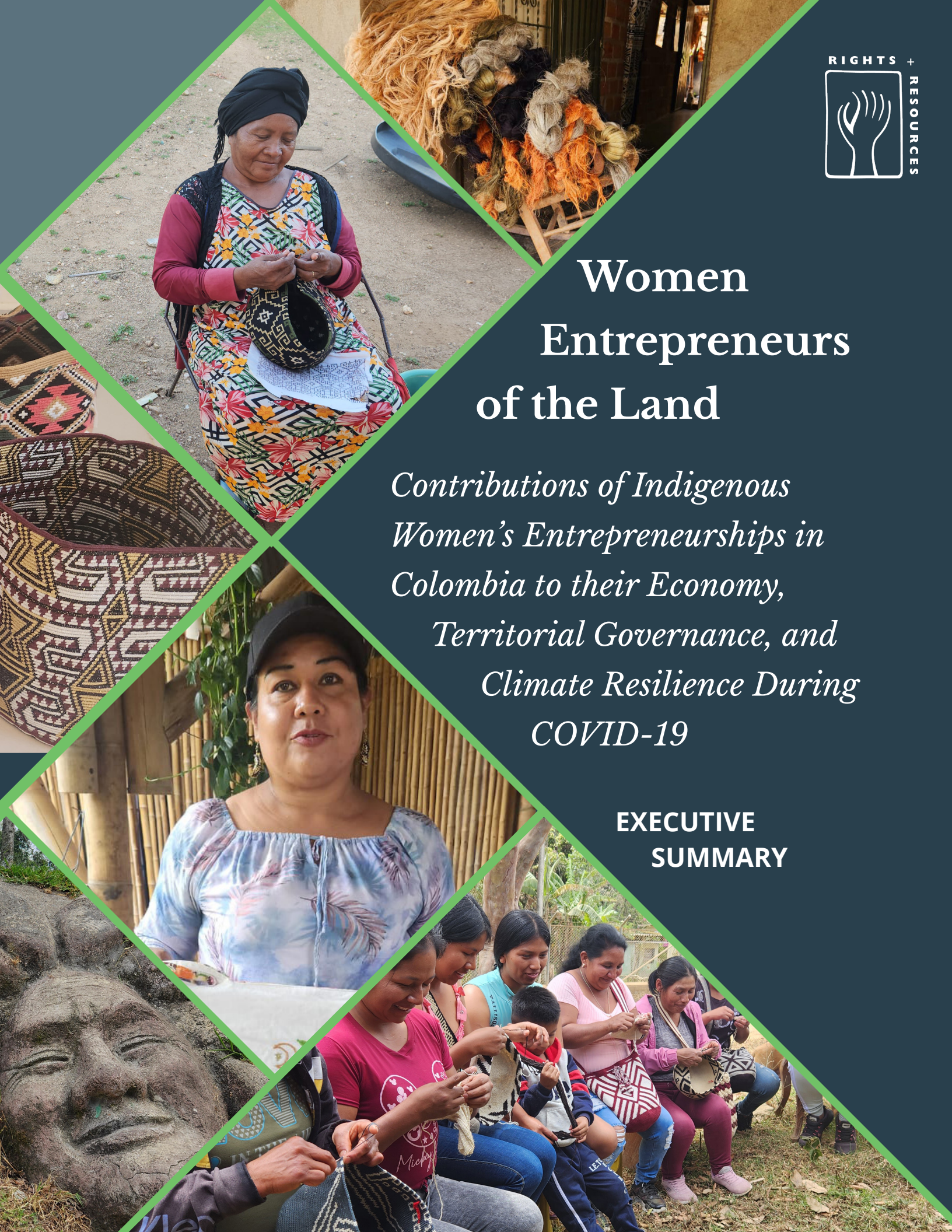


Women Entrepreneurs of the Land

*Contributions of Indigenous
Women's Entrepreneurships in
Colombia to their Economy,
Territorial Governance, and
Climate Resilience During
COVID-19*

EXECUTIVE
SUMMARY



COVER PHOTOS (TOP TO BOTTOM)

➤ Yarns of the Association of Kankuamas Indigenous Artisans (ASOARKA), Kankuamo, Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta; Artisanal Association Foundation (KALEME), Uribia, La Guajira; Weavings of KALEME; Member of Rooting Our Ancestral Knowledge (ENRAIZANDO); Location: northern Cauca, near the headquarters of the Association of Artisans and Craftsmen of Cauca (ENREDARTE CON IDENTIDAD); Members of ENREDARTE, northern Cauca region.

