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Food sovereignty, gender and everyday practice: the role of Afro-Colombian women in sustaining localised food systems

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ABSTRACT

While social and political movements are the scale of action most often identified with food sovereignty-related struggles, everyday provisioning practices are critical for sustaining the distinctiveness and relative autonomy of localised food systems. We examine gendered provisioning in a Colombian, Afro-descendent community as a case study of how food sovereignty is enacted in daily life. Women's everyday food provisioning practices nourish households, sustain socio-cultural and ecological relationships, and maintain greater self-sufficiency within market economy integration processes. Deeper analysis of gendered provisioning highlights complexities, power relationships and challenges within localised food systems and refines understandings of gender dimensions of food sovereignty.

KEYWORDS

Food sovereignty; provisioning; gender; everyday practice; local food systems; Colombia; Chocó

Introduction

Social movements are the social and political action most often identified with food sovereignty struggles; however, everyday practice in food provisioning work is essential for sustaining localised, place-specific food systems and exercising some degree of autonomy from the global food system. In their everyday provisioning practices, women often undertake distinct, significant work that is frequently normalised within households and dismissed by society as secondary to, or less important than, higher profile, market-oriented activities (Lemke and Delormier 2017). Analysing women's everyday food provisioning practices highlights a dimension of food sovereignty struggles that has largely been ignored in the literature.

We contend that special attention to women's everyday practice adds valuable insights into how localised food systems are sustained and reproduced. In this paper, we examine gendered provisioning practices in an Afro-descendent community, Sivirú, in the Colombian Pacific. Their everyday, local food provisioning practices run counter to wider trends of greater integration into a globalised food system as well as various Colombian

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government policies that foster the industrialisation of food production (IPES-Food 2016; Oxfam International 2016). The importance of everyday provisioning practices in Sivirú resonates with the daily realities of other rural communities along the Colombian Pacific Coast, and very likely finds echoes elsewhere in the country and the rest of tropical, coastal Latin America. Food provisioning in these regions, particularly that carried out by women, is essential to nourishing households and communities as it provides sustenance, maintains socio-cultural and ecological relationships (Ministerio de Cultura and Fundación ACUA 2015, 2016), and enables greater self-sufficiency within market economy integration processes.

In our analysis of the provisioning dimensions of Sivirú's food system, we identify a range of activities in which women are the primary actors. These activities provide access to culturally important foodstuffs and maintain social relationships, traditions and ecological knowledge. As such, we argue that women's everyday provisioning practice is a distinct and powerful expression of food sovereignty that is vital to sustaining the functional capacity of localised food systems. Deeper recognition and engagement with how food sovereignty is constructed through daily life adds richness to the concept by providing salience to complexities, power relationships and challenges within localised food systems. Building knowledge around these under-studied components in turn helps identify and better understand women's important contributions to and central roles in enacting food sovereignty.

We begin by situating our research in the literature by highlighting the significance of everyday food provisioning as resistance, and thus central to food sovereignty, and the gendered dimensions of provisioning practices. Next, we describe our research methods, provide a brief overview of the regional context and explain key elements of the local food system, with particular emphasis on the components in which women are most active. In our discussion, we reflect on how a food sovereignty lens contributes to analysing this case as well as how approaching food sovereignty through the lens of everyday practice supports practical and analytical engagement with place specific, gendered dimensions of food sovereignty.

Food sovereignty through everyday life, food provisioning and resistance

Food sovereignty is broadly defined as, 'the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems' (Nyéléni Forum 2007). As La Vía Campesina stressed early on, food sovereignty means having 'the right to produce our own food in our own territory. Food sovereignty is a precondition to genuine food security' (1996, 3). It is a radical political framework aimed at transforming the global neoliberal industrial capital-intensive food system by re-embedding food systems so that local communities have more control and decision-making over the ways and means of food production, distribution and consumption. Food sovereignty emphasises the full realisation of the right to livelihoods for peasants, farmworkers, small-farmers and other rural people engaged in food production and provisioning, and prioritises ecological stewardship (Nyéléni Forum 2007).

Since introducing its peasant concept of food sovereignty in the mid-1990s, La Vía Campesina has worked with other social actors to consolidate an anti-capitalist global social

movement to resist and build socially-just and ecologically sustainable alternatives (Desmarais 2007). This includes, among other strategies, lobbying the United Nations General Assembly to adopt a Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other Peoples Working in Rural Areas. It is this scale of action – often associated with global, regional, national and/or sub-national social movements, international summits, national campaigns, protests and legislation – that an increasingly prolific food sovereignty scholarship has focused on, and around which the discourse and concept of food sovereignty tends to be linked.¹ However, resistance and alternatives to capitalist food system models also occur through everyday practice and the work that women and men do to sustain localised food systems embedded in local cultures, ways of life and biodiversity. Extending the food sovereignty framework to actively and intentionally include these everyday life dimensions strengthens the analytical power and potential of food sovereignty-informed policy to better support the priorities and needs of people living in rural contexts, such as Sivrú on the Colombian Pacific Coast.

La Vía Campesina's resistance has expanded understandings of the sociocultural, ecological and economic impacts of neoliberal globalisation. It has also raised awareness and visibility of peasant and other small-scale food producers' struggles and visions for social and environmental justice. Expansion of the food sovereignty framework has also allowed for the incorporation of diverse contributions, including visions of anti-capitalist alternatives from social actors who embrace food sovereignty as a political project. Despite these contributions, the concept of food sovereignty has been subject to a variety of criticisms.

Some of these criticisms may be roughly grouped as concerns over essentialisms and romanticisms. Critics argue that the food sovereignty framework tends to essentialise capitalist and non-capitalist relations. A resulting focus on enclosures (e.g. land grabbing) and geopolitical processes (e.g. free trade agreements) as chief contributors to the agrarian crisis is said to obscure the diverse ways that peasant producers actually participate in capitalist markets and local processes of accumulation (Li 2015). Food sovereignty proponents are also criticised for a tendency to romanticise the 'peasant' as a unitary, non-capitalist actor (Bernstein 2014). This results in a failure to grasp the significance of international markets to the wellbeing of small-scale farmers (Burnett and Murphy 2014), the ambiguities of the notion and practice of 'sovereignty' (Hospes 2014), and the important question of 'who is the sovereign' (Edelman et al. 2014). The family farm is extolled as an unproblematic production unit (Agarwal 2014) along with the capacities of peasant knowledge, labour and agroecological techniques to adequately respond to and satisfy the food needs of the growing world population (Altieri and Toledo 2011).

While these criticisms certainly suggest some limitations and contradictions within food sovereignty discourse, it is beyond the scope of this article to develop or address them in detail. Instead, we want to stress that much of the food sovereignty literature has paid too little attention to the sometimes-messy realities of what food sovereignty struggles look like in everyday practice. In doing so, an undervaluation of women's contributions to

¹Due to space limitations, we cannot do justice to these rich, extensive writings on food sovereignty struggles in both the grey and academic literatures. Instead, we encourage readers to visit La Vía Campesina's website (www.viacampesina.org) and search the following journals that have published various articles on food sovereignty: *Journal of Peasant Studies*, *Globalizations*, *Agriculture and Human Values*, *Third World Quarterly*, *Dialogues in Human Geography*, and the *Canadian Journal of Development Studies*, among others.

sustaining local food systems still common in development policy and practice may be perpetuated or unchallenged. We argue that, alongside international Food Sovereignty assemblies and academic conferences, are grounded constructions of food sovereignty that are enacted through the everyday provisioning work of women and men that is rooted in local histories, ecologies and cultures and without which the distinctiveness of local food systems and food traditions could not be sustained.

