

RESTORE HER RIGHTS

PARTICIPATORY SYSTEMIZATION:
EXPERIENCES FROM
THE RESTORATION PROCESS IN
CHOMES,
COSTA RICA

September 2024

Case Study by CoopeMoluscosChomes R.L.

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FOREWORD AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For more than two decades CoopeSoliDar R.L. has worked on developing processes with local communities that have small-scale fisheries as a way of life. Not only to strengthen their capacities for sustainably managing their marine territories of life but also to demonstrate that, from a human rights base and values-based approach, it is possible to promote organized local participation that contributes to the improvement of their livelihoods.

A lesson that has been confirmed time and again from different experiences is there can be no conservation separate or dissociated from human beings – from women, men, young people, older adults. Their wisdom and experience, of their marine and coastal territories contribute not only their physical effort in the work of the mangrove restoration, but also countless traditional knowledge linked to a culture of the sea and a way of life. The above without leaving aside emotions, values and attitudes that make them the protagonists of their own lives, transcending stereotypes linked to poverty, dependence, and immobilization.

The people with whom we have worked on this systematization of experiences are actors in their own development. Although they have suffered various forms of violence, especially the women because of their gender conditioning factors, they have had the strength, the organization, and the proactive attitude to move forward in search of paths that lead to a better quality of life and greater social justice.

The continuity and sustainability of this experience is linked to the participation of CoopeMoluscosChomes R.L. in the Network of Responsible Fishing Marine Areas and Marine Territories of Life; and the commitment of the women to support other mollusk gatherer communities on the Pacific coast of the country, with the aim of strengthening their advocacy in public policies that strengthen them as subjects of rights.

This systematization will make it possible to understand the dynamism and complexity of the marine territories of life, as well as the diversity of actors involved at both the governmental and

civil society levels. People who are rightsholders have been finding opportunities to establish a political dialogue with the different actors, where negotiation and sometimes denunciation are part of these processes, which propose more sustainable transformations in compliance with global standards and conventions such as the Global Biodiversity Framework that contains Target 23 articulated to gender, the Sustainable Development Goals where Goal 14 is linked to life under water, and other international instruments such as the

Voluntary Guidelines for the Sustainability of Small-scale Fisheries (SSF) in the context of food security and poverty eradication, the SSF Call to Action and the Rules of Conduct. The strength of these instruments, conceived by small-scale artisanal fishers, is strong and they propose to find the optimal routes for their implementation where human rights base approach, gender and youth must be positioned to visualize concrete changes towards equality and equity in the marine territories of life.

ACRONYMS

AMPR	Marine Responsible Fishing Areas
CoopeSoliDar R. L	Cooperativa Autogestionaria para la Solidaridad Social (Self-managed Cooperative for Social Solidarity)
CoopeMoluscosChomes R. L	Cooperativa de Molusqueras(os) de Chomes
INCOPECA	Costa Rican Institute of Fisheries and Aquaculture
INAMU	National Women's Institute
MINAE	Ministry of Environment and Energy
NBSAPS	National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans



INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this document is to compile significant information on the process that has been developed in Chomes regarding the sustainable use of mangroves, specifically with CoopeMoluscosChomes R.L. and its efforts to improve the living situation of its members from a perspective of human rights, dignified work for women and respect for their cultural identity linked to the sea and mangroves. This information and knowledge base has been built and analyzed in a participatory way by the women of the cooperative, highlighting lessons learned and challenges for the future. It is hoped that this experience will be useful for strengthening the integration of technical and traditional knowledge, and will also serve to rescue participatory, respectful, and supportive work methodologies that not only show a path among many, but also serve as a source of inspiration for strengthening collective action, seeking greater equity, and promoting respect for local knowledge. This systematization exercise makes it possible not only to reconstruct the historical timeline, but also

to add a critical interpretation of the experience based on its ordering and reconstruction. Thus, making it possible to show the route that has been traced and the elements that intervened in the process, as well as the relationship between them. The purpose of ordering the information is to explain the changes that took place in the process, the factors that intervened and the lessons learned that can be drawn from it. Paulo Freire states that systematization is a process of reflective praxis based on people with a history, culture, social practices, and experiences that must be enhanced to improve the processes of development and change. According to various authors consulted, systematization is the critical interpretation of a lived process which, based on its reconstruction, from different voices and perceptions, can approach a theoretical-practical interpretation of that reality and discover its logic to arrive at certain results generated by that experience.

“

We need to work and the mangrove gives us that opportunity, to do what we like and what we have learned from our ancestors. The trees are ready and we must transplant them, teaching our children to ensure their future.

Kathia Aguirre,
CoopeMoluscosChomes R.L.

Our mangroves have a woman's face. Hard-working and courageous women, who go out every day to work in these marvelous ecosystems with joy, enthusiasm and a lot of illusion.

Aracelly Jiménez Mora, manager of
CoopeMoluscosChomes R.L.

”

“

I have participated in the reforestation of our mangroves, we participate as an organization in this restoration. We have the knowledge to plant more than 2,000 plants that are germinating, and then move them to the land to be planted. We know that mangroves are the reproduction centers for all mollusks and fish, which is why they are so important for life.

Maricruz Mojica Mojica,
CoopeMoluscosChomes R.L.

”

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Figure 1. General map of the location of Chomes and its proximity to the mangrove forest. Puntarenas Province. CoopeSoliDar R.L. 2016.

ABOUT CHOMES

Chomes is located on the Pacific coast of Costa Rica, bordering the Gulf of Nicoya. It belongs to the Puntarenas province. The map in figure 1 shows the location of the community of Chomes, and its location in the country, as well as the representation of the mangroves through the dark green color.

