



Mujeres del manglar: agencialidad, cuidado y sostenimiento de la vida en el Golfo de Guayaquil

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Summary

Women crabbers and fishermen from the rural and peripheral neighborhoods of the Gulf of Guayaquil work every day to legitimize an activity that has historically been carried out by men.

Their relationship with the mangrove is not new, because the activity is familiar and transmitted from generation to generation. Contact with the mangrove ecosystem occurs from the time they are children and a little less when they are adolescents, causing them to relate it with the mangrove, be it in being and inhabiting the place. The men for

family and social tradition are those who cohabit the mangrove ecosystem for the use, trade and commercialization of the red crab, however, gender systems have caused

that territorial and family dynamics change as it is not a purely feminine activity. Women have seen the need to work as crabbers, despite violence, insecurity, discrimination and asocial segregation, because there is no other means of life to support the family economy, the relationship with the mangrove is different, for For them, the mangrove is a source of life, which encourages the care of nature but builds a strong social and community fabric, thus allowing the sharing of care tasks from governance, labor and territorial agency.

Keywords: Governance, gender systems, agency, mangrove ecosystem

Introduction

Ecuador is a country that is characterized by the use and exploitation of natural resources. By having a primary export economy, it causes the use of all geographical space for its exploitation in order to satisfy different needs at the individual and community level and depending on environmental governance policies at the national and international level.

This document aims to show the socioeconomic conditions, governance and agency from the understanding of gender systems and their relationship with mangrove ecosystems in peripheral and rural sectors of the Gulf of Guayaquil (Trinitaria Island; Cristo del Consuelo; Batallón del Suburbio and the Communes of Puerto Roma and Puerto Buenavista)¹.

The methodology applied to collect information was qualitative in nature; Focus groups were held with local leaders (qualified actors), semi-structured interviews were recorded applying the gender approach, mainstreaming intersectionality and interculturality combined non-participant observation. Additionally, the MANGLEE2 application was presented.

the same that allowed participants to learn about its use for mapping and monitoring mangroves in Ecuador.

In the Gulf of Guayaquil are the most extensive mangroves in the Ecuadorian territory, their resources provide men and women who have adjusted to the different

- ¹ This document is based on the information provided within the framework of the consultancy "Gender, social inclusion and mangroves in the Gulf of Guayaquil" carried out during the months of May-July 2023, contracted by the EcoCiencia Foundation, as part of SERVIR -Amazon, an initiative of the Biodiversity Int. Alliance and the International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT), with the support of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and the International Center for Research on the El Niño Phenomenon (CIIFEN).
- ² MANGLEE is a free access and educational tool that allows monitoring of the mangrove ecosystem in Ecuador MANGLEE is created within the Google Earth Engine (GEE) platform, integrating cloud computing, remote sensing and machine learning. The tool is made up of three modules and a results visualization application, available on GitHub



economic and political processes with the purpose of supporting one of the fundamental pillars of society: the “family”. The insertion of both men and women in the home economy is diverse, so the exploitation and use of natural resources becomes the

“modus and habitus” for the maintenance of life and nature. The main economic activity observed in the mangroves is the extraction of red crab.

Gender roles allow identifying specific activities and actions between men and women, however, feminine and masculine “agency” is

complementary, it shows a differentiation given by the sexual division of labor, gender stereotypes, unpaid work and care of the home, which falls on women (mothers, aunts, grandmothers, granddaughters, nieces), highlighting gender gaps. to which is added job instability, domestic and social violence, the presence of extreme poverty due to unsatisfied basic needs (EPNBI), lack of access to education, social discrimination, chronic child malnutrition (CIM) and others. worsening social problems.

Gender systems and mangrove ecosystems: an interrelation between water, life and nature

The Mangrove Ecosystem in Ecuador is considered an important part of the National System of Protected Areas (SNAP) to stop the indiscriminate logging of the mangrove and provide legal security, promoting community participation of all users. This fact determines governance, according to Lunay (2005) it is the relationship between the interest of the rulers and the governed.