In her reflection on the importance of this localisation dimension of food sovereignty, Robbins (2015, 452) observes that:

Food sovereignty is a political discourse, a proposition and, in some ways, an abstract description of a desired system of agricultural production, distribution, consumption and social relations. In another sense food sovereignty is a grounded practice of concrete political, economic and social steps towards a specific vision for the food system and the actors involved in it.

Robbins' work is part of an emerging body of scholarship concerned with extending what is empirically and theoretically considered to be part of the food sovereignty movement through research focused on how food sovereignty comes alive in everyday life. Such enquiry has been variously articulated as 'quiet food sovereignty' (Visser et al. 2015), 'local food sovereignty' (Ayres and Bosia 2011), 'food sovereignty in everyday life' or a 'people-centred' food sovereignty (Figuroa 2015), 'lived experience of food sovereignty' (Ngcoya and Kumarakulasingham 2017), and 'resistance occurring in everyday life' and 'everyday practice' (Siebert 2020).

While distinct, these approaches share common threads: a focus on local and micro-scales of practice, lived experience, and local meaning-making situated within broader regional, national and global processes and structures. They also argue that these 'quiet' expressions of food sovereignty grounded in place and the daily struggles to feed a family or community, rather than being apolitical or lacking food sovereignty's political underpinnings, provide insights into the importance of lived experience in understanding how capitalism and the neoliberal food regime are engaged with, negotiated and resisted (Figuroa 2015).

Building on insights from Scott (1985), Fanon (2008) and others (Gibson-Graham 2008; Ong 2010), heuristics of everyday life direct attention to the production of meaning in food provisioning practice and how disruptions to societies and environments brought about through historical processes of colonisation, marginalisation and exploitation, most recently under the expansion of capitalism and neoliberalism, are experienced, reproduced, negotiated, engaged with and resisted through sometimes seemingly 'banal acts of daily subsistence' (Figuroa 2015, 502). Resistance in this sense reflects both Scott's (1985) everyday forms of resistance and expressions of adaptive resistance (McMichael 2015).

Attention to lived experience suggests that food systems should first and foremost be approached in terms of their social life. As Figuroa (2015, 503) puts it, 'food is the modality through which capitalism is lived and made tangible in everyday experience.' Expansions of capitalism are felt in rural food systems through growing demands for cash income, market competition for small-scale food producers, rural-urban migration, land and resource enclosure, as well as flows of remittances and other processes (Akram-Lodhi and Kay 2009; Wittman, Desmarais, and Wiebe 2010; Turner 2019). How small-scale food

producers negotiate their autonomy within the expanding influence of the capitalist mode of production has also been identified within the new peasantries literature as a vital political process of resistance (van der Ploeg 2018).

Looking at the everyday creativity, actions and tactics people employ to ensure their survival, and analysing how they craft resilient food systems while pursuing lives they value, may also point to gaps in the architecture of control exercised by the neoliberal food regime (Figueroa 2015; Robbins 2015; Lewis 2016; Davidson-Hunt, Idrobo, and Turner 2017; van der Ploeg 2018). Lewis's (2016) examination of women's domestic cooking in South Africa, for example, finds that while these responsibilities are usually part of women's prescribed social roles and thus are part of the subordination of women's reproductive labour within capitalism and patriarchal structures, some women find that these quotidian practices can provide spaces of creative agency, pleasure, authority and influence within the household, as well as within wider social spheres by shaping desires, sensibilities and relationships. Extending this insight into how power operates, not only through top down processes but also through individual and collective agency, food sovereignty can be approached as a relational concept in which 'sovereignty is not an extraneously existing object but is a *living process*' (Iles and Montenegro de Wit 2015, 482). Thus, food sovereignty is best understood as a historical material process reflecting the relational histories of people, place and their positionality within broader forces and structures of power. This is well captured by Schiavoni's (2017, 25) 'historical, relational and interactive (HRI) approach' in her detailed study of food sovereignty struggles in Venezuela.

Grey and Patel (2015) extend this thinking through their consideration of Indigenous movements and food sovereignty. Along with other scholars (e.g. Bradley and Herrera 2016; Mayes 2018; Daigle 2019), they conclude that for Indigenous Peoples, food sovereignty is part of their long history of resistance struggles for decolonisation and their determination to regain control over ancestral lands and resources, restore Indigenous foodways, and revive traditional economies. Importantly, as Daigle's (2019, 298) study of Anishinaabe food sovereignty demonstrates, understanding these struggles as being 'grounded in everyday practices of resurgence that are based on Indigenous ontologies' is absolutely critical. In this context, everyday food practices are conceptualised as everyday forms of resistance and resurgence linked to Indigenous cultural, political and legal orders seeking the protection and regeneration of Indigenous foodways and practices.

Provisioning, gender and resistance

The economic lens that dominates and focuses national and international policy-making on growing 'the economy' is clearly a factor in marginalising and attempts to obliterate the non-market aspects of traditional economies. Standard economic analysis often obscures the networks of social and cultural ideals in which economies are 'embedded', and that govern the activities of producing and distributing means of livelihood (Polanyi 1977, 2001). 'Provisioning' is the term generally attached to this understanding of economy (Narotzky 2005) and the expression we use in this article. Within this frame, traditional economies represent a dynamic between the activities of production and distribution on the one hand, and religious, social, cultural and other commitments on the other. Thus,

such economies are central expressions of identity, community, culture and values and are central to struggles for self-determination and anti-colonialism for Indigenous and other local peoples (Kuokkanen 2011; Grey and Patel 2015).

An additional bias shaping analysis of provisioning is an assumption that 'subsistence' practices are simple systems associated with deprivation. Indigenous Peoples and scholars, including Sahlins (1972, 1998) and others (Kuokkanen 2011; Peredo and McLean 2013), have powerfully critiqued this notion. Sahlins, for example, maintained that hunter-gatherer societies often enjoyed their own version of affluence while producing and distributing materials with aesthetic, religious and social significance. Furthermore, subsistence economies are multifaceted and include trading and 'markets', though these are not markets where prices are established by supply and demand. Markets and other exchanges, he points out, are based on the *use* value of what is exchanged, and the logic behind exchange is not the accumulation of capital, but rather the satisfaction of needs and maintenance of social relationships (Sahlins 1972, 83). This thinking is echoed in Kuokkanen's (2011, 219) definition of Indigenous economies as:

... the traditional and local economic systems of indigenous peoples [, which] include a variety of land-based small-scale economic activities and practices as well as sustainable resource management. ... At the center of the economic activity is not the exchange for profit or competition but the sustenance of individuals, families, and the community.

Traditional economies are a primary target of modernisation, colonialism and capitalist expansion. While efforts to destabilise, undermine and prohibit activities within traditional economies have a long history and have taken many overt forms, including dispossession of lands and resources, the modernisation discourse also persistently denigrates subsistence practices and other traditional activities as inefficient, inconsequential and relegates them with 'backwardness' and 'poverty' (Kuokkanen 2011; Peredo and McLean 2013). These converging pressures seek to coerce those who are engaged in traditional economies into the market economy. However, rather than traditional economies disappearing, many contemporary Indigenous and local peoples living in rural and remote areas operate within mixed economies in that their livelihoods blend engagement with capitalist markets with other provisioning practices (Peredo and Chrisman 2006). The relationship and interdependence between these economic systems are often misconstrued. The defence of non-capitalist provisioning is a central component of collective political struggles for self-determination, decolonisation and right to traditional territories, but is also often central to the immediate struggles for survival and wellbeing of individuals, families and communities (Peredo, McLean, and Tremblay 2019). These insights are important when analysing food sovereignty in the context of Afro-Colombian communities.

