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Co-design of touristic route in Colombian indigenous territory: GTA for landscape conservation and women transformation

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Abstract

Within the CGIAR Science Program on Multifunctional Landscapes implemented in indigenous territory of Cumbal (Colombia), gender research is examining the role of women in biodiversity conservation. In particular, using gender transformative approach (GTA) and Feminist Political Ecology (FPE) we explore to what extent women's participation and leadership in indigenous agro-tourism can foster nature conservation at landscape level, while addressing gender inequalities. FPE offers a critical lens for understanding how environmental inequalities are shaped by gender, interrogating essentialist associations between women and nature and foregrounding the patriarchal structures that condition women to care for their livelihoods and environments. When combined with GTA – which actively co-designs solutions with women, feminist movements, and youth – this pairing has the potential to generate cutting-edge, action-oriented knowledge at landscape scale.

This study builds on participatory workshops, semi-structured interviews, participatory observation and literature review. Through the participatory method of co-designing a touristic route, women involved in indigenous agro-tourism initiatives improved páramo (unique high-mountain ecosystem, located primarily in the Andes mountain range in South America,) conservation while strengthening their cultural identity, self-esteem, empowerment, networking and income. The capacity strengthening process led by indigenous women was key to achieve engagement, legitimacy and relevancy of the process. Nevertheless, challenges remain related to the lack of women participation in indigenous local authorities, women land access and ownership.

We discuss the role of women led agrotourism in local nature governance and policy incidence toward environmental justice. Besides, we examine the risk of gender-based violence associated with agrotourism in terms of gender expectation of women, occupational self-segregation, gender stereotypes, limited access to and ownership of land, amongst other. The co-design of touristic route as a participatory methodological tool appears as innovative and relevant to address both conservation and gender issues, that could be reproduced in other contexts.

This study address knowledge gap for its understudied geographic area (Latin America and Colombia), and in particular in Andean and indigenous contexts where the traditional social and cultural structures can limit women's ability to empower themselves.

Keywords: Biodiversity conservation, Colombia, Feminist Political Ecology , gender transformative approach, indigenous agrotourism

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