All photos by Angélica Maria Lesmes for RRI.



› ENRAIZANDO, formed by Embera Chami women from the department of Caldas, Colombia, who have production lines in ancestral medicine, weaving and clothing, handmade toiletries, food production, etc. Photo by Angélica María Lesmes for RRI.

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The research in Colombia was developed by: Angélica María Lesmes Cabiata

The following people provided valuable information for the development of the research: Elisa Canqui and Francisco Perez

The following organizations contributed to the development of the research:

- › Association of Artisans and Craftsmen of Cauca (*Asociación de Artesanas y Artesanos del Cauca*, ENREDARTE). Municipalities of Corinto, Jambaló and Toribio, Department of Cauca.
- › Association of Kankuamas Indigenous Artisans (*Asociación de Artesanas(os) Indígenas Kankuamas*, ASOARKA). Municipality of Valledupar, Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, Department of Cesar.
- › Artisanal Association Foundation (*Fundación Asociación de Artesanas*, KALEME). Municipality of Uribia, Department of La Guajira.
- › Rooting Our Ancestral Knowledge. Following the Ancestral Footprints (*Enraizando Nuestros Saberes Ancestrales. Tras las huellas ancestrales*, ENRAIZANDO). Municipality of Riosucio, Department of Caldas.

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INTRODUCTION

The Rights and Resources Initiative (RRI) is a global coalition of over 150 organizations that supports the recognition of the collective land, forest and resource rights of Indigenous Peoples, Afro-descendant Peoples, local communities, and the women and youth within these groups. Since 2018, the RRI coalition in Latin America has emphasized the importance of better understanding the roles the women in these communities play in their own economies and how this contributes to territorial governance, women's empowerment, and the strengthening of their leadership.



► ASOARKA, formed by Indigenous women from the Kankuamo Resguardo of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. Photo by Angélica María Lesmes for RRI.

In recent years, the fundamental role of Indigenous Peoples' leadership and ancestral knowledge in the development of their economies and the survival of their Peoples has been increasingly recognized. Communities are organized to foster economies from an Indigenous perspective and meet at least two needs: food sovereignty and security and income generation. These initiatives are created based on their knowledge, ancestral practices, and their own forms of organization and administration.

In the ecosystem of these entrepreneurship initiatives, initiatives emerge and are led exclusively by women who, based on their shared knowledge and interests, look beyond the attainment of income and food. **With their entrepreneurship, women foster and strengthen their leadership in the permanent search for survival strategies, sense of belonging, and intergenerational knowledge as strategies for the survival of culture, identity, autonomy, and territory.**

In 2023, the RRI coalition conducted the study, *Contributions of Indigenous Women's Entrepreneurships in Colombia to their Economy, Territorial Governance, and Climate Resilience During COVID-19*, whose results are shared in the present document. The research was conducted in eight case studies: four in Colombia and four in Peru.

The methodology adopted for the studies was collaborative, comprehensive, and adaptive, allowing for a deep and contextualized understanding. It sought a detailed view of the contributions of Indigenous women-led economic entrepreneurship to local economies, territorial governance, sustainable natural resource management and resilience to climate change and pandemics such as COVID-19.

The methodology included: the case studies; review of secondary information; definition of the conceptual framework and analysis variables; identification of primary sources; elaboration of methodological tools; field data collection; data organization and analysis; and validating and sharing the results.