Around the world, women often play distinct and important roles in provisioning economies. Women tend to have specialised traditional ecological knowledge and are often primarily responsible for and engaged in distinct activities that vary between cultures and life stages, but are often linked with reproductive labour, household management and food provisioning, processing and sharing (Howard 2003; Leung, Zietsma, and Peredo 2014; Wall et al. 2018). Women's contributions and knowledge, however, are often under-recognised, undervalued and under-accounted for in policy and economic analyses (PWESCR 2011; IPES-Food 2016; Wall et al. 2018). The dovetailing of patriarchal structures with capitalist social relations that undervalue and render invisible or

insignificant reproductive labour contributes to a perpetual ‘muting’ of women’s work and knowledge. Consequently, women are particularly vulnerable when the functioning of traditional provisioning systems is negatively impacted by globalisation and other disruptions (Kuokkanen 2011; Federici 2014). The recognition of the important role that women play in supporting local food systems, as well as the disproportionate challenges they face within a context of the neoliberal food system, highlights the importance of examining the particular contributions of women within gendered provisioning systems.

Gender equality/equity is a critical element of the theory, practice and discourse of food sovereignty; indeed, it recognises that ‘women’s rights are non-negotiable’ (Patel 2012). However, while a promising literature is emerging,² there is still a research gap on the gendered dimensions of food sovereignty (Agarwal 2014; Masson, Paulos, and Bastien 2017). Our article contributes to this emergent literature by analysing women’s engagement in self-provisioning in the coastal community of Sivirú. In overlaying a focus on everyday practice and gendered provisioning in this case study, we highlight some of the ethical complexities as well as the market/non-market dynamics that can characterise local food systems, thus informing food sovereignty theory and practice.

Methods

We present a case study of gendered food provisioning from the Community Council of Sivirú, a small coastal village, in the Bajo Baudó Municipality, Chocó Department, Colombia. We draw on data from 22 semi-structured, multi-party interviews with 24 people (13 women and 11 men) on local livelihoods and local food systems, a focus group with nine female mangrove cockle harvesters, and participant observation at participants’ homes and on harvesting trips carried out in early 2018. Village participants were selected for the interviews through snowball sampling and referrals from key informants. The focus group was open to all cockle harvesters who wished to attend.

We also use survey data from 33 households in Sivirú that were collected as part of a regional household survey on natural resource-based livelihood practices that was conducted by the Interdisciplinary Centre for Development Studies at the Universidad de los Andes and MarViva, a regional non-governmental organisation, as part of the management planning process for a newly declared protected area in Bajo Baudó (MarViva 2018). The survey included questions on natural resource use, contributions to livelihoods, resource use importance rankings and household consumption and provisioning.

Sivirú was selected for this research because of the community’s participation in the aforementioned regional protected area planning process and the interest of community leaders in the research. Sivirú is also one of the larger population centres outside the municipal capital and has a relatively diverse economy with local livelihoods heavily dependent on natural resource-based activities, particularly fishing, agriculture and shellfish harvesting. As such, documenting livelihoods in Sivirú was deemed important to local and regional natural resource management decision-making as well as for the potential contribution to broader understandings of gendered provisioning practice in coastal Afro-Colombian descendant communities. All data were collected and transcribed in Spanish; English translations were done by the authors. Participants have been given

²See among others: Park, White, and Julia (2015), Conway (2018), Portman (2018), Bezner Kerr et al. (2019).

pseudonyms to protect their privacy and anonymity. This research was approved by Ethics Committees at Universidad de los Andes (Bogotá, Colombia) and University of Victoria (Victoria, Canada).

Regional context

Sivirú is home to approximately 200 households, nearly all of Afro-Colombian descent, situated in the community's Collective Territory about an hour by small motorised skiff from Baja Baudó's capital, Pizarro. Sivirú's collectively titled lands cover nearly 21,500 ha of low-lying mangrove forest and rivers flowing into the Pacific Ocean (CODECHOCO et al. 2017, 181). With temperatures averaging 26–28°C and average annual rainfall of 6,000 mm, the Chocó is one of the most humid, heavily forested and biologically diverse regions in the world (Ministerio del Trabajo and PNUD 2013). The Bajo Baudó population of 17,000 self-identifies as 67.4% Afro-Colombian (concentrated in Pizarro and rural coastal and estuary zones) and 32.5% Embera Indigenous People (concentrated inland in the watershed headwaters) (CODECHOCO et al. 2017, 174–5).

Following a long struggle for legal recognition, Afro-Colombian collective land rights were recognised by the Colombian State in the early 1990s (República de Colombia 1993), which began processes of collective titling that have enabled greater decision-making power over land and resource use by community councils (*Consejos Comunitarios*) (Asher 2009; Peña et al. 2017). Collective titling has improved living conditions and enabled the consolidation of long-term Afro-Colombian territorial planning projects (e.g. ethno-development plans, *planes de etnodesarrollo*). Although beyond the scope of this paper, access to agricultural land has been mediated by the interplay between the establishment of the collective titling process and the struggle against illegal groups trying to take control over the territory and its resources (Velez 2011). Access to the land is undoubtedly vital in structuring local and regional food systems and resource uses in the Chocó and elsewhere in Colombia.

Bajo Baudó has been deeply affected by Colombia's decades of armed conflict and associated violence against the civilian population perpetrated by right-wing paramilitary and left-wing guerrilla groups, which has continued in spite of the implementation of the 2016 Colombian Peace Accords. Human rights abuses include killings, forced displacement, child recruitment, deployment of landmines, and death threats (Human Rights Watch 2017). Illicit crop production, drug smuggling and illegal mining by criminal syndicates and illegal armed groups are also sources of violence and ecological destruction. In 2011, over 5,000 people were registered as forcibly displaced in Bajo Baudó, corresponding to nearly a third of the municipal population (Ministerio del Trabajo and PNUD 2013).

Nearly all mobility within the municipality and external trade is provided by small craft operating on river or sea. Over 55% of the population has never or only attended primary school (Ministerio del Trabajo and PNUD 2013, 33). Seventy-one percent has electricity (usually for six hours daily) (p. 38). Only 18% have piped water, and nearly all solid waste disposal is in waterways or ad-hoc dumps (p. 99). Because of concerns about industrial fishing, non-selective artisanal fishing practices, mangrove deforestation and over exploitation of wild harvested species, Bajo Baudó's eleven Community Councils came together in 2017 with state and non-governmental agencies to establish an Integrated Regional Management Area called the Enchantment of the Mangroves of Bajo

Baudó (*Distrito Regional de Manejo Integrado el Encanto de los Manglares del Bajo Baudó*). This is the largest marine protected area in Colombia and covers nearly 315,000 ha (MarViva 2018). The Integrated Regional Management Area aims to conserve ecological and cultural heritage values within a framework of sustainable use and community development.

In recent years, Bajo Baudó Community Councils have also enacted voluntary fisheries closures, in addition to adhering to nationally mandated closures. It is against this backdrop of historical and regional processes and the enabling context of collective titling processes that people living in Sivirú work to provision and sustain themselves, their families and their community.

Overview of traditional and contemporary coastal Afro-Colombian economies

Afro-Colombian communities in Bajo Baudó and the rest of the Colombian Pacific rely heavily on natural resource-based provisioning and have maintained distinctive cultures, resource use practices and forms of social organisation that support richly diverse and distinctive localised food systems (Escobar 2008; Asher 2009; Ministerio de Cultura and Fundación ACUA 2015, 2016; Oslender 2016). A Ministry of Labour and UNDP report (Ministerio del Trabajo and PNUD 2013, 13), however, describes the Bajo Baudó economy this way:

Agroforestry and fishing for self-provisioning developed through a smallholder framework form the municipality's economic base, which in this region of the country is synonymous with poverty and misery, because of the low competitiveness of agricultural business managed under this approach.