The Chomes mangrove comprises 15,176 hectares of mangrove forest (38% of the mangrove forest in Costa Rica; Zamora, 2006; Cortés, J. & Wehrmann, I., 2009¹). It is protected from waves and has considerable freshwater inputs (Zamora, 2006).

This mangrove has been reduced by the creation of lagoons for shrimp farming, one of the greatest threats faced by the people of the community, who have been involved in this activity for decades. Morales (2013) points out that 80% of the Chomes mangrove forest was devastated for the construction of shrimp farms for the MARICULTURA company (López & Breton, 1991)².

The predominant species in the mangrove is the red mangrove (*Rhizophora mangle*; Castaing et al., 1980³). This mangrove species grows mainly on the banks of canals where the soil is softer and more unstable (Jiménez & Soto, 1985⁴). In general, the five species that are found dominantly are red mangrove or crawling mangrove (*R. mangle*), mangrove caballero (*R. racemosa*), salt mangrove (*Avicennia germinans*), mangrove mariquita (*Laguncularia racemosa*) and mangrove piñuela (*Peliciera rhizophorae*). Where the salinity is found to be very high, the trees grow as shrubs (Zamora, 2006; Cortés & Wehrmann, 2009)⁵.

The population of the Chomes district is 7,604 inhabitants (INEC, 2022⁶), where 51.88% are men and 48.12% are women. Among the economic activities, in addition to the sustainable use of mangroves, there are people engaged in agriculture, livestock, construction, and commerce, among other activities. In the community of Chomes, the only and main way of life is small-scale artisanal fishing, which includes the sustainable use of mollusks from the mangroves, and the integral use of the mangrove as an ecosystem of great value for the health and vitality of this marine territory of life⁷.

In 2015, CoopeMoluscosChomes R.L. was born in the face of a difficult situation where a red tide left many women out of work and with enormous difficulties in meeting the needs of the women and their families. The women received support to become cooperative, which gave them enthusiasm

and hope in the organizational work to carry out collective and solidarity work in this territory of life. 53 women started the cooperative and are still active. Over time, the organization has opened the door to some men who support the work and mission of this organization.



Figure 2. Distribution of mollusk species such as piangua, mussels, choras, clams in the Chomes mangrove. CoopeSoliDar R.L. 2016.

In 2016, with the support of CoopeSoliDar R.L. with the participation of SINAC-MINAE, the mollusk gatherer women of Chomes took a leading role in the elaboration of the Participatory Mangrove Management Plan, offering their traditional knowledge and experience in participatory research. They worked on a weekly basis extracting, measuring, and sexing the different species of mollusk present in the mangrove, and with this they were able to prepare the management proposals that served as the basis for the State's decision to grant them permission for the sustainable use of one of the species present (2017) and the decision for the use of the other species later on in time (2024).

1. Zamora-Trejos, P., & Cortés, J. (2008). The mangroves of Costa Rica: The North Pacific. *Revista de Biología Tropical/International Journal of Tropical Biology and Conservation*, 57(3).
2. López Estrada, E., & Breton, E. (1991). Technical knowledge, social organization and identity of the Chomeños. Québec, Canada: Department of Anthropology, Laval University.
3. Castaing, A., Jiménez, J. M. & Villalobos, C. R. (1980). Observations on the ecology of mangrove swamps of the Pacific Coast of Costa Rica and their relationship to the distribution of the mollusk *Geloina inflata* (Philippi) (Pelecypoda: Corbiculidae). *Journal of Tropical Biology*, 28(2), 323-339.
4. Jiménez, J. A., & Soto, R. (1985). Regional patterns in the structure and floristic composition of the mangroves of the Pacific Coast of Costa Rica. *Revista de Biología Tropical*, 33(1), 25-37.
5. Zamora Trejos, P. (2006). Chapter III: Mangroves. In Nielsen Muñoz, Vanessa & Quesada Alpizar, Marco (Eds.), *Informe Técnico: Ambientes Marino Costeros de Costa Rica*.
6. National Institute of Statistics and Census of Costa Rica: <https://inec.cr/tabulados>
7. Chomes Marine Life Territory, cultural and biological diversity go hand in hand (Video): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n_IGMJHrTIs&t=14s

BEFORE RESTORATION:

Self Strengthening as a stepping stone towards Transformation

This process is not the result of a wetland restoration initiative; rather, it stems from efforts to support and empower fisherwomen and women mollusk gatherers, in recognising their vital roles as key actors of development, conservation, and wellbeing in coastal and wetland areas.

This process has been developed jointly by CoopeSoliDar R.L. and the Network of Responsible Fishing Marine Areas and Marine Territories of Life (hereafter, the Network), acting as promoters of collective action by fishers in defense of a vision of human rights for this sector in Costa Rica for more than two decades.

Through local work and its projection to the global

- The reality in the country is that there are currently no specific policies that recognize the problems and needs of fisherwomen.
 - Women in coastal areas are involved in various value chains of small-scale artisanal fisheries (including activities linked to pre- and post-fishing).
 - At the national level, efforts are being made to make the presence of women visible in the small-scale artisanal fishing sector and their mobilization of leadership and productive management for the conservation of the marine environment, guaranteeing the food security of their families and their communities, even while facing a decline in the catch of marine species due to climatic factors.
 - Inequity gaps still prevail in organizational spaces as women's participation in decision-making, contribution to value chains, and recognition of generational knowledge are not recognized.
- It is essential to support capacity building for fisherwomen in managing productive projects for artisanal fisherwomen without neglecting their assertion of rights.
 - It is urgent to develop participatory-action research processes in coordination with governmental and non-governmental bodies to learn about the concrete realities in which women fisherwomen work, their working, health, economic, social, and productivity conditions, and to move towards more equitable spaces.
 - It is important to carry out learning routes with small-scale artisanal fisherwomen who have successfully undertaken productive projects that will generate a space for feedback towards alternative ideas according to the reality of the marine context in each case and thus achieve the sustainability of small-scale fisheries in the context of food security and poverty eradication, according to the mandate for the implementation of the (SSF Guidelines), at the national level.

level, CoopeSoliDar R.L. manages to bring the work in the territories closer to advancing a discussion on social justice, equity, and the distribution of benefits derived from conservation processes in marine-coastal zones (including mangroves and their human populations). This process links local efforts with international processes. For more than twenty years, CoopeSoliDar R.L. has worked on this, especially in Chomes in the last five years, trying to connect the national movement with the global women's movement for rights and demands.

