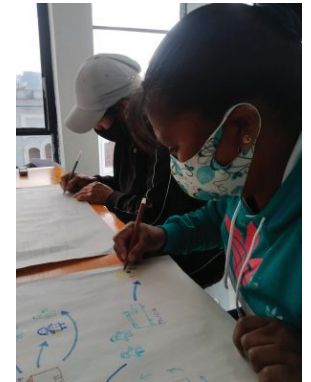
SCHOOL EDITION OF 2022

After two years of sustained political and methodological reflections in the School for Feminist and Popular Political Development (2020 and 2021), and the co-research efforts that culminated in the production of Sitiadas III and IV, this 2022 we go back to our life-stories and the histories of our peoples dispossessions. We believe this approach will enrich our critical and collective understanding of the contexts in which we live. We have also partner up with other organizations and social movements that strive for life's dignification and wealth redistribution.



Additionally, this year concretizes our collective decision to give us back the right to read, write, calculate, and know the history and geography of our country and the world. Therefore, the school ties together with a more traditional literacy program.

IMAGES OF THE ONGOING SCHOOL:



2. OUR SCHOOL PROGRAM

SITIADAS: a feminist action/co-research fanzine

Closely related to the schooling program is the co-production of fanzine called *Sitiadas* as part of a final project for each school edition. Through *Sitiadas*, women of the collective are able to denounce, share and reflect on their personal and collective stories. The process of producing something to be published in *Sitiadas* is not only an exercise in which women practice their writing and reading skills, but also a process of knowledge production in which they become empowered by the rightful notion that ‘what they have to say matters’.

Sitiadas first edition started back in 2004 in the women’s prison of El Inca in Quito. Through the construction of sorority bonds, women coming from diverse backgrounds, joint a collective space in order to share their histories and look for commonalities in their life-trajectories. The name of the magazine reflects the way in which we feel: labelled, trapped and under siege.

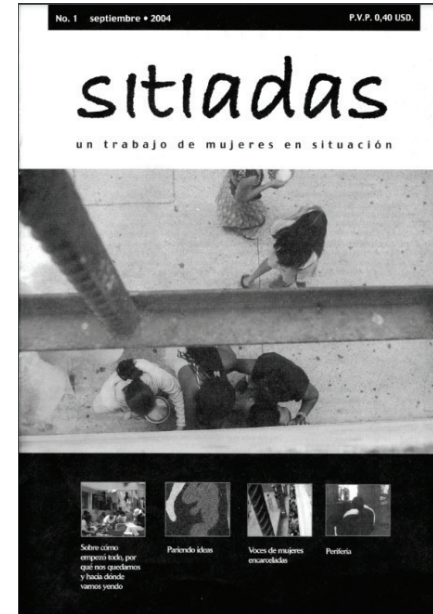
Quote from the first edition of *Sitiadas* which reflects on the different labels imposed on incarcerated women: “Drug dealer, thief, drug addict, rich, poor, foreigner, someone’s acquaintance, pregnant, old, swindler, sick, just to count a few: Besieged. Labeled, incarcerated, regulated, marginalized....”



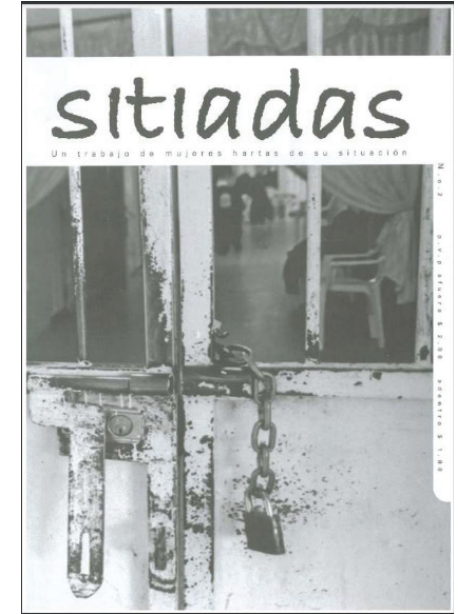
Launch of *Sitiadas IV* in 2021.