While Sivirú community members and local leaders identify many challenges that affect their wellbeing, most do not describe themselves as living in 'poverty and misery', nor do they see small-scale food production as the source of their problems. Rather, many take great individual and collective pride in their livelihoods, provisioning practices, and their associated distinct cultural identity.

Sivirú has adapted and retains a highly diverse economy in which small-scale agriculture, fishing and wild food harvesting persist as central activities. Local provisioning practices draw on multiple ecosystems and social networks (Figure 1). As many older research participants discussed during interviews, in the past, families lived on their agricultural plots further inland and came together for celebrations and special events in what today is the village of Sivirú. To access education and other services and because of growing insecurity as a result of the violence, families began to settle year-round in Sivirú during the last three to four decades. Subsequently, community members began to adapt their provisioning practices. While agricultural production continues on ancestral plots, fishing activities have shifted from rivers to estuaries and the coast, and hunting has declined. Cultivation of home gardens has also grown in importance for families no longer living in close proximity to their fields.

As evidenced through the livelihood survey and supported through interviews, most households combine fishing, agriculture and mangrove harvesting to provision their families. In addition to fish trade, commercial coconut production has been incorporated into the agricultural system in recent years, and paid work and remittances have also

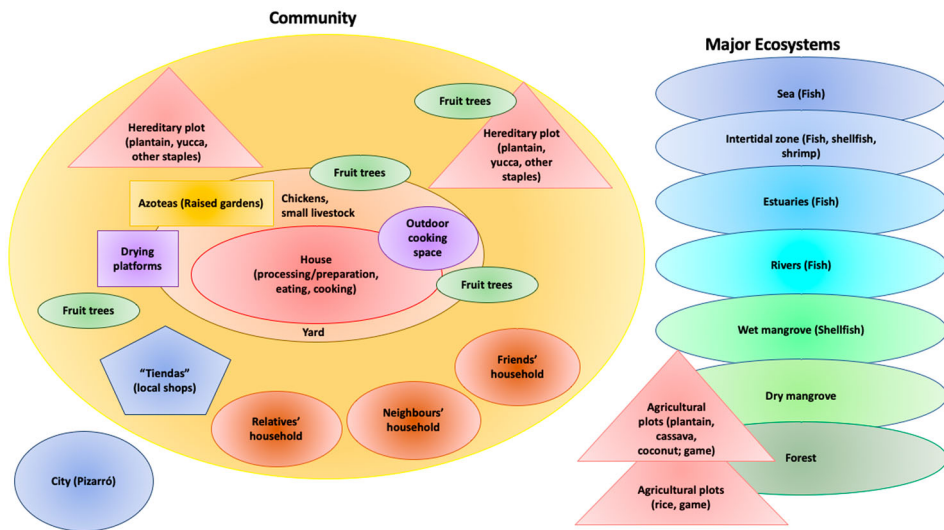


Figure 1. Household foodscapes in Sivrú (designed by the authors based on interview and survey data).

increased. More externally produced foods are also available now, including: eggs, frozen meat, dairy, fruit and vegetables, cooking oil, sugar, salt, wheat flour, cornmeal, rice, alcohol, sugar-sweetened drinks, cookies, chips, candy and other snack foods. These foods, as both staples and treats, form an important component of many household diets, particularly for those with predictable cash incomes.

Prior to the adoption of outboard motors in the 1980s, households were largely food self-sufficient. Exchange and gifting within family and friend networks were common provisioning practices and created social buffers against food deficits and times when families experienced shortages. These practices persist, although less extensively, today. As one key informant explained, older people placed great value on producing food to feed the family: 'Their happiness was having lots of plantain and taro (*papachina*, *Colocasia esculenta*) on the farm. ... Their biggest worry was having the family well fed.' Coming back from the farm, it is still customary to share the harvest with family and neighbours. As another informant, Julia, explained, 'When we bring lots of plantain from [our agricultural plot] upriver we go to each person and give them some good plantains that will last for a few days ... it is the same with fish.' A fisher elaborated, 'if I go fishing and capture fish and the neighbour doesn't have anything to eat, there's fish and I pass it to my neighbour. That's how we support ourselves here ... that is always the custom.'

As money is more actively used and needed for various expenses, some foods are also exchanged through cash trade, but often this is not done to generate profit. Rather, as community leader and key informant, Daniel, reflected:

Here you almost never buy fish. Usually, someone tells you to come and take a fish, or you might ask to buy a pound. They'll sell you the pound, but you'll bring home two or three instead ... here we also sell by tradition ... People go around with their little products, like water apples (*marañón*, *Syzygium malaccense*) or little sweets, like *cocada* [a coconut cookie-like sweet], to try to get a little money to buy what they need, but how they sell it is like a gift.

People acknowledge these community networks and practices as being important to their family diet, particularly in times of scarcity. One woman recalled,

I remember that my mom would go to the neighbour, whoever had something, and ask for a fish ... She would get the fish for us to eat, or eggs, sometimes you'd buy them, but without minding how many you took, or they would lend them to you.

The language of borrowing and lending foods is common, reflecting the reciprocal understanding embedded in the exchange.

Collective labour exchange is another mutual support system practised in this and other Afro-Colombian Chocó communities. *Mano cambiada*, which translates literally to 'exchanged (or changed) hands', also referred to in Sivirú by the colonial word *minga*, is one such sharing arrangement used for agricultural and other labour. As one community member explained, 'You tell the neighbours, "On Saturday I need your help with this work", and you give them food and they come and they help you with it ... and when they need that help, it's the same.' Although the frequency and extent of these labour sharing practices has declined, according to residents, they still remain an important social and cultural practice in the community.

Food provisioning and gender

Many provisioning activities have distinct gender and class dynamics that shape time allocations and availability of foods and other resources at the household level. While somewhat flexible, traditional gendered roles, responsibilities and specialisations are widely accepted. During community meetings and workshops, for example, men frequently introduce themselves as fishers and/or agricultural producers (*pescador* and/or *agricultor*), while most women referred to themselves simply as housewives (*amas de casa*) and, occasionally, as mangrove cockle harvesters (*piangüeras*). In this context, however, the term *housewife* implies a broader set of duties than traditional housework. Women engage in an entire range of provisioning activities.

Women's contributions to household food provisioning in Sivirú are shaped by their responsibility over domestic space and corresponding reproductive activities related to meal preparation, laundry, cleaning, and child and family care. Planning and preparing meals for the household (and sometimes extended family), for example, happens two to three times daily and normally requires one to two hours per meal. With these regular, but intermittent, activities, most women's spheres of activity are quite close to home. Women are the main resource users, managers and decision-makers in home garden production and shellfish harvesting, contribute to agricultural production, and are also involved in many secondary production activities, while men tend to dominate higher profile fishing and farming sectors, particularly for commercially oriented products, such as coconut and fish (Figure 2).

Rebusque is a Colombian Spanish term referring to livelihood strategies that rely on multiple sources of income, and are often classified as 'precarious' and 'informal'. Local residents tend to talk about their *rebusque* with reference to the idea of 'piecing together' a livelihood, including how they gain access to cash income. Home garden production and mangrove cockle harvesting are two important domains of the local food system that women engage with as part of their provisioning, or *rebusque*, activities.