ENTREPRENEURSHIPS ANALYZED

Artisanal Association Foundation (Fundación Asociación de Artesanas, KALEME)

 Municipality of Uribia, Department of La Guajira

 Handicraft products of Wayuu origin

 200 Wayuu women

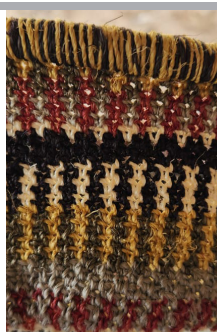


Association of Kankuamas Indigenous Artisans (Asociación de Artesanas(os) Indígenas Kankuamas, ASOARKA)

 Municipality of Valledupar, Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, Department of Cesar

 Kankuamas crafts based on fique

 212 Kankuamas Indigenous women



Rooting Our Ancestral Knowledge. Following the Ancestral Footprints (Enraizando Nuestros Saberes Ancestrales. Tras las huellas ancestrales, ENRAIZANDO)

 Municipality of Riosucio, Department of Caldas

 Ancestral medicine, fabrics, and clothing; artisanal hygiene products and Emberá foods

 180 Emberá Indigenous People



The selection criteria for the case studies at the country level accounted for the leadership processes of Indigenous women with different production lines belonging to diverse Indigenous Peoples.

Association of Artisans and Craftsmen of Cauca (Asociación de Artesanas y Artesanos del Cauca, ENREDARTE)

 Municipalities Corinto, Jambaló and Toribio, Department of Cauca

 Nasa crafts

 38 Nasa Indigenous women



STUDY RESULTS

Contributions of the entrepreneurship to Indigenous identity

Three complementary processes of Indigenous identity have been carried out through the entrepreneurship:

1. The recovery of Indigenous women's identities through the rehabilitation of practices and knowledge, empowerment, political training, and support networks. Entrepreneurships are valued as catalysts of ancestral knowledge and the intergenerational transmission of knowledge and practices.
2. The promotion of the transmission of Indigenous women's experiences and visions of the future, including their multifaceted relationship with territory; the recognition of the rights of Indigenous Peoples; the tangibility of political projects for the recovery of identity; and the reparation of the violent history against Indigenous Peoples.
3. The strengthening of identity by increasing the visibility of Indigenous Peoples through the products and commercialization processes around them. **Indigenous products carry a life history, a concept of territory, and a solidarity approach that is increasingly recognized globally.**

Convergences of the four entrepreneurship

The systematization of the studies allows us to identify the convergences of the four cases in relation to the entrepreneurship' different strengths, opportunities, weaknesses, and threats.

Strengths

- › **Safeguarding traditional knowledge:** The four entrepreneurship in Colombia identify i) the conservation of traditional knowledge; ii) the processes of knowledge recovery and conservation; and iii) the cultural identity and sense of belonging both in the production lines they lead and in the use and meaning of Mother Earth, as strengths. This coincides with the integral concept of Good Living and the strong relationships these women have established within their own economies.
- › **Solidarity and cohesion building:** Another strength of the four entrepreneurship is their organization and distribution of labor, which emphasizes solidarity and the strength of Indigenous women's unity around production.



"If only there were electricity in every house, so we could work there ... right now we need solar panels, because with those we could work until 10 o'clock at night."

—Fernández Ipuana, member of KALEME

Opportunities

- › **Expansion of resources and strengthening of the network:** A joint opportunity is the management of resources and support to strengthen the entrepreneurship, in accordance with their needs, for seed capital and capacity building for strategic work. Even though all the entrepreneurship have received financial or technical support, continuing to manage and expand their scope provides an opportunity for growth.
- › **Greater visibility of entrepreneurship:** This opportunity is linked to the entrepreneurship's visibility from the production lines. Beyond commercial visibility, the entrepreneurship propose the recognition of their production practices as cultural heritage and sustainable.
- › **Market expansion:** The commercialization and market expansion of the entrepreneurship's production lines is identified as an opportunity to expand communities' positive economic and social impact.