CoopeSoliDar R.L., together with the Network, developed a first baseline of the situation of fisherwomen in 2016⁸ and concluded that:

This baseline work is complemented by different studies⁹ that were prepared with international organizations and backed up in Costa Rica, highlighting that no attention has yet been provided to fisherwomen's needs. They lack support for working in the framework of decent working conditions and social protection. Based on the findings of the studies, a strong commitment of CoopeSoliDar R.L. and the Network to bring progressive change towards equality and equity in women's rights in small-scale artisanal fisheries has been developed. A video called "A Sea of Women" was prepared to share the reality of the fisherwomen in Costa Rica¹⁰, to create awareness of the life of small-scale artisanal fisheries, particularly women.

In 2016, the first Women and Fishing Forum was held in the community of Chomes. In this space, the formulation of an Agenda for Women Fisherwomen of Coasts, Seas, Rivers, and Wetlands of Costa Rica was achieved. This Agenda was used for advocacy efforts initiated at the national level to recognize women mollusk and small-scale artisanal fisherwomen in their life context, strengthening their contribution while belonging to the small-scale artisanal fishing sector. At the same time, taking up a priority issue such as the recognition of decent and dignified work in the different value chains of small-scale artisanal fishing.

In addition, concrete capacity-building actions were developed for a human rights approach to conservation and development named "Employment and Decent Work in Artisanal Fisheries: Mollusk Gathering Women of Chomes" workshop¹¹. This workshop explained the conditions for decent work in Costa Rica and permitted mollusk gatherer women to realize the need for exercising their rights in the framework of the legal context of the country, and to propose a route to making the necessary changes for a decent working condition for all.

Due to the various global advocacy work of CoopeSoliDar R.L. and the mollusk gathering women, international spaces have opened up to discuss their problems, including their participation in the Fifteenth Meeting of the Conference of Parties in Montreal in 2022.

At the national level, a series of visits have been made to the Legislative Assembly of Costa Rica between 2014 – 2018, including in the framework of the draft law N° 21.478 on the sustainable use of shrimp fishing in Costa Rica¹² and the framework of draft on the voluntary guidelines for the sustainability of small-scale artisanal fisheries in the context of food security and poverty eradication.¹³

In 2016, with the support and traditional knowledge of the mollusk gatherer women from CoopeMoluscosChomes R.L., the first Participatory Management Plan for their mangrove was carried out.¹⁴ In 2018, a case study was produced that showed the situation of the community and the organization¹⁵ (See Box 1 for more information).

In the same year, for the first time in the history of the country, recognition was given to the work of the mollusk gatherer women and cooperative members of Chomes through the formalization of a corporate license that allowed the formalization of all the people associated with the cooperative. This was a decision based on the Participatory Development Plan for the mangrove, and carried out as part of the technical work and organizational strengthening actions.



In 2017, the mollusk gatherer women of CoopeMoluscosChomes R.L. participated in the exhibition of a series of photographs portraying their work in the mangroves of the community of Chomes. The exhibition, "Face of the Mangrove," was open to the public for four days at the Costa Rican Presidential House. © CoopeSoliDar R.L.



Visit of the mollusk gatherer women of CoopeMoluscosChomes R.L. to the Presidential House in the framework of the photographic exhibition "Face of the Mangrove". © CoopeSoliDar R.L.



Mollusk gatherer women from CoopeMoluscosChomes R.L. show their formal permit for sustainable use © CoopeSoliDar R.L.

9. Decent rural employment in the artisanal and semi-industrial fisheries sector in Costa Rica: <http://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/2e1c8f81-445a-496e-bfe5-2faad177c82d/> and Towards a strategy for the recognition and formalization of women's productive in the main value chains of small – scale artisanal fishing, which recovers traditional knowledge and practices: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1KeQOo1HRVBdn-_j6ZbTcyXlkBs4HkdD/view

10. A Sea of Women: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AorPtroKUJnc&t=61s>

11. Employment and Decent Work Workshop: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1dTtaA1KS3lKBEKv1nbJsR6qEuZhwNm_Nx/view

12. Law N° 20.478: <https://www.asamblea.go.cr/p/Lists/Noticias/DispForm.aspx?ID=7742&ContentTypeId=0x0100AEFFC8C3B152B24EB8D5FA5DE427D586>

13. Law N° 20.750: <http://www.aselex.cr/boletines/Proyecto-20750.pdf>

14. Participatory Mangrove Management Plan: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1HAglFJjYwbpED0In_VPO9B-tYlv2Jel_/view

15. Case Study: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1hO5vjHreFYRByWoEzTfkKb0AaUuQ4eA6/view>

8. Base line of situation of fisherwomen: <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1AFmm8RWypcl721sl0khR76dOAV8KClN/edit>

Participatory Management Plan in Chomes

The process of developing the participatory management plan began in 2016 with CoopeMoluscosChomes R.L, CoopeSoliDar R.L, the Network of Marine Areas of Responsible Fishing and Marine Territories of Life, and the efforts of the government through INCOPESCA and MINAE.

