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PGC Day 9: Greenest

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## DEFENDING A LIVING RIVER: HOW MARI LUZ CANAQUIRI MURAYARI GAVE THE MARAÑÓN A VOICE

In March 2024, Mari Luz Canaquiri Murayari, a 56-year-old Kukama woman from Shapajilla, Peru, and the women's organization she leads, Asociación de Mujeres Huaynakana Kamatahuara Kana (HKK), won a groundbreaking legal case to protect the Marañón River. For the first time in Peru's history, a river was granted legal personhood, with the right to flow freely and remain free from contamination.

The Marañón is one of Peru's most vital waterways, traveling more than 1,000 miles from the Andes Mountains through lush forests before merging into the Amazon. It sustains 75% of Peru's tropical wetlands and is home to pink dolphins, manatees, giant otters, and hundreds of fish species. But it also runs through one of the country's largest oil-producing regions. Since 1997, more than 60 oil spills have devastated the river, poisoning fish, damaging livelihoods, and causing widespread health problems.

After a catastrophic spill in 2000, Mari Luz noticed that almost no women were represented in community leadership. This led her to create HKK.

Over time, the group expanded to 29 communities and became a powerful environmental force.

HKK sued the government in 2021 to secure legal personhood for the river. When the historic ruling was announced in 2024, she had not only changed Peruvian law—she had helped redefine what justice for nature could mean.



Mari Luz inspires me because she shows that true leadership comes from compassion and persistence, not power or privilege. She fought for her river not just as an environmental cause but as a part of her people's identity and survival.