Weaknesses

- › **Commercialization:** In the cases of ENREDARTE, ASOARKA and EN-RAIZANDO, there is a weakness in marketing that prevents their entrepreneurship from expanding their capacity for action at both the production and social levels. **Some causes of this weakness include the lack of appreciation of local products (handicrafts), the lack of qualified personnel to promote marketing, and packaging and regulatory restrictions for the entrepreneurship's inclusion in local and regional markets** (for example, sanitary barriers to compliance with the law).
- › **Lack of access to services and roads:** In the case of KALEME, the weaknesses identified refer to a lack of access to basic services, such as electricity, potable water, and basic sanitation, which impact the production conditions of handicrafts as their communities are located in desert areas that are difficult to access by road.

Threats

- › **Market competition:** The main threat to the Indigenous women's entrepreneurship is competition with other individual or collective entrepreneurship. In the cases of ASOARKA and ENREDARTE, this threat is highlighted by other entrepreneurship projects and intermediaries present in their entrepreneurship's zones of influence, which compete by selling low-quality goods at lower prices, hindering the commercialization of their products. KALEME faces a similar situation, but the impact of competition and intermediaries is greater, as it can eventually affect the volume of handmade products that must be guaranteed to their exclusive customers.



› Weaver at KALEME. Wuayuu family, Ipuana clan. Photo by Angélica María Lesmes for RRI.



► ENRAIZANDO, formed by Embera Chami women from the department of Caldas, Colombia, who manage production lines in ancestral medicine, weaving and clothing, handmade cleaning products, and food production. Photo by Angélica Maria Lesmes for RRI.

- **Recurrence of armed conflict:** It is important to note that ENREDARTE and ASOARKA identified the resurgence or recurrence of armed conflict as a threat, given the context of violence experienced by the women of these entrepreneurship and the dynamics of restructuring control territories where armed groups are operating extrajudicially have been deployed. In the case of ENRAIZANDO, the women have been victims of violence and the armed conflict, but they do not foresee a resurgence of violence in the territories in the short- and medium-term. They are currently in the process of reparation and healing.

Contributions of the entrepreneurship to local economies

The development of their own production systems for both agricultural products and value-added products has enabled Indigenous women and their families and communities to generate community dynamics of self-governance aimed at promoting their own economies, producing goods for trade and personal consumption, and generating surpluses for marketing, strengthening both the economies of Indigenous Peoples and commercial short circuits.

In general, the entrepreneurship support economic autonomy, with the ASOARKA and ENREDARTE entrepreneurship valuing this contribution the most. Economic empowerment and its contribution to the family economy by boosting local marketing dynamics is an important contribution of the entrepreneurship since the income generated, although temporary, is used to secure food and other necessities. The entrepreneurship also contribute to the local economy by ensuring food security and producing healthy foods that are traded, sold, or used to offer food services or generate income to access them.

The entrepreneurship also highly value the development of alliances and networks with communities. This facilitates the trade and barter of products while establishing solidarity networks to boost the production of Indigenous goods, and in turn generate solidarity among women.

The entrepreneurship also promote equality, although efforts must continue so that true parity, complementarity, and duality between men and woman can be achieved economically and in decision-making.

The four entrepreneurship were generally found to provide informal and temporary jobs characterized by low and sporadic income. The KALEME entrepreneurship is an exception, providing steady employment and income as an exclusive, high-volume supplier of goods.

The commercialization of the four entrepreneurship' products ranges from the local to the international level. ENRAIZANDO conducts commercialization at the local level among families and communities. However, it has great potential to expand both its production base and its market reach. The ENREDARTE and ASOARKA entrepreneurship have advanced in both regional and national commercialization, with these levels providing their main markets.

ENREDARTE has already begun exporting its products, but the continuity of its market has been difficult to sustain given the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on trade. The difficulties that ASOKARTA's entrepreneurs perceive include the procedures and high cost of export shipments.

KALEME only conducts commercialization in the international market using two types of channels: as a supplier of GUANABANA Handmade, which demands handmade products for exclusive small-volume sales, mainly to clients in China and Thailand, with shipping and distribution costs assumed by the clients. In both cases, the prices set by the entrepreneurship projects cover the costs of production, administration, and taxes.

ENREDARTE, ENRAIZANDO and KALEME have greatly contributed to reducing inequality and exclusion in Colombia. This consideration reflects these entrepreneurship' importance for women in improving living conditions and providing an alternative to the poverty and violence the women of ENREDARTE and ENRAIZANDO—and Indigenous Peoples more broadly—have experienced.