This Participatory Management Plan for the mangrove has eight concrete actions to be developed for the sustainable use of the mangroves in the community of Chomes:

1. Capacity building
2. Gender equality
3. Participatory scientific and community-based research
4. Community environmental and cultural education
5. Commercialization and marketing
6. Ecosystem restoration and recovery
7. Control and surveillance
8. Evaluation of the process and revision of the management plan



Research Team of CoopeMolus-Chomes, R.L. Defining the zoning for the Participatory Management Plan. © CoopeSoliDar R.L.

The mollusk-gathering women who are part of CoopeMoluscosChomes R.L. have requested the incorporation of restoration actions from the very first moment their knowledge and work has been recognized. Prior to this effort, they have developed, with external support, the following activities:

- Mangrove cleaning: Livelihood support from the Costa Rican Ministry of Labour. This process took place in 2015 and lasted nine months and involved all the women of CoopeMoluscosChomes R.L.; at that time, there were 47 women.
- Blue Carbon Project - Neotropica Foundation: This process took place in 2016. The project they proposed did not work because they chose an area to plant mangrove trees, which was not suitable. The foundation then disappeared from the community.

This allowed progress to be made not only in preparing a participatory management plan for the mangrove but also in concretely defining the areas, from the perspective of women's traditional knowledge, that should be restored due to the environmental impact of unsustainable extraction activities carried out by other communities and the impact of the private shrimp aquaculture production company legally registered as Chomes Mar.



Figure 3. Map of proposed restoration areas (golden stars) in the management plan of Chomes mangrove. CoopeSoliDar R.L.2016.

Efforts have been converging to implement the Participatory Management Plan. The black stars on the map (See Figure 3) indicate the areas reforested in this important life zone. In the last three years (2021-2024), women in Chomes focused on strengthening their work, building visibility on the rights of mollusk-gathering women, and restoring another region within their territory. These were some of the processes that they followed:

1. Obtaining Free, Prior, and Informed Consent from the Community¹⁶
2. Valuation of the traditional knowledge embodied in the participatory management plan and the restoration process.^{17 18}
3. Preparation of year 1 - year two work plans based on women's needs and the participatory mangrove management plan.
4. A capacity-building workshop on decent and dignified work was held for all women in the cooperative¹⁹ and those who have not previously participated in a similar workshop.
5. Preparation of training modules on the Convention on Biological Diversity and advocacy on women's issues, Target 23, and the Global Biodiversity Framework²⁰.

6. Meetings with the Focal Point Costa Rica - Convention on Biological Diversity in the field and presentation of the vision of women and their integration in the country's NBSAP process for the Convention.
7. Construction of a roadmap for implementing the women's agenda for the seas, rivers, coasts, and wetlands in the framework of work beyond Chomes with other small-scale artisanal fisherwomen.
8. Women and Artisanal Fisheries Position Papers and their participation in national advocacy spaces: New Draft Law on Guidelines²¹ regional and global: A Call to Action for Small-scale Artisanal Fisheries²² and the Rules of Conduct for Working with Artisanal Fishers²³
9. Roadmap presented to the authorities and the Network for collective learning and strengthening the struggle for a human rights approach to marine conservation.
10. Support for CoopeMoluscosChomes R.L. and other women mollusk gatherers in the framework of decent and dignified work and the implementation of Target 23 of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.

Box 2

Real and Meaningful Participation: Lessons from Chomes

This process has brought in stakeholders from different sectors involved in marine-coastal conservation: small-scale fishers, government, and civil society organizations, within the framework of the Voluntary Guidelines for the sustainability of small-scale artisanal fisheries in the context of food security and poverty eradication and contributions to Sustainable Development Goal 14²⁴ including Ministry of Environment and Energy, Ministry of Fisheries (INCOPESCA), Ministry of Labour, INAMU, Ombudsman Office, Ministry of the Exterior, Civil society group like CoopeSoliDar R.L., Small-scale artisanal fishing communities -CoopeMoluscosChomes R.L, Network of Marine Responsible Fishing Areas and Marine Territories of life, mollusk gatherer women from the Térraba Sierpe marine territory of life.

All calls for meetings and activities related to this process have been coordinated in advance through the formal channels defined and coordinated by the women in their work plan. The facilitation of meeting and dialogue spaces has strengthened clear and assertive communication between CoopeMoluscosChomes R.L., various government institutions and CoopeSoliDar R.L. and has become an example of the importance of collective action through the network.

As part of this, the Free, Prior, and Informed Consent was developed, which established the values that should be strengthened in this process that include:

- Transparency in the use of resources.
- Conflict resolution.
- Training and education.
- Commitment.
- Perseverance.
- Permanence in the process (not to be abandoned)
- Punctuality.
- A union between CoopeMoluscosChomes R.L. and CoopeSoliDar R. L.