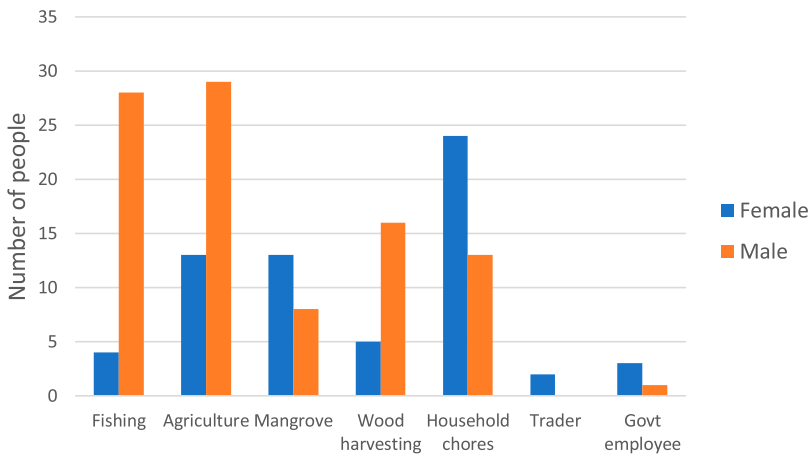


Figure 2. Livelihood activities in Sivrú reported by gender for all household members over 13 years of age (Cider-MarViva Survey Data).

Within the household, men and women do not normally share finances or have equal access to cash. Although men, who generally have better access to cash income through commercial fishing, agriculture or waged labour, may provide a household allowance that is managed by the female household head, this is not necessarily sufficient to meet household needs or cover a woman's personal expenses. Consequently, *rebusque* is important to some degree for all women; however, the need depends greatly on individual circumstances. As Fernanda, a middle-aged occasional cockle harvester with a male partner and children, explained, 'We women find ways of making an income (*las mujeres nos la rebuscamos*) because we don't like to depend on our husbands.' For female household-heads, provisioning the household is basic to survival, while women in more affluent households, or those who can pool their resources with other household members who have regular cash incomes, may not have the same necessities.

Women in Sivrú, however, have limited options for earning cash income, especially if they do not migrate to Pizarro or other urban centres. Mangrove cockle is one of the few tradable resources to which women have access. Some women also sell or trade products from their home gardens, particularly herbs, eggs and poultry, while others produce and sell sugarcane rum (*viche*). Some women also wash clothes or have small shops (*tiendas*), and a few have employment in education and health services.

Dalia, for example, is a single mother living with four of her seven children. She combines extensive home garden and small livestock production with mangrove cockle harvesting and agricultural production of rice and other staples. She sells her chickens, eggs, herbs and cockles and grows food to feed herself and her children. By contrast, more affluent women with extensive support networks are more likely to maintain a home garden exclusively for household use and might occasionally harvest cockles if they want to prepare a cockle dish or sell cockles to get extra cash for themselves or their household. In this way, class, even within a relatively narrow spectrum of inequality, is significant in shaping women's *rebusque* and their involvement in different components of the local food system.

Agriculture and home garden production

Foods from the agricultural plots make a major contribution to household diets and supply healthy, fresh produce that families value and take pride in eating and sharing within the community. According to key informants, most households maintain 1–3 ha plots located upriver, on average one hour by skiff from Sivirú. When weighted by frequency of production and importance ranking in the household survey, rice was identified as the most important crop grown in agricultural plots, followed by banana and plantain, tubers (e.g. *papachina*; yuca, *Manihot sculenta*), sugarcane, coconut, and corn, in addition to fruit such as lulo (*Solanum sessiliflorum*), pineapple (*Ananas comosus*), soursop (*Annona muricata*) and guava (*Psidium* spp.). Work on the agricultural plots also facilitates opportunities for small game hunting and wild food harvesting. Interview participants explain that both men and women are involved in agricultural production. Women contribute their labour primarily to planting and harvesting; they also prepare meals during planting and harvesting activities. It is during these seasons that extended families also sometimes collaborate together through *mano cambiada*.

Women are also responsible for all home garden production. While men may help with building infrastructure and heavy work, within the household division of labour, home gardens are recognised as women's purview. Home gardens are a feature in nearly all household food systems surveyed, although their complexity and dietary importance varies according to available land and time, contributions of other provisioning activities, and personal interest. Home gardens include four distinct spaces and practices: *azoteas* (raised gardens), fruit tree cultivation, small-scale staple food production, and small livestock rearing. Women support each other in these activities by occasionally lending and sharing produce, starter plants and seeds. As one woman emphasised, however, having one's own home garden is critical: 'If by chance you need something, you go to the neighbour and she'll give it to you, but only once or twice; it's important that everyone has their own little garden (*azotea*).'

Azoteas

Cultivating *azoteas* – small raised garden beds (Figure 3) – is an ancestral practice passed down matrilineally and remains an important and iconic feature of gardens in Sivirú and Pacific Afro-Colombian food systems widely (Ministerio de Cultura and Fundación ACUA 2015, 2016). Julieta explained how she learned to cultivate *azoteas* from the women in her family:

I've been at this a long time, practically since I was a little girl. ... I watched my mother, my grandmother, my aunt who did this. So, when I was a woman and, really an expert, I got the idea to do this, too.

Traditionally, the *azotea* beds are made from no-longer-seaworthy dugout canoes, but some are also made from wooden frames and supplemented with pots made from old buckets, cooking pots and other available vessels. The beds are raised 1.5 m or more above the ground on wooden supports. Special soil collected from anthills (*tierra de hormigas*), compost or mulch are used to fill the *azotea*. Production in the *azoteas*, and home gardens generally, is nearly always organic; during interviews women discuss this with pride, often mentioning health concerns related with chemical use.



Figure 3. A wooden framed azoteas, surrounded by papaya, coconut and other fruit trees (photo: C.J. Idrobo).

Azoteas are positioned near the house and planted with vegetables (e.g. onion, long onion, tomato, cabbage, squash, pepper, chilli peppers, white spinach) and many herbs important for the local cuisine. A category of herbs is known as ‘herbs of the azotea’ (*hierbas de la azotea*) and includes: two varieties of basil [purple basil (*albahaca morada*) and medicinal white basil (*albahaca blanca*)], *cilantro cimarrón* (*Eryngium foetidum*), *orégano* (*Origanum vulgare*), *poleo* (*Mentha pulegium*), *hierbabuena* (*Mentha spicata*) and others. Although artificial and industrially produced flavouring, such as Maggi® cubes, have become common across Colombia and are also used in Sivirú, many people greatly appreciate and intentionally use *hierbas de la azotea* in their cooking, saying they add a special flavour and are healthier. Julieta explained, ‘It is the flavour we have. You see a *sancocho* (traditional soup), and with these herbs that one grows – oh, the food turns out so delicious!’

Many cultivated plants are also used as traditional medicines and are greatly respected in the community. Fruit trees are also grown in yards for food and shade, alongside some ornamental plants, such as cotton, and cigar plants (*hoja blanca*; *Calathea lutea*), the leaves of which are used to wrap food in cooking. Maintenance and replanting of the *azotea* takes place every few months, depending on the lifecycle of the plants.