“We are empowering ourselves as people, as women, and also as members of the community. So I think it has been very important to make our cuisine known, to make our work with seeds known. I think that also makes us very, very strong, which makes the organization strong and the community strong.”

—Maria Luz Bartolo, ENRAIZANDO

Contributions of the entrepreneurship to territorial governance

Participation in decision-making and implementation defines the self-governance of Indigenous Peoples in Colombia. Women identify the entrepreneurship as a means of generating territorial governance through leadership at home, in the community, and in their own decision-making spaces.

Although differences exist in the governance and entrepreneurship of Indigenous Peoples, the latter are an economic and productive extension of territorial governance, which complement the multicultural and intercultural actions that the communities have been developing in their territories and in decision-making spaces at the regional and national levels.

The entrepreneurship have generated deep transformations in Indigenous women's approaches to life. **The self-esteem, confidence, and self-perception of women as agents of change and leaders in production processes and in the intergenerational transmission of knowledge have increased, breaking with stereotypes and patriarchal models implanted among Indigenous Peoples** which assume that solely men can participate in economic activities and contribute to the family economy.

For ASOARKA and ENREDARTE, the entrepreneurship have contributed to the valuation of women's roles within the family, in community decision-making, in caring for territory, and in Indigenous resistance against armed conflict.

In general, the entrepreneurship have led to positive changes in Indigenous women's knowledge and skills, and helped generate new sources of income, catalyze greater independence, and promote broader appreciation of their participation in decision-making spaces.

At the same time, **the entrepreneurship promote intergenerational knowledge transfer and strengthen relationships between more experienced women entrepreneurs, community youth, and the territories.**

Women's leadership in these entrepreneurship and their appreciation within the family have incentivized the involvement of men and youth in these processes. In all the case studies, only Indigenous women were involved in these projects but men have also started joining the work teams in recent years. This evolution is based on the concept of duality and complementarity, a principle of Indigenous Peoples' laws of origin.

All the entrepreneurship have facilitated the development of strategies or norms that promote the sustainable use of natural resources and territorial conservation, which translates into greater community governance. The entrepreneurship have contributed to improving community self-management when facing challenges in the territories. For ASOARKA and KALEME, the two associations closely resemble self-governance structures that the difference between them is difficult to discern. In the case of ASOARKA, the entrepreneurship and governance structures share roots in the family clan structure.



► Member of ENRAIZANDO, formed by Embera Chami women from the department of Caldas, Colombia. Photo by Angélica María Lesmes for RRI.



“The participation and empowerment of women in other scenarios, transmitting knowledge to children and youth, has also allowed us to relate to other production experiences, carry out exchange processes and learn about them. It has also made us aware of organic production and environmental management.”

– Rosa Montero, ASOARKA

In all four case studies in Colombia, caring for Our Mother Earth was fundamental. However, the strong vision ENRAIZANDO puts forth stands out since it contributes to the sustainable use of natural resources through community self-management in its production processes and political formation despite not being formally constituted.

Resilience to extreme changes: COVID-19 and climate change

Resilience to extreme changes in the four case studies is based on their relationship and ancestral practices linked to the territory and Mother Earth. Thus, it was found that the practices Indigenous women develop concerning the environment and changing climate and health conditions are part of the strengthening of ancestral wisdom and balance with the territory.

In this sense, all the entrepreneurships perceive environmental actions as Indigenous Peoples’ own actions rather than as responses to extreme changes. All the entrepreneurships enable the intergenerational conservation and transmission of ancestral knowledge between generations which is evident in production processes. This perception is unanimous among all the women entrepreneurs and is reiterated in the information obtained from the fieldwork, although it is more prevalent among the ASOARKA and KALEME entrepreneurships.

Faced with the COVID-19 contingency, the entrepreneurs took protective measures and maintained remote communication with them during the pandemic. The ASOARKA entrepreneurship developed the most adaptive strategies and actions, which led to greater support from external institutions to overcome the poverty, hunger, and illnesses caused by the virus.