16. Document : <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1kkTldngiE3SGcbul-KAWF2wtpnBsVzr9/view>

17. Chomes mangrove restoration process 2022- 2023- Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PkSf11bLXU8&t=5s>

18. What has the mangrove restoration process meant? - Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bHWE1_hfxbw&t=3s

19. Workshop on employment and decent work in small-scale fisheries: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ijDw4RF9Fno_a0A8NrpqJAel7P1TotqD/edit?usp=sharing&oid=118193046842091292316&rtpof=true&sd=true

20. Module: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1QX_p55DTJ-XyLWx1a2YDJFRM401OoTZc/view

21. New Draft Law on Guidelines: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1pLxMKErU2qMKQlbdE_HIZ228RHMzcxTf/view

22. A Call to Action: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1gowa6www_qOP4L8aiaHasq9mgTy4BnqqW/view

23. Rules of Conduct: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1OMNi08RBPFDJnK42Q3wcm3zj0xu5NFe/view>

24. Contributions to Sustainable Development Goal 14: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1MdsoSHU5p7o_hv1oEJgx6tklnPj8tvRj/view?usp=sharing

Perceived Challenges & Risk Mitigations

- **Collectivization:** The main challenge was to promote true participation with the free, prior, and informed consent of CoopeMoluscosChomes R.L. so that the decision was made in direct and active consultation with all women and members engaged in this process.
- **Formalization:** CoopeMoluscosChomes R.L. was at risk of disappearing due to debt owed to government entities. The women of Chomes aimed to bring their organization back into order and formality, including being up to date with payments to the Costa Rican Social Security Fund, which would revitalize the work carried out.
- **Impacts of Climate Change:** A red tide affected the community again between November 2021 and August 2022, causing a reduction of marine resources, which again affected the quality of life and plunged the women into despair.
- **Lack of Recognition:** As with other small-scale fishing communities, land tenure and access rights remain the biggest challenges to address, as there has been very limited recognition.
- **Building and Challenging Narratives:** Building a counter-narrative through networking and advocacy that addresses the interests of



Decent work workshop in Chomes
© CoopeSoliDar R.L.

mollusk gatherer women across marine territories of life in Costa Rica who share issues of uprooting, discrimination, violence, and stalking by tourism and extractivist projects ensures joint and sustainable solutions that can be found over time.

- **Threats from Private Industries:** The women of Chomes have been publicizing in different spaces what is happening with the Chomes Mar shrimp aquaculture company, as well as the damage caused to the mangrove forest by contamination and logging of species. They have denounced the situation in different environmental and legal instances. However, due to the harassment and violence they face from the company, they have been taking their distance and acting with caution due to the danger to their physical and emotional integrity, as well as that of their families. This situation affects not only the mangrove but also the safety and quality of life of the Chomes mollusk gatherer women.

RESTORATION:

Integrating Ecosystem Restoration to Larger Self Determination Processes

The process of restoration should not be seen in isolation. As provided above, this has been built within a larger framework, including capacity building at the organizational level and strengthening women's ability to directly contribute to dialogues and decisions at all levels that impact their livelihood, identity, and territories.

For the first phase of the restoration process, CoopeMoluscosChomes R.L. proposed a methodology according to their needs and capacities. Maintaining the agreed values and principles, 15 sub-groups of mollusk gatherer women were organized, with the participation of some male members, who participated in the reforestation equally and fairly. These groups oversaw cleaning of the mangrove area, building the nursery, planting mangrove tree seeds, and labeling and reforestation of the mangrove community area. During this phase, almost 6,000 Red Mangroves were transplanted, and these saplings had a 100 percent survival rate. With the success of the first phase, the women initiated phase two with the indigenous species *Pelliciera Rhizophorae*, locally known as Pinuela, which the women found out was vanishing from the region.

The process has allowed CoopeMolusChomes R.L. to strengthen itself through dignified work that benefits the community and the participating partners.



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RESTORATION:

Successes, Learning & Challenges

Continued Strengthening and Recognition: During the period of mangrove restoration, the strengthening of the organization and the incorporation of more young people into the cooperative has been promoted. There has been significant dissemination and recognition of the activity at national and international level.^{25 26}

Renewed Energies: The working groups were able to work on time, thus positively impacting the women's organization and lives. The work has generated collective learning and improved the economic conditions of highly vulnerable people in the territory.

Representation in Global Policy Dialogues: Part of the outcome of these efforts was the presence of women's voices representing artisanal and mollusk fisherwomen at both Lisbon²⁷ and COP15²⁸, which had important results in the approval of Targets 22 and 23 of the Global Biodiversity Framework—this generated capacity building and advocacy for defending a human rights vision for marine conservation.

Dynamization of commercialization and marketing processes as added value in value chains through the Mercado del Mar: Commercialization and marketing of mollusk has become an important step towards improving the living conditions of mollusk gatherer women in Chomes and developing autonomy. The mollusk gatherer women have been improving the forms of packaging and organization for the commercialization of their products through the Mercado Del Mar (Sea Market)²⁹

Cross Cultural Exchanges and Strengthening Regional Narratives of Mollusk Gathering Women: In 2022, the participation and exchange between mollusk gatherer women from the communities of Puerto Cortez in Térraba Sierpe and Chomes was facilitated where representatives of both organizations participated in the Work and Decent Employment Workshop. In 2024, the manager of CoopeMoluscosChomes R.L. visited the community in Térraba Sierpe as part of the process of strengthening the network.

Lack of Recognition of the Role of Mollusk Gathering Women: Obtaining recognition and support from institutional authorities (INCOPECA, MINAE, INAMU and others) in the framework for compliance with the Voluntary Guidelines for the sustainability of small-scale fisheries in the context of food security and poverty eradication, the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14 and the new Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework has been the priority of the women but they are seldom upheld.

25. The 47 Costa Rican women working on mangrove conservation in Chomes: <https://www.bloomberglinea.com/2022/10/15/las-47-mujeres-ticas-que-trabajan-en-la-conservacion-del-manglar-en-chomes/>

26. Women reforest mangrove forest that provides them with livelihoods: <https://www.pressreader.com/costa-rica/la-nacion-costa-rica/20221218/281547999947772>

27. Josefina Mata Ceja, intervention at the Small Scale Fisheries Plenary at the Oceans Conference in Lisbon, 2022: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LWkccX03yZo>

28. Aracelly Jiménez Mora, at the UN Conference on Biodiversity in Montreal 2022: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1HnFDR1VHUHxa_E9LP3oxPWsyGhMd-9nD/view?usp=sharing

29. Sea Market: <https://www.facebook.com/PescaArtesanalCR>



AFTER RESTORATION:

Actions and Reflections towards Transformative Process

The community of Chomes has a culture that is closely linked to the mangroves where the women of the cooperative know that protecting the mangroves (reforesting them and keeping them clean) generates an economic benefit that will allow them to create resources that will be distributed fairly (as they have always done) and also help in generating awareness amongst the children about the continuation of the work carried out by their mothers, grandmothers, sisters, and

cousins. This process has reignited a series of actions and emotions that have allowed the women to grow as an organization and at an individual level (See Box 3 for more details).

