

Tradition, Knowledges and Nature of the Cabécar People: **Artisanal Work and Organic Agriculture as Eco-sustainable Practices**

Ángela Martínez Sanabria¹⁰³

In the indigenous Cabécar territory of Nairi-Awari, in Costa Rica, Ángela Martínez Sanabria and her family have developed collective initiatives for protecting the environment and safeguarding the intangible cultural heritage. Through family and community initiatives, indigenous peoples promote a balance between culture and environment.

Among the most important projects, the following stand out: a traditional artisanal project that can reduce the use of plastic; an initiative of traditional agriculture and cuisine, capable of combining healthy food and Cabécar culinary traditions; and, finally, an individual project of jewelry made with recycled and natural materials. Regarding findings it is thought that family, collective and community projects are an excellent platform for transmitting the ICH, as well as for putting into practice sustainable ideas that allow financial livelihood and environment protection.

In the provinces of Cartago and Limón, between the cantons of Turrialba, Siquirres and Matina, there is the indigenous territory of Nairi-Awari. This territory covers 5,038 hectares and belongs to the Cabécar people. It was made official on May 21, 1991.

The Cabécar people are one of the eight indigenous peoples in Costa Rica and have several territories in the Caribbean and South Pacific regions of Costa Rica. For centuries they have resisted colonialism. It characterized them. Furthermore, until today, they maintain a considerable part of its original customs and traditions, such as the Cabécar language, traditional recipes, agricultural wisdoms or artisanal techniques, among others. In Nairi-Awari, for example, 473 people live, with 94% of its population maintaining their mother tongue.

Cabécar is my first language, and Nairi-Awari is the community where I work and live with my family. A very important aspect of our culture is family, because in addition to being a support every day, it is a source of learning and a way of transmitting ancestral knowledge. However, such knowledge is transmitted thanks to the Cabécar language and the interest

¹⁰³ Cabécar indigenous woman who, with her family, elders and traditions, has endeavored several projects that try to combine tradition and protection of nature.

of those who, despite being younger, are proud of our traditions, so we learn about them in practice. Thus, speaking our language has allowed us to preserve the names of things, as well as the essence of ideas, stories and secrets that are behind artisanal techniques, culinary recipes, and knowledge from nature.

For these reasons, in this document I will talk about two family projects and one personal project that are closely related to safeguarding our intangible cultural heritage, as well as the protection of the environment. With this, I intend to make evident, from family and community initiatives, the different efforts from indigenous peoples for the promotion of a balance between culture and environment.

This balance is very important in our culture, because, at the same time we fight for retrieving ancestral lands and having more autonomy in our territory. We know that the land is connected to our traditions, animals and plants that are part of our everyday life and worldview. In fact, this is what propels us to retrieve territories and traditions, as well as collaborate with the preservation of species and ecosystems from the Barbilla National Park, which crosses our territory. For this reason, in addition to collaborating with park rangers to avoid illegal fishing, hunting or logging, we also contribute to reducing the environmental impact through the projects mentioned below

The Cabécar Family project is composed of different members from my family, men and women from different ages and generations. The heart of this project is the manufacturing and trading of artisanal works made with traditional techniques, using materials like fruits (such as gourd), fibers, seeds, barks, etc.

This project allows different aspects. For example, it allows us to convey, through practice, the knowledge and skills about traditional artisanal techniques to new generations. This is how I learned, in a family environment, watching other people and trying to practice what I learned and observed. Also, this project allows visibility to the quality, beauty, history and traditions hiding behind artisanal works made in our Cabécar community.

Finally, this project has allowed us to showcase the importance of protecting the lands we live on, because our artisanal works account for the diversity of species of plants and animals present in our territory, as well as their importance for our world view and for the health of the ecosystem. Last, but not least, some of the artisanal objects we make, such as the case of gourds, are used to promote reduction in the use of plastic by those who purchase these products. Instead of using plates or jars in plastic or other materials, they can use objects made from gourd, which is a natural, biodegradable raw material.

The second project is named “Cabécar Delights”. In our family and our community, we have had the concern of eating healthy foods, free from poisons or chemicals that are harmful to our health. For this reason, we have fed our animals for a long time with healthy, hormone-free foods, just like we try to grow most of the foods we eat. In the area we live, we have learned firsthand the damage large plantations cause to the environment, with their pesticides and deforestation.

As a result, we wanted to share our idea with other people, but also share the flavor of our traditional recipes. Thus, we grow different products in the traditional way, so that the impact on land and nature is minimal. Later, some products, like cacao, are dried, fermented, roasted, ground and processed with traditional techniques and instruments, to become different products we then sell.

With this, we convey, through tablespoons of flavor, the importance of our agricultural and culinary traditions, and also of healthy food produced in a sustainable manner.

Finally, another project I work on is also related to nature and the environment to produce artisanal jewelry with environmental responsibility. It is a project mixing tradition and some modern or contemporary elements. I make jewels using organic elements that I find near my house, such as feathers or seeds picked from the ground. Then, I combine them with other pieces, most of them recycled, to create the jewelry I sell.

This project started from a personal idea, and it is very comforting, because it allows giving a new life and a more beautiful appearance to objects that would otherwise be considered garbage and contaminate our territory. Therefore, I have taken on the task of collecting plastic caps or other plastic trash, alongside feathers and seeds. This represents the ongoing effort required to protect the world we live in.

For us, taking care of nature is nothing new, but it is necessary for survival. As we protect our territory from contamination or deforestation, we ensure our planting lands and the permanence of everything that is important to our culture.

On the other hand, the importance of family in our community allows collective initiatives capable of combining the safeguarding of our ancestral traditions with the environmental efforts and the search for highly feasible alternatives for livelihood.