Sitiadas is understood as part of an exercise to reclaim women’s voices. It is a political exercise capable of bridging individual experiences with collective histories of oppressions.

SITIADAS I (2004) [link](#)



SITIADAS II (2006) [link](#)



The first and second volumes of *Sitiadas* reflect on the life-stories of inmate women in ‘El Inca’ prison. Through a collective writing and reflecting exercise they shared problems and found resonance in other women’s histories.

“Who are they? Who are we? ...We are all women with a thousand things to think about... a thousand things to question... a thousand things to shout to the world... because we know that what happens to us inside and outside (prison) is not casual, because it is time to rethink ourselves, to demand changes, to stop the different types of institutionalized violence”

With time, we were able to weave deep friendships, which allowed us to establish fluid means of communication and reflection among women inside and outside of prison, and among unequal and ‘equally different’ women.

2. OUR SCHOOL PROGRAM

SITIADAS III (2020) [link](#)

Many years later, we found ourselves out of prison, but still struggling to find our place in the fragmented territory of the city. For that reason, and amid the COVID-19 pandemic, we got together again to reflect this time on the various survival struggles that we face in the streets and during forced isolation.



While some of us were talking, dialoguing, and reflecting on our problems, others were accompanying our process. That way we were able to overcome the isolation, while also resisting the increasing of stigmas produced and reproduced by the state, the media and part of civil society during COVID-19.

“It is not easy to make our voices public because we have been more imagined than heard, and because we are punished as we are imagined. This issue of Sitiadas is a new effort to name the complexity of this world from within ourselves. (...) Knowing that the written word is a privilege of the whitewashed society. It is at the same time a limit and a possibility”

SITIADAS IV (2021) [link](#)

For the 4th volumen of our magazine, we opted for writing together with other feminist and anti-racist organizations who are also based in Quito. Together, we looked back at our own stories and those of our ancestors, based on the topics such as:



(1) Care and maternities with ‘Desde el Margen’

(2) Racism with ‘Re-existencias Cimarrunas’

(3) Violence against women with #Sonidosde la Memoria

(4) Health with ALAMES and Las Comadres

(5) Migration and job volatility spearheaded by Mujeres de Frente



2. OUR SCHOOL PROGRAM

Other publications

Bimonthly column in desInformémonos newspaper

- Genealogy and history against punishment (15 febrero 2022) - [link](#)
[Link](#) to article in english
- El estado produce la violencia carcelaria (12 abril 2022) - [link](#)
- Experiencias del Estado Punitivo I (8 junio 2022) - [link](#)



Flor de Guanto magazine - [link](#) to their different volumes



Other articles and books

- EL MERCADO Y EL ESTADO CONTRA LA VIDA: Dinámicas sistémicas de menoscabo de la capacidad de reproducción de la población señalada como incivil y criminal en Ecuador, entre 1980 y 2020. [Link to access book.](#)
- Comunidades de cooperación
- Racismo de estado, desarraigo y desmemoria: Mujeres indígenas en las prisiones del Ecuador
- State, racism, uprooting and memory loss: Indigenous women in ecuador's prisons
- Sistema penitenciario y población penalizada durante la Revolución Ciudadana (2007-2017)
- Incivil y criminal. Quito como escenario de construcción estatal de la delincuencia entre los decenios 1960 y 1980
- La familia de la Tía Gloria: Crianza y poder punitivo estatal en el Ecuador
- El sostenimiento de la vida en los entornos penitenciarios
- SitiadAs. La criminalización de IAs pobres en Ecuador durante el neoliberalismo
- Situación de las Mujeres Privadas de Libertad 2012
- Vivir en la fractura
- “Rehabilitación”, el verdadero castigo. Un análisis del gobierno de las prisiones regido por el Código de Ejecución de Penas y Rehabilitación Social
- Las incardinaciones de “Claudia Mula”: guerrera kamikase

3. THE WOMEN'S HOUSE

OUR PLACE

The Women's House (La Casa de las Mujeres) is our counter-cultural and feminist center in Quito. Here, our community of care flourishes among girls, boys, adolescents and women. The space is always open and available for encounters and initiatives with other social movements.