Fruit tree cultivation

A striking feature of Sivirú, and other Bajo Baudó communities, is that the physical space of the community is an edible landscape. With the exception of a few ornamentals, nearly every tree and plant is edible fruit bearing: avocado (*Persea americana*), banana (*Musa sapientum*), *borojó* (*Alibertia patinói*), breadfruit (*Artocarpus altilis*), cacao (*Theobroma cacao*), coconut (*Cocos nucifera*), custard apple (*Annona cherimola*), guava, ice-cream-

bean (*Inga edulis*), lemon (*Citrus* spp.), lulo, mango (*Mangifera indica*), papaya (*Carica papaya*), plantain (*Musa* spp.), orange (*Citrus sinensis*), soursop, *marañón*, and others. Seeds usually sprout spontaneously in refuse heaps and are transplanted and cared for when someone wants to cultivate them. Household ownership and rights over fruit tree harvests are recognised in the community, and people know whose trees are whose. Fruit is harvested and eaten by the household and sometimes sold or gifted by the owner's children around the community.

Small-scale staple food production

Some households also maintain small plots (e.g. 5–15 m²) around the community that are not necessarily within or adjacent to their yards. These are often inherited from other family members and are used to grow small quantities of staple food crops (e.g. plantain, banana, manioc and *papachina*). These plots are usually managed by women and provide important, though complementary, sources of food when it is not possible to reach larger agricultural plots up river, when food is needed on short notice, or if the family does not have agricultural plots.

Small livestock rearing

With greater availability of purchased meat and eggs and changes in community life, interview participants in Sivirú say there is less small animal production than before. Almost half of surveyed households, however, continue to raise chickens and ducks for meat, eggs and income and these are identified as extremely important for some interviewed households. Flocks belong to women who are responsible for their management and care, often with the help of children. The flocks feed on corn and household scraps and range in size on average from five to ten, but can be as large as 15–20 adult birds, depending on the household and the time of year. Single mothers, like Dalia (mentioned above), often prefer to raise chickens to sell, rather than eat the eggs, which is an important source of household income. They sell chickens for approximately 8 USD, which is close to the value of a day's labour in other activities (see below). Livestock represents a critical source of cash and protein depending on changing household needs.

Shellfish harvesting sub-system

Shellfish harvesting is widely considered to be extremely difficult, dangerous and gendered work with women undertaking the majority of it. Piedad, a key informant, reflected, 'Men say "I won't go [harvest cockles]" because it isn't men's work, it's women's work (*no es de hombres, es oficio de mujeres*).'¹ A few men occasionally harvest cockles with their female family members; however, this is less common and generally not regarded as a long-term livelihood activity. Mangrove cockle (*piangua*, *Anadara tuberculosa*) harvesting is the primary activity, while other resources [e.g. for periwinkle snails (*piacuil*, *Littorina* spp.) and several crab species (*tasquero*, *Goniopsis* sp.; *meón*, *Gecarcinus quadratus*; *jaiba*, *Callinectes arcuatus*)] usually harvested in conjunction with cockle harvesting, are seasonal (e.g. blue land crab, *Cardisoma crassum*), or take place less frequently (Figure 4). The exact number of Sivirú women and households involved in cockle harvesting is difficult to determine; there is a spectrum of engagement and dependence on this provisioning practice.

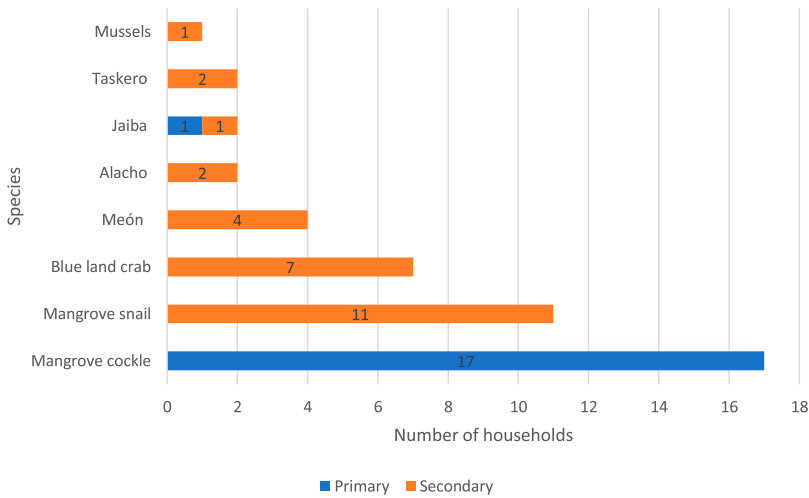


Figure 4. Species harvested in mangrove ecosystems ranked by importance to households (Cider-MarViva Survey Data).

Fifty-five percent ($n=17$) of surveyed households reported cockle harvesting. One interviewed cockle buyer estimated that he currently buys from 20 to 25 people and another reported buying regularly from ten, suggesting around 30 people from Sivirú are regularly involved in the cockle trade, while many other women may harvest exclusively or primarily for household consumption. Key informants estimated that four to eight women – most of whom are household heads and single parents, such as Dalia – depend on the sale of cockles as a primary source of cash income. Women with higher dependence on the cockle trade harvest almost daily. Piedad, whose harvesting activities fall in the middle of the spectrum, harvests once or twice a month, sometimes going out for several days in a row, and allocates about a third of her harvest (10–12 dozen cockles) for household consumption and sells the remainder (20–30 dozen). Others harvest only when they want to cook their harvest.

Harvesters explained that harvest volumes vary considerably depending on the season, tide and skill of the harvester. During waxing gibbous tides, harvests are larger and the harvesting trips are full day (dawn to 4:30/5pm), while on the waning crescent tide, the catch is lower and harvesting trips are shorter (e.g. 8am to 2pm). Occasional harvesters normally concentrate their efforts during the waxing gibbous tides, while women highly dependent on cockle income harvest throughout the month. Also, during the winter months, because of changes in water salinity, cockles bury themselves deeper in the mud and are not harvestable.

In the mid-2000s, Sivirú established a seasonal cockle harvesting closure to improve shellfish population health. In spite of initial uncertainties, the closures are generally now seen by *piangüeras* as having improved their harvests. However, as no consistent monitoring is done, it is impossible to know with certainty what current catch levels are, or how they compare with past catches. Older harvesters describe great abundance in the past, followed by declines, and now, perhaps, a period of modest recovery.

According to the harvesters we spoke with during the focus group and individual interviews, fifty to 60 dozen cockles, approximately 1.5–2 kg when shelled (and worth 9.75–

13.85 USD), is considered an excellent harvest for an experienced harvester. Less experienced harvesters report catches between 15 and 20 dozen (0.5–1 kg, worth 3.45–6.90 USD). During the study, the norm for experienced harvesters was 30–40 dozen a day (1–1.5 kg, worth 6.90–9.75 USD). As a point of reference, the normal wage for a male agricultural labourer in the community is 9.75 USD. When the commercial trade in cockles began several decades ago, buyers from Ecuador bought up to 6000 dozen Sivirú cockles weekly, paying 0.38–0.47 USD/dozen. Around 2015, trade shifted to the national market and buyers from the Chocó capital, Quibdó, and occasionally elsewhere in Colombia, began buying shelled cockles by weight for approximately 7.30 USD/kg. During the favourable tides, one of the principal buyers told us during an interview that he regularly purchases between 60 and 70 kg daily from Sivirú, and 10–15 kg daily during less favourable tides. He pays a resident to collect and ship the product to his fish shop where he resells the cockles for approximately 13.30 USD/kg to local restaurants and consumers.

Women also use cockles in local trade by selling to other households (0.38 USD/dozen in shell) and using cockles for gifting and barter exchange. For women and households with few resources, occasionally gifting cockles to neighbours allows them to maintain social reciprocal relationships. One *piangüera* explained, 'I share with my mom, my mother-in-law, and the neighbours ... There are times when one gives cockles to the neighbours.' Another *piangüera* elaborated how, especially in the past, women would stockpile cockles to exchange for other foods:

Before, since the cash factor was very difficult, before going [to harvest cockles] the person would go to do a little business and would say, "Neighbour I'm going to get cockles, give me this in exchange for cockles that I'll bring."