Governance is the set of norms and behavior regarding a specific political action, it is visible in the agency of human beings based on the natural resource and the channeling of good coexistence practices.

The mangrove ecosystems of the Gulf of Guayaquil have historically been threatened by the change in land use for the construction of shrimp farms and of course the expansion of the



real estate sector that grows without measure and without planning The

regulation of the mangrove ecosystem as a natural resource to sustain the family economy began with the work of men, they were the ones who were initially dedicated to the extraction of shells and red crab, the governance of mangrove ecosystems has varied according to the social and gender conditions that are generated by different situations in the territory. Although this activity has historically been male, to support the family, it must be understood that making use of mangrove resources is not easy, as presented in the following paragraph:

The extraction of red crab is a traditionally male activity, so it involves great physical effort, including walking with boots in the mud, all day, inserting your arms up to the elbow, traveling long distances, which involves traveling in boats. , exposing yourself to the sun, the wind, the rain, the water, but it is also an activity that has a high degree of insecurity, due to the presence of pirates, organized crime, but it also implies a family commitment as the activity is economic that livelihood generates, this implies getting up early to go to work, that is, leaving in the early hours of the morning, being exposed to insect bites and snake bites, complicating the daily work of those of us who carry out this activity (Technical Report 2023).

The extraction of red crab is an activity that greatly marks male behavior, in terms of Lefebvre (1974) on the social production of space, it represents the normalization and reproduction of a masculinized space, being considered an activity not suitable for women, this is related to what

mentioned by the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1998) states that the sexual division of labor shows that masculine activities are related to the established social order, men are related to the market or public sphere while women are related to the domestic or private sphere that It means caring for family and home. The flexibility of men not only implies mobilization in the mangrove ecosystem, but also implies access to education and the maintenance of life from the labor economy, while the feminine space is limited because women do not have access to education. .





According to Gayle Rubyn (1975), **a sex/gender system** is the set of provisions by which a society transforms biological sexuality into a product of human activity and in which those transformed human needs are satisfied.

The activities are complementary because they allow the construction of equitable social relationships from the transmission of family and ancestral knowledge that allows community knowledge to be sustained. **Gender systems** require both female and male agency to be able to sustain practices within social structures. In the case of women and their relationship with the **mangrove ecosystem**, their agency is directly related to community and family support. According to Zabala and Castañeda (2014), **agency is the ability to act intentionally and therefore, achieve purposes or goals guided by reason, that is, female agency is linked to the ability to manage community processes** as mentioned in the following story:

My husband is about to celebrate eight months since he passed away. Since he passed away, I have started working to support myself because I have two sons, but they also have their families, so I can't sit still and do nothing. It's been hard, but what else is there to do? I sell fruits, watermelons, oranges, eggs, roasted ripe fruits. It's difficult, yes, I get sick, I get inflamed, my arms hurt, but what should I do? My children can give me food, but for anything else that I need I can't tell them to give it to me because I know that they have their families. (GF June 6, 2023).

In the present narrative, the participation of the participant in the activity of crab extraction and fishing has been because her family situation underwent a change, after the death of her husband, her agency was to get involved in the activities because she needs maintain her life and her daily life, her male children cannot

support their mother, because they also have their own homes, however the transmission of knowledge supports the family process and the community process, which is also supported by other women who have been carrying out this activity for some years, they help the participant in being able to carry out this action, so the construction of agency becomes a collective action and feminine sisterhood.

Agency is also related to household chores and the care economy. As Silvia Federici (2013) mentions, care and domestic activities play an important role, because it is women who, through work and love, do everything possible *to* maintain the family nucleus, which implies a load of energy and additional tasks that is not taken into account when understanding that their work at home also implies a “sacrifice” to be able to support the men “providers/workers” this It allows the economic support activities to fall on the male figure or figures of the home.