The House is our safe and common territory in a very fragmented city. Within the house we have a sewing workshop, educational and co-research spaces for women, a communal food basket, and a space dedicated to our children and adolescents where they can safely play, study and share.



- School Space | Flexible Space
- Collective Sewing Shop
- Space for Children and Adolescents
- Entry | Shared kitchen and dining | Communal Food Basket

The building where the *Women's House* is located belongs to the Ecuadorian Ministry of Health. In 2018, it was given in bailment to *Fundacion Rururbana - Mujeres de Frente* for 10 years (until 2028), with the possibility of renewal for another 10 years.

COLLECTIVE SEWING SPACE

The Collective Sewing Space is a productive enterprise of a group of female members of the organization. The sewing machines are a means of production put in common.



The knowledge, shared between sewing professionals and apprentices, is the basis of this teaching-learning and production space.



3. THE WOMEN'S HOUSE

SPACE FOR CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTES

The Space for Children and Adolescents (Espacio de Wawas) is a space for the collective accompaniment for children and adolescents, sons and daughters of members of the organization and other women.



The space was first born as a safe place to accompany the children whose mothers were subjected to Ecuador's punitive state, in whose absence children and adolescents suffered various forms of violence that left deep marks on their sensibilities and life possibilities.

Understanding that the State's punitive system does not only affect those incarcerated persons, but equally so their offsprings and close family-networks, it became indispensable to create a safe space to mitigate the consequences of the institutional neglect suffered by the children and youth.

Therefore, this space was born as a result of a long and sustained process of accompaniment and collective reflection with diverse women.

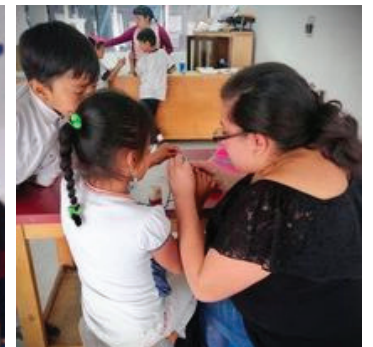
TODAY...

Together we aim to confront the destructive dynamics of some public schools, which tend to teach children that they belong to a world of abandoned and guarded streets, instead of to a world of aspirations for dignified futures.



**This space is crucial for the sustainment of all the other productive and reflexive spaces within *Mujeres de Frente*, because mothers need to know their children are safe and taken care of while taking part in other activities, such as the schooling program.

During the first year of pandemic, children and adolescents were abandoned to their family's ability to afford equipment and internet connection, in order to access online-education. In *Mujeres de Frente* we had to organized ourselves to accompany children academically and pedagogically in order to avoid school dropout. Therefore, we created an alliance with the Central University of Ecuador, to organize a sustained process of cooperation and accompaniment for children in their various learning processes -from doing homework together, to learning to play instruments, or simply doing crafts.



3. THE WOMEN'S HOUSE

COMMUNAL FOOD BASKET

The Community Food Basket (Canasta Comunitaria) is a collective solution to the problem of hunger and the productive enterprise of a group of women members of the organization.

Racism, dispossession and capitalist exploitation, for us, translate into the difficulty of sustaining the lives of our families every day. For this reason, we have put this problem in common and today we are working to make food cheaper and better for all of us who are part of this organizational network, at the same time that we have decided to build an alternative of dignified work.

Today we buy basic foodstuffs together in bulk, which, by the mere fact of buying in common, makes our food cheaper. And we want to make this enterprise grow with dignity, building bridges of cooperation and redistribution in the countryside and in the city.

In the city with people who decide to contribute with us by acquiring food products in our store in solidarity, and with small urban producers who we hope will find in our store a space for fair trade; and in the countryside with



CATERING PROJECT

small farmers whose hands produce the best and richest organic food of these lands, who we hope will find in us an alternative to the middlemen who get rich at their own expense.

Moreover, the enterprise has grown to include a catering services for small to medium venues -for between 20 and 100 persons-. In that way, women are able to produce an extra income while working together in the communal kitchen of the Women's House. Knowledge related to traditional cooking and the interest for recovering our 'grandmother's recipes' is a constantly exchanged.



Rururbana Foundation

Mujeres de Frente



Find more about us at:

mujeresdefrente.org