When asked to rank the relative importance of cockle uses, household survey respondents identified household consumption as the most important use, followed by local trade, including sale, gifting and reciprocal exchanges, and extra-local trade.

Women typically harvest together in small groups of four or five people, reaching the harvesting grounds by canoe or pooling gas money for a motorboat. Women harvest together not only for economic reasons but also for mutual aid in case of accident or injury, for companionship, to provide mentorship to new and young *piangüeras*, and as a safety measure because of the ever-present risk of encountering armed groups. Mariela explained, '[Now] I'm scared ... you should know, that sometimes there are armed groups and so one feels apprehension to go alone.'

Women enter the mangrove in long pants and long-sleeved shirts, but without footwear or gloves (Figure 5). Because of the physical challenge of climbing over and under the mangrove stilts and walking through, and getting stuck in, sometimes waist-deep, foul-smelling mud, harvesters carry as little as possible, usually only a bucket to collect the cockles. To harvest cockles, harvesters reach their hands and wrists into the soft, gritty mud around the mangrove stilts. They describe coming back exhausted, hungry and dehydrated, with head- and backaches, and their fingers sore and chaffed. These are considered normal, expected outcomes of harvesting. Moreover, there are other serious risks from encountering bumblebee catfish (*Pseudopimelodus zungaro*) – a fish with venomous pectoral and dorsal spines that lives in the mud – and venomous snakes. Women are frequently stung by the catfish resulting in painful, lingering injuries, including lasting swelling.



Figure 5. Women harvesting mangrove cockles between the mangrove stilts (photo: authors).

When they arrive back at the beach, they wash their catch in the shallow water, and upon returning home, prepare family meals and ready the *piangua* to sell. Other shellfish are usually harvested in smaller quantities and only for household consumption or by special order. Clams, snails, crabs and other shellfish are nutrient dense, of high cultural value and provide important sustenance, including acting as emergency or fall-back foods during times of scarcity. Several women described how they or their mothers would go shellfish harvesting so that the ‘family could eat more than plain rice.’ Most shellfish are prepared in thick stews and served with rice; however, there are many varied recipes for cockles and other shellfish, including *tamales* and *atollado* (similar to risotto). These dishes are some of the first foods people mention when asked about typical and favourite dishes, describing with detailed enthusiasm how to prepare them and how enjoyable they are: ‘This, yes, *this* is so good’, said María Rosa, relating how she likes to eat blue and *meón* crabs.

Fishing and secondary products

The complementarity between agricultural production and fishing is important for food and income security. Fish are most abundant between March and July, and primary target species are snapper (*Lutjanus* spp.), flathead grey mullet (*Mugil cephalus*), Pacific sierra (*Scomberomorus sierra*), croaker (*Ophioscion* spp.), weakfish (*Cynoscion reticulatus*), and shallow-water shrimp (e.g. *Trachypenaeus* sp.) and prawns (e.g. *Litopenaeus* spp.). In spite of the growing commercial fish trade, household survey respondents report household consumption as their most important use of fish, followed by local exchange, either through sale or gifting, and commercial trade (MarViva 2018).

While men primarily undertake fish capture, women are chiefly responsible for fish processing and preparation. Fresh fish is commonly fried or grilled and served with plantain,

yuca, or rice. Research participants pointed out that historically salted sun-dried fish and smoked fish were the primary fish preservation techniques available. Although smoking has declined, sun drying is still widely practiced. Beyond their practical importance, these techniques produce ingredients with distinct textures and flavours featured in dishes, such as *tapado de pescado* (dried fish steamed over boiled plantain) and soups. Several members of households involved in fishing explained in interviews that although prices are lower relative to fresh fish, dried fish is also sometimes sold to neighbours, Embera Indigenous peoples coming to trade, or urban buyers for around 2.50 USD/lb.

Additionally, the majority of Sivirú households produce sugarcane rum (*viche*) three times a year and sell it by the bottle (750 ml/2.50 USD) or 5 gallon measure (41.00 USD) locally, as well as to people from neighbouring communities and in Pizarró. *Viche* is also central to traditional medicine in Afro-Colombian communities in the Pacific, as it is used to produce medicinal plant tinctures.

Gendered provisioning practice as a food sovereignty perspective: theoretical and practical implications

The everyday provisioning practices of Sivirú women, we contend, enact food sovereignty by helping sustain a localised food system deeply embedded in social-ecological relationships that reflect local culture and ecological knowledge. While several commercial food products leave the community and many products also flow in, local food provisioning is essential to the survival and wellbeing of many households and is a part of the social and cultural fabric of the community. Re-aligning the food sovereignty lens to everyday practice helps give salience to women's expressions of resistance and the under-recognised work rooted in specific cultural contexts, places and ecosystems around which food systems are built, adapted and sustained. This has theoretical as well as practical significance.

From a theoretical perspective, such an approach demands nuance, countering the critiques of food sovereignty as essentialist and shedding light on how power and class inform how daily struggles for sustenance are experienced. Furthermore, the lens of food provisioning practice also helps make visible the role of women in small-scale food systems in the production and harvesting of food, sustaining food production spaces, maintaining seeds and genetic and culinary diversity, and ensuring the continuity of transformation and exchange processes that have deep cultural value. These contributions are often ignored in analyses of social movements' struggles for food sovereignty.

When considering what constitutes work within the food sovereignty frame, the political nature of that work is a critical area of reflection (Figueroa 2015; Visser et al. 2015; Siebert 2020). We argue that women's everyday provisioning practice, while often normalised and undervalued, is highly political in at least two ways. Firstly, when situated within the regional and national context of persistent violence and forced displacement, state neglect, demographic trends of rural to urban migration, and growing pressure to integrate into the market economy, any work that people do to stay in their territory is a critical form of resistance. In spite of significant challenges, many people have chosen to remain in Sivirú, invest in sustaining their families and community and champion their visions for a better future, rather than move to the city. While the term 'food sovereignty' is not part of the regular lexicon of community members or leaders (as is the norm in many places were

the term has not been promoted through civil society groups and where opportunities for exposure to the term are limited), many aspects of the concept resonate strongly with the ways self-determined development priorities are discussed locally, particularly the pursuit of dignified lives and livelihoods and the role of local foods. Local production of culturally meaningful foods provisioned through home gardens and wild food harvesting, and the culinary expressions these activities and associated traditional knowledge afford, are integral parts of local identity that people associate with their individual and collective well-being, and their connections with their ancestral territories. These also are central to their aspirations for the future.

Secondly, the logic of production within women's provisioning practice is distinct from capitalist production as the key objectives are social and cultural reproduction. Through the production of food, women reproduce spaces and practices that sustain relationships among family and other community members and with their territory that make living in that territory viable. Sometimes this involves the generation of cash income, but it is not the only or dominant motivation in food provisioning work. These strategies, while sometimes intersecting with and including capitalist markets, transcend logics related to income generation and capitalist accumulation (Gibson-Graham 2008).

Local food production for local consumption allows community members to maintain some degree of independence from the capitalist market economy, in spite of the need for cash to access some material goods. Access to market foods can be very important for some households, including by providing alternatives in the event of local supply shortfalls and allowing access to foods that are not locally available. However, *dependence* on market foods can limit the range of choices available to providers within a household over the long term because of the associated need for cash income and can negatively impact the nutritional quality of local diets (Turner 2019).