Being a crabber becomes an unconventional activity for today's society; some men see it as a threat or as a

problem for the exercise of their work activity, because it implies that they take away the resource that they need to be able to sustain the economy

family, crab-eating women not only take care of their families, but their domestic work is directly related to community support, symbolically representing an extended family in which education, security, health, strengthening and maintaining ties affective in the neighborhood and organization, are around actions that promote general well-being. Federici (2013) mentions that domestic work is a natural attribute that women have maintained for many years, causing men to minimize care work and assume that it is a natural activity that women must also support. participate in the family economy.

The minimization of domestic chores causes crab-eating women to be discriminated against. In some of the sectors, women who work in the mangrove ecosystem are not well regarded in this regard, it is mentioned:

We are proud housewives, as long as we have husbands, they are in charge of supporting us (laughs) and that is the custom here. We are not going to be stuck in the mud doing their sacrificial work. (GF June 11, 2023).



Being a housewife who only dedicates herself to the home responds to the conservative society model that the province of Guayas has, but there are women who decide to take the risk and go to work in the mangroves, even if other women judge them, the women who They have decided to carry out the activity because they cannot find any other way to survive, they are exposed to the violence that is exercised by the men who work in the mangrove and the men when they find their companions in the mangrove do not help them or take them into account, they let them They defend themselves because it is wrong for them to work in this activity. Women crabbers face not only social discrimination but other problems as mentioned below:

For women crab harvesters, there is no action that will stop them from working in this activity, especially if they feel that their economy depends on the extraction of the mangrove. Women challenge the sexist and patriarchal position of those who have been victims of violence. The main situation is the lack of education, due to the ineffectiveness of public policy and the state, which, paraphrasing Judith Butler (2002), represents in societies that do not matter, since there is no public investment to improve the quality of life of the crabbers and the crabbers. For women, the mangrove is a source of life, women feel that they do extraction activities differently, within one of the stories told by a female crabber is: stepping on the exposed roots of the mangrove without having to cut or intervene with the machete, as the men do, in turn they seek to be much more careful with nature and the ecosystem.

It's unsafe because you don't know who you're going to meet, I've had to go secretly or alone because my mother wouldn't let me go when I was a child but I needed money, men don't like us working in this activity because machismo, women and men do not respect a crabber/merchant (GF June 23, 2023)





Conclusions

The lack of investment by the State and the failure to create public policies to improve the quality of life of women whose main activity is the relationship, work and livelihood of the use of natural resources such as the mangrove ecosystem has caused them to look for a way to legitimize a job that has historically been shaped by tradition, agency and male control. Denying the presence of women crabbers only causes this activity to be carried out clandestinely. The clandestinity of this activity can be understood in a symbolic way, because even though the male crabbers know about the women's work, the rates of violence only increase, the lack of help to

being able to transport, spatial segregation, the lower price for an activity that, within what is conceived as the social production of the mangrove ecosystem, generates a strong and expanded social fabric, puts at risk the lives and reputations of women who, by lack of social inclusion they have risked working as crabbers and fishermen to sustain their daily lives.

Its presence in the mangrove ecosystem comes from its family relationship, since it is an activity that is transmitted from generation to generation. Although women have always been displaced from this place, the fact that their grandfather or father has been immersed in the activity implies that their commitment to work and their relationship

with the mangrove is deeper, generating dynamics of care and protection towards a space that generates familiarity, because women are the ones who dedicate their lives to caring for the home, the activity they carry out is necessary to sustain life, without this activity men could not dedicate themselves to crabbers. Recognizing that they are the ones who support the community, from the vision of the extended family, their space implies a construction process that is managed day by day, in the future due to the mechanisms of community participation and the social dynamics themselves. There will be more women dedicated to resource extraction in mangrove ecosystems, in turn the ability to

political and territorial agency, will allow them to get involved in community political processes, however, support from organizations that strengthen participation and education is needed.

The lack of access to technological and computer means shows that women seek their own path of agency and autonomy that is linked to the need to manage their own relationship with the mangrove ecosystem, but this encourages women to break the rules. established social and strength, in order to manage their own dynamics of family and social care, without losing the path towards love for life and nature.



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