“

Continue what we have been doing so far, cleaning up the rubbish that arrives with the tides, try to plant more trees with what we generate in the guided tours we do, and have faith that we can get resources to resume reforestation with strength.

Aracelly Jiménez Mora, manager of CoopeMoluscosChomes R.L.

Box 3

Chomes - Building Solidarities and Communities

The women from Chomes shared some key reflections from this process, which include:

- Solidarity among mollusk gatherer women, not only from Chomes but also from various communities that are part of the Network of Responsible Fishing Marine Areas and Marine Territories of Life.
- Integration of some men into the cooperative. "They fell in love with the process with their research and contributions," says Aracelly Jiménez Mora. However, the women themselves must continue to lead the organization, as they have done over the years.
- It allowed experimentation with the piñuela seedling, which had almost become extinct, which has been positive in terms of its new reproduction and expansion in the mangrove.
- The nursery has had an impact on the community,, it is a place for community education where they come to learn about the mangrove.
- The space for dialogue was expanded. "The cooperative was dying, but this process strengthened them, united them and inspired the youth to join."Aracelly Jiménez.
- Trust and learning between CoopeSoliDar R.L and CoopeMoluscosChomes R.L. has strengthened.³⁰

30. Information collected from reports submitted to Women 4 Biodiversity as part of this process: https://drive.google.com/file/d/100AirJRRvmjwqH0622_pTmtzqiqEMxjj/view



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Participatory Management Plan for the Mangrove, Chomes, Puntarenas, and Economic Development

The technical document prepared by the cooperative members included a specific chapter on the social, historical, and economic characterization of the Chomes community and the mollusk-gatherer women. This was instrumental in realizing aspirations and opportunities for the economic development of the women of CoopeMolusco-Chomes R.L., including learnings from developing a small restaurant to supply and feed the small-scale fishermen of Chomes. In conjunction with INCOPECA and the National Women's Institute (INAMU), the women of Chomes were able to benefit from the development of a small food

business aimed at serving small-scale fishermen from the community and tourists visiting the community. Unfortunately, this experience could not be followed up, given the obstacles of the Ministry of Environment and Energy (MINAE), which did not provide the necessary permits (to have energy in the area) to support the infrastructure of the premises. Despite the above, the experience was a positive one of broad learning in local small business development and the challenges women face in their rights framework.

Development of guided visits to the Mangrove

In collaboration with CoopeSoliDar R.L., the women's cooperative of CoopeMolus-Chomes R.L., designed a circuit for local tourism activity in the community of Chomes and its mangrove. The tourism offer includes welcome talks, a visit to the mangrove, and learning about the main mangrove types, the challenges, and the restoration efforts. The guided tour can also include a visit to the sea

and nearby islands. The profits benefit the women who participate in these visits. While this process is still in its initial stages, it has allowed women to engage and assert their narrative meaningfully and sustainably with those keen to learn about their journey.

Mercado del Mar S.A.

El Mercado del Mar (Sea Market) was created as a response by CoopeSoliDar R.L. to the impact of COVID-19 on small-scale fishing communities and especially on the local and indigenous communities that make up the Network of Responsible Fishing Marine Areas and Marine Territories of Life. Built on a Code Of Ethics, the Mercado del Mar S.A.³¹ was a space for the commercialization of seafood products from the AMPR Network and Marine Territories of Life, based on values and principles of equity, fair and equitable distribution of benefits, economic justice, solidarity, humanity, recognition of the work of women in each phase of the production chain i.e. pre-catch, catch, and post-catch (value added and

commercialization), promotion of the contribution of young people, which strengthens the social and cultural resilience, conservation and use of coastal marine resources in coastal marine communities and contributes to solving the structural problems experienced by small-scale fisheries in Costa Rica. From January 2022 to December 2022, the Mercado del Mar purchased 6,418.189,46 million colones (\$12,225.82 USD) worth of a wide variety of products from CoopeMoluscosChomes R.L. (See the image below for more details.) This money has contributed to improving the quality of life of the cooperative's women.



Photo: CoopeSoliDar R.L (2024) Aracelly presents some of the products available to buy in the Sea Market

Sales for Chomes in 2022			Per Unit in Colones	Total
1	Camarón	kg	62,93	857 285,00
	Corvina aguada	kg	7,12	38 800,00
	Corvina Reina	kg	42,9	412 865,00
Total 1			112,95	1 308 950,00
2	Camarón	kg	49,38	329 999,98
	Camarón Cabeza	kg	32,42	488 540,00
	Corvina Reina	kg	61,5	597 540,30
	Mariscada	kg	20	130 000,00
Total 2			163,3	1 546 080,28
3	Camarón	kg	57,22	828 408,02
	Camarón Cabeza	kg	25,1	352 702,44
	Corvina aguada	kg	30,88	163 752,11
	Corvina Reina	kg	76,46	935 220,47
	Piangua 100 Unid	Paq	3	21 517,02
Total 3			192,66	2 301 600,05
4	Camarón	kg	19,25	296 241,66
	Camarón Cabeza	kg	21,47	277 143,13
	Corvina Reina	kg	8,46	107 003,52
	Mejillón	kg	8,25	18 448,90
	Piangua 100 Unid	Paq	7	50 221,92
Total 4			64,43	749 059,13
8	Camarón	kg	35	512 500,00
Total 8			35	512 500,00
TOTAL 2022			568,34	6 418 189,46