In Sivirú and other rural coastal communities where in-situ opportunities to earn cash income are irregular and limited, maintaining access to food through non-capitalist market economies can be a vital component of one's livelihood and a significant factor in the degree of autonomy over everyday and major life decisions one has, including where and how to live (Davidson-Hunt, Idrobo, and Turner 2017). The significance of the choice to stay in one's home territory should be understood within the regional context (Idrobo and Johnson 2020). While the Colombian Pacific has been integrated into global markets since the colonial period through extractive industries, particularly mining and logging, market integration has accelerated and deepened in recent decades (Asher 2009). This has greatly increased access to goods and services that people need and value; however, it has also been intertwined with the penetration of the illegal drug trade, illicit resource extraction, forced displacement and other forms of violence against the civilian population. Port cities, such as Buenaventura to the south, and other urban centres, like the Chocó Department Capital of Quibdó, most integrated with national and international market economies and where rural populations have been forcibly displaced as a result of the armed conflict are seen by many research participants as hotbeds of violence, insecurity and vulnerability to urban poverty (Nicholls and Sánchez-Garzoli 2011; International Crisis Group 2019). This adds weight to the significance of food provisioning in increasing the range of options available to people in Sivirú.

While predominantly male provisioning activities such as agriculture and commercial fishing tend to receive more recognition and support from state and non-state actors,

women in Sivirú play vital roles in sustaining localised food systems and the local economy through their food production and harvesting activities and their work of planning and preparing meals. Similar to Lewis's (2016) findings elsewhere, many Sivirú women find within these activities spaces for the exercise of creative agency, pleasure, authority and influence. These individual and collective everyday practices are integral to maintaining and strengthening the complex traditional ecological knowledge, biodiversity, social relationships and cultural practices that make the Sivirú food systems distinctive and capable of sustaining families, communities and lifeways. Many of the features discussed here also resonate strongly with other Pacific Coastal Afro-Colombian food systems (Ministerio de Cultura and Fundación ACUA 2015, 2016), thus reinforcing the importance of better recognising and supporting these everyday provisioning practices.

Scholars and proponents of food sovereignty point to the challenges of deepening food sovereignty in diverse contexts and at multiple interrelated scales (Iles and Montenegro de Wit 2015; Ngcoya and Kumarakulasingam 2017). Examining everyday practice and lived experiences of food provisioning allows an exploration of the possibilities and challenges surrounding food sovereignty in contexts such as Sivirú. As Ngcoya and Kumarakulasingam (2017, 486) suggest, broadening the lens of food sovereignty analysis beyond 'loud' political processes, '... allows us to conceive of food sovereignty as a situation produced by historical constellations of power, and the response to that situation under conditions of constraint.' Food sovereignty movements and scholarship have long been concerned with gender and the participation of women, particularly with respect to their representation in La Vía Campesina and member organisations (Desmarais 2007); however, as Bezner Kerr et al. (2019) note, few place-based empirical studies on food sovereignty apply a gender analysis. Our analysis of women's provisioning activities builds on this scholarship and extends the analysis into everyday practices of food sovereignty that sustain localised food systems.

On one hand, recognising women's muted contributions provides new insights into how food sovereignty is actualised not only through regional or national mobilisations, but also, and perhaps predominantly, through everyday provisioning practice. Women's knowledge and labour in cultivating home gardens in Sivirú, for example, provides access to fresh vegetables, fruit, herbs, protein, medicines and sometimes income or exchangeable goods that in turn enable access to other foods and maintain social security networks within the community. The fresh herbs that women cultivate are an iconic, valued feature of local cuisine that cannot be easily replaced by commercial products without impacting local perceptions of food quality and health. Aligned with other rural contexts undergoing dietary transition as their diets progressively integrate store-bought foodstuffs (Turner 2019), many in Sivirú express concern over a rising incidence of non-communicable diseases, such as high-blood pressure and diabetes, that are related to unhealthy diets high in salt, sugar and saturated fats. Our findings also highlight the importance of home garden production to local perceptions of wellbeing.

Examining women's provisioning work also highlights the challenges that they face, the complexity of their livelihoods and the relationships between their livelihood options and wellbeing. Mangrove cockle harvesting is an example of how one resource can be the linchpin of many women's *rebusque* and at the same time underscores the differences among women in the community and complexities of 'choice', empowerment, and benefit (Agarwal 2014; Guerra et al. 2017). The significance of this activity for women

who choose to harvest occasionally is distinct from those who harvest cockles as often as possible to sustain themselves and their dependents. Women describe cockle harvesting as part of their identity, calling themselves *piangüeras*, and this work, which is universally recognised as difficult and hazardous, also endows certain respect and authority to the women who undertake it – all characteristics of mangrove cockle harvesting also documented elsewhere (Ochoa Camacho et al. 2011). In gaining access to culturally appreciated foods they otherwise would not have, community members in Sivirú, Quibdó and elsewhere benefit greatly from the knowledge, labour and risks assumed by *piangüeras*. However, for *piangüeras* themselves, the exposure to hazards comes with costs to their health and needs to be situated within the context of the limited range of options available to them. As Bezner Kerr et al. (2019) stress in their gender analysis of agroecological practices in Malawi: to what degree are practices that maintain or rebuild valued ecological relationships and cultural practices providing more socio-ecologically just alternative pathways to capitalist globalisation or simply reproducing unequal, oppressive gender relations? Examining the everyday provisioning work that women undertake helps increase recognition of their contributions, sheds light on the complexities involved, and may highlight development strategies and pathways that enhance women's and the communities' wellbeing.

It is notable, for example, that mangroves and mangrove cockle conservation are a focus of local resource management and protected area planning. Consequently, initiatives are underway to regulate cockle harvests through community-level voluntary closures, education initiatives with *piangüeras* to establish shell size minimums, and zoning processes linked with the Enchantment of the Mangroves Protected Area. The focus here and in other regions has been on ecological conservation and less attention is being directed at improving harvesting and exchange conditions for harvesters (Lucero, Cantera, and Neira 2012). A challenge of balancing ecological conservation with local livelihoods is that the greatest harvesting pressure is in the areas closest to the community because of relative ease of access and safety concerns. If harvesters' concerns are not taken meaningfully into account in conservation planning, women without access to other livelihood opportunities or capital for motorboats and gas will be disproportionately impacted by loss of access to their harvesting grounds. Similarly, exposure to hazards, such as bumblebee catfish, could be reduced by working with *piangüeras* to design appropriate and functional safety gear, such as durable protective gloves. Improving the prices that women who sell cockles receive may also contribute to enhancing their livelihoods.

Conclusions

In the Bajo Baudó municipality, regional level development projects for resource use planning and conservation involve increasing control over the food system by creating the legal conditions to regulate usership and access, particularly over coastal and marine resources. Supporting artisanal fishing as a small-scale food production activity is a key driver of the Integrated Regional Management Area and other processes; however, the everyday, customary provisioning activities of women undergird many aspects of the localised food system. The secondary attention given to women's provisioning work by state and non-state actors, including at the community level, suggests that women and their households may be disproportionately impacted by regional food sovereignty-related

territorial planning efforts if their activities and needs are not carefully and meaningfully taken into consideration in planning.

Examining food sovereignty through everyday practice makes visible the fact that Sivirú's localised food system draws upon a very rich biodiversity base in terms of edible species and the ecosystems where they can be found. Access to many of these species and their benefits is deeply intertwined with gendered knowledge and practices. Looking at everyday practice, thus, also highlights possible contradictions between micro and macro food sovereignty work. Recognising how women's economic activities and everyday practice contribute to local and regional food sovereignty struggles helps extend the lens of food sovereignty analysis and domains of action to better understand women's work and their livelihood activities.

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