In contrast, ENREDARTE received only one aid shipment, which provided food to some of the entrepreneurship’s women. The association overcame COVID-19 but was weakened and currently requires support to resume its activities.

KALEME received assistance from the TOTTO and Guanábana companies due to their commercial relationship. The companies provided food to women artisans during the pandemic as production slowed given the restrictions on mobility and contraction of global commerce.

ENRAIZANDO received almost no support from external institutions during the pandemic. However, solidarity among the women of the microentrepreneurships is highlighted through their ability to boost cultivation and food production, sustaining families and communities during the pandemic.

CONCLUSION

Opportunities for support and resource management

It is important not to disrupt the formation processes of entrepreneurship and avoid setbacks in their consolidation and operation. In this regard, dialogue is needed between governments, aid workers, self-governance structures, and women's entrepreneurship to define joint work strategies that allow entrepreneurship development, efficient allocation of resources and, consequently, improved living conditions for Indigenous women entrepreneurs, their families, and communities.

It is important to support the strengthening of entrepreneurship in areas such as:

1. Finance, administration, planning and strategic follow-up. Thus, the entrepreneurship' organizational capabilities will provide opportunities for resource management and commercialization.
2. Establish cost structures of the entrepreneurship' production lines and create a culture of monitoring costs and inputs.
3. Enhance the knowledge and use of information technology tools such as social networks and websites for e-commerce to expand product commercialization in the different marketing channels identified.
4. Follow-up on client establishment and maintenance to achieve greater commercialization of Indigenous products.
5. Support advocacy with the national government to promote Indigenous entrepreneurship, ensuring governance and community solidarity as the main basis for Indigenous economies in Colombia.



► KALEME. Wuayuu family, Uribia, Guajira, Colombia. KALEME was born from the intergenerational tradition of weaving and Wayuu handicrafts in the Ipuana clan. Photo by Angélica Maria Lesmes for RRI.

Ancestral knowledge and resilience

Resilience to extreme changes is based on Indigenous Peoples' relationship and ancestral practices linked to the territory and Mother Earth. In this way, the entrepreneurship' actions are a process of strengthening ancestral wisdom and balance with the territory. In general, the Indigenous women of the various associations indicated that through the entrepreneurship, culture and ethnic identity are strengthened, as their production processes drive the conservation and transmission of ancestral knowledge between generations.

The changes that nature has undergone due to high temperatures and seasonal changes have brought uncertainty into production processes, which are now almost unpredictable. The COVID-19 pandemic also impacted the entrepreneurship with a decline in sales and the suspension of collective activities such as meetings, self-education events, and community production. In all the entrepreneurship, the use



► ENREDARTE, formed by Indigenous women from northern Cauca. Photo by Angélica Maria Lesmes for RRI.

of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) contributed to facilitating remote relationships among Indigenous women.

Territorial governance

In the life plans and laws of origin of the case studies, women's participation is meant to equalize opportunities between men and women. The concepts of complementarity, parity, and duality are raised in the guidelines or mandates of Indigenous Peoples and in some life plans, which shows the growing importance of Indigenous women's issues in the Indigenous agenda.

Contributions to the economy

It was found that the jobs and income generated by the entrepreneurship are essentially informal. This constitutes a challenge and suggests a need to transform entrepreneurship so that they enable more formal employment opportunities, create steady and improved income generation for Indigenous women, and encourage their long-term social sustainability.

Therefore, it is important to transform and strengthen all Indigenous entrepreneurship, not only those of women. It is essential that the Colombian government promote prior consultation and joint work to formulate and implement a national policy for Indigenous economies, with clear guidelines and positive exceptions, and their insertion in national and international markets.

Likewise, it is recommended that the entrepreneurship take advantage of the resources and programs available from the Colombian Ministry of Information and Communication Technologies, since e-commerce is an alternative method that can be used to improve commercialization, and the Ministry offers resources and free courses to generate competencies and knowledge in virtual business, which are easily accessible and can strengthen the entrepreneurship.

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