Box 4

Learning around the issue of income development and benefit sharing

Prior to the development of productive alternatives, work must be done on the core issues of organization and human rights based approach. Collective action should be promoted to enable broad benefit sharing. The productive alternatives that are promoted with fisherwomen should be based on their strengths and knowledge of themselves and their resources. The Mercado del Mar S.A. is a suitable initiative to empower and recognize the work of women in an innovative way, based on values and principles. It is an instrument for the struggle for the human rights of small-scale artisanal fishermen and fisherwomen.

Engagement with Youth

In the case of Chomes, the recovery of the mangrove forest has been attractive to young people who have joined the cooperative as associates and have participated in the mangrove cultivation workshops. Both young men and women contribute their work and energy, and generational integration occurs in the community. On the other hand, to rescue and generate a sense of belonging in the girls of the communities, especially in Chomes, dolls were made to represent their mothers, mollusk women. The objective of this was to create spaces for the mothers to talk with their daughters about the importance of the mangroves, the pride in their work, and the ancestral knowledge linked to this

activity so that there is an intergenerational integration based on knowledge and life plans that give sustainability to the richness of the mangroves and other coastal marine resources. Another achievement came in 2021, during the II National Congress of Artisanal Fishing, a young woman from Chomes was the runner-up in an Innovation Contest with a mangrove ploug³¹ which recognized young women's role in the invention of appropriate technology for the extraction of mollusk in the community and knowledge in Coastal Marine resource conservation.



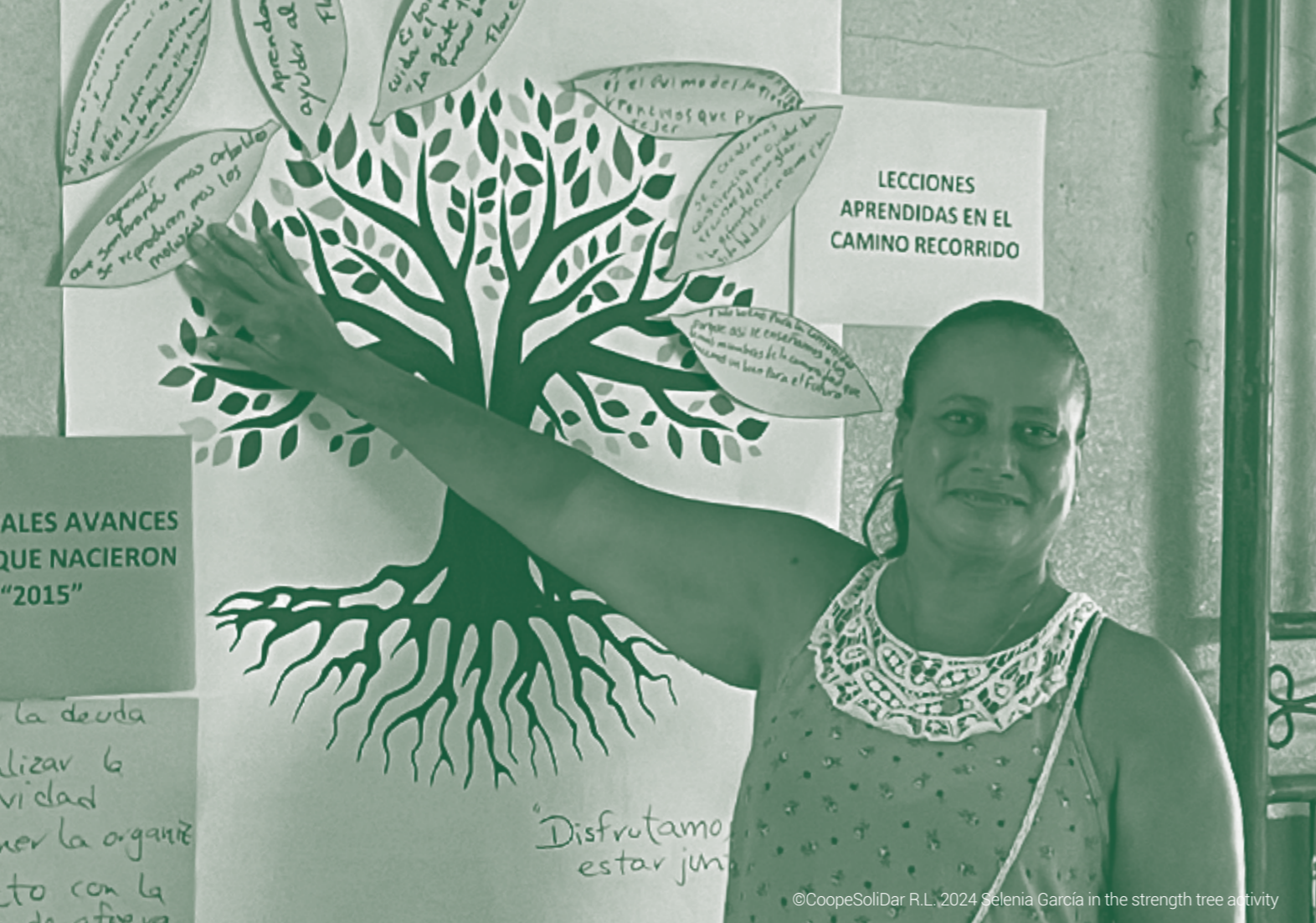
Positioning the gender approach in small-scale artisanal fisheries:

In 2017, the Agenda of Fisherwomen of Seas, Rivers, Coasts and Wetlands³² was born because of the National Forum of Women Fisherwomen, held in the community of Chomes in the province of Puntarenas, with the aim of positioning and recognizing the work carried out by women who belong to the small-scale artisanal fishing sector.

and guidelines were still valid. Based on this review and the changes made in September 2022, it was presented to the Ombudsman's Office. In 2023, specifically during the III National Congress of Small-scale Artisanal Fishers and Mollusk Gatherers: Intertwining Life, Knowledge, and Culture, the Agenda was a topic of discussion in the working groups and the intergenerational dialogues.

In 2022, the same women who had developed the agenda, reviewed it to assess whether its content

31. Code of Ethics Mercado del Mar S.A: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1FSCkzNseeNdYB66FQMMuKkBJRu2TtY0h/view>



©CoopeSoliDar R.L. 2024 Selenia García in the strength tree activity

LESSONS LEARNED:

TESTIMONIALS FROM COPEMOLUSCOSCHOMES R.L.

“

FOR THE ORGANIZATION

- I learned that unity is the basis of any organization.
- Together, hand in hand, we can continue to fight for a better future for ourselves and our children.
- I learned that the mangroves are the lungs of the earth, and we have to protect them through organization.

”

FROM THE CONSERVATION AND CARE OF THE MANGROVE

“

- Reforestation has been a lot for areas that have been cleared. We have recovered the mangrove forest.
- I learned that by planting more seedlings, more mollusks will reproduce in our mangroves.
- The mangrove needed reforestation, and we have done it through our organization.

”

“

FROM THE IMPROVEMENT OF THE QUALITY OF LIFE

- The resources we have received from reforestation have helped us to meet our needs.
- It has been good for the community because, in this way, we show the other members of the community that we are doing good for the future. When the community improves, so do we

”

FROM THE STRENGTHENING OF CULTURE AND GENERATIONAL INTEGRATION

“

- It is important that the children go with us sometimes to teach them the importance of mangrove care, and that they learn from a young age how it is done.
- I learned that, in a mangrove forest, people litter less.
- We have created more awareness in caring for mangrove resources, especially among young people.

”

CONCLUSIONS

1. Initiatives linking restoration and conservation must be accompanied by a prior process of strengthening women's organizations and collective action to defend their rights. Conservation cannot exist without a human rights-based approach and people.
2. The State has still not assumed the commitments that correspond to shared management models for the responsible and equitable use of coastal marine resources. There is a lack of follow-up, commitment, and support to implement public policies that effectively link gender and conservation. There must be participatory and committed accountability.
3. Local experiences contribute to Target 23, but there are still gaps between what is stated in the Target and what happens in reality. Gaps in tenure rights and access rights to the sea and its resources are still pending, which is a huge debt to the women of coasts, seas, rivers, and wetlands.
4. Private companies intensively use biodiversity, yet there is no state control over their actions that affect women and conservation. These blue economy companies, such as Chomes Mar in this marine territory of life, continue to violate women, impeding free access to mangroves, pollution, and deforestation. Proactive action is required to prevent the expansion of these extractivist models.
5. The integration of CoopeMoluscosChomes R.L. in the Network of Responsible Fishing Marine Areas and Marine Territories of Life allows the women of Chomes to strengthen their links with public institutions and present their demands. The sector needs to be more unified, clearer, and with an identity backed by international instruments such as the SSF Guidelines, SSF Call for Action, and Rules of Conduct.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- ✓ Restoration projects must incorporate equity and equality values and principles in their implementation. Women cannot adapt and be resilient without access to land tenure, health, traditional knowledge, intergenerational dialogues, and participation in decision-making at the public policy level.
- ✓ The projects' rhythms, in terms of time and resources, must be able to adapt to the natural cycles of reforestation and mangrove restoration so that the resources can be used to support the work carried out by the women according to the cycle of the seedlings and their reproduction.
- ✓ In this restoration program, it is necessary to consider the issue of strengthening the identities of the diversity of adult women, young women, and girls based on the experience and potential of their historical and ancestral work for their food security and the planet's survival.
- ✓ Advocacy in policy frameworks is essential to ensure better recognition of women's work in mangrove conservation at national and global levels.



About CoopeSolidar R.L.



CoopeSolidar R.L. is a cooperative founded in 2000. CoopeSolidar R.L.'s mission is to propose innovative alternatives so cultural and biological wealth may contribute to improving the population's quality of life, with justice and equity, by working with participatory decision-making processes from individual and collective spaces to the local, national, and international levels.

CoopeSolidar R.L.'s goals are to expand and strengthen participation in influencing administrative, political, and institutional decisions, ensuring that these decisions reflect community interest and lead to a fair and equitable distribution of the benefits of using natural resources.

About CoopeMoluscosChomes R.L.



CoopeMoluscosChomes R.L. is a cooperative formed by 40 women and 12 men dedicated to the sustainable use of mangrove resources. Located in Puntarenas, Costa Rica, this cooperative is dedicated to strengthening small-

scale artisanal fishing. Most of the women who make up this cooperative are mothers and heads of household. They are enterprising, cheerful, and eager to learn and improve their families' livelihoods.

About Women4Biodiversity

Women4Biodiversity

Women4Biodiversity believes that 'Living in Harmony' with Nature needs to take into account the roles and contributions of women and girls to achieve transformative change. This requires addressing gender equity and needs to embrace the holistic solutions and the recognition of women's human rights to achieve it. Our work

involves building synergies around the work of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) and other international arenas to provide direction for more coherent and inclusive processes while ensuring their proper implementation.

