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Case Study: Approach to communities within the framework of rural development and tourism projects under the regenerative approach of the Costa Rica Regenerative program and the Faculty of Environment and Development of the University for International Cooperation (UCI)

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Abstract	<p>One of the case studies prepared by the UCI deals with the processes of approaching communities within the framework of rural development and tourism projects under a regenerative approach. These processes do not contemplate a methodology or a list of steps to follow, but rather consist of a process that emerges from the need and willingness of communities to strengthen their livelihoods for the well-being of the community while conserving and restoring natural resources, culture without denaturing the sense of place. In this sense, what the case study seeks is to introduce some elements that are contemplated or s for community intervention bringing interests and needs closer, with the internalization of the precepts of regenerative development, in a logic of local incidence to change the global scale.</p>
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Approach to communities within the framework of rural development and tourism projects under the regenerative approach of the Costa Rica Regenerative program and the Faculty of Environment and Development of the University for International Cooperation (UCI)

Summary:

One of the case studies prepared by the UCI deals with the processes of approaching communities within the framework of rural development and tourism projects under a regenerative approach. These processes do not contemplate a methodology or a list of steps to follow, but rather consist of a process that emerges from the need and willingness of communities to strengthen their livelihoods for the well-being of the community while conserving and restoring natural resources, culture without denaturing the sense of place. In this sense, what the case study seeks is to introduce some elements that are contemplated or s for community intervention bringing interests and needs closer, with the internalization of the precepts of regenerative development, in a logic of local incidence to change the global scale.

Background:

The rural areas of Costa Rica are extremely rich spaces in terms of natural resources with their own dynamics according to the biophysical, socio-cultural, and productive characteristics and the interrelationships between them. Despite the uniqueness of each territory, there are many problems in common in rural communities, various factors make them the places with the lowest human development indexes, greater poverty and extreme poverty and greater inequality in the country.

In these communities, the livelihoods mainly include activities of the primary sector (agriculture, livestock and fishing), so that an exhaustive use of natural resources is made but few added values are generated in the commercialization of products and few productive chains, so the profits generated by these activities to the communities are very low. In addition to this, most of the products generated are transferred to the Greater Metropolitan Area of Costa Rica for commercialization and from there they are directed back to rural areas, generating costly traceability both environmentally and economically and a very low remuneration to local producers compared to the final prices in the market.

Other problems in these areas have to do with lower levels of education and specialization, as well as fewer sources of employment and coverage of basic services and public infrastructure (Barboza et al 2019). The population most affected by these problems are



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rural women because of their roles of caring for children and the elderly that limit them in terms of education and work.

An aspect that has aggravated the situation exposed above was the arrival of the Covid 19 Pandemic that generated food insecurity, poverty, the significant increase in unemployment and a deepening of social gaps, among other aspects such as the increase in domestic violence and effects on the mental health of the population (State of the Nation 2022).

In general, the complexity of each rural community must be analyzed holistically, identifying the interrelationships between the different components and dynamics that converge in the territory, to address the problems with initiatives that integrate human consciousness and actions with the principles of living systems, this in general is the end of regenerative development.

Justification of the study:

Outreach to communities is a process that should be treated very carefully, there are many research and extension processes in which information is simply extracted from local communities without returning anything in return. There are also processes in which projects and initiatives are planned from the office without contemplating the many aspects that are interrelated in the territory and that characterize that complexity that is not easy to understand at first glance, even less without emerging in the local reality and the socio-productive dynamics. Knowing these factors is the basis for determining contextualized actions that are more likely to really obtain positive results and impacts on people's way of living and thinking.

Because of this, it is important to understand the most appropriate processes of approach to the community to generate a dialogue of knowledge that allows understanding the complexity of the territory and the vision of the community to propose joint solutions and generate collaborative work spaces that generate benefits to the entire community.

In this sense, Costa Rica Regenerativa, through the community initiative, works to generate spaces that allow collective action, innovation and articulation in the search for good living, all this through a regenerative approach that generates well-being for people and the planet in general.

Study site:

Costa Rica Regenerative rural development initiatives have focused primarily on the province of Guanacaste, the communities of Puerto Jesus, Nambí, Tempate and Playa Lagarto, as well as the protected wilderness areas Parque Nacional Diríá and Parque



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Nacional Miravalles, among other sites. Each site seeks to work with the different actors that are in the territory, although the need and interest of joint work has arisen mainly from grassroots organizations such as associations of molluscers, women, fishermen, producer and development associations, as well as the administration of these protected areas.

As part of the strengths of these rural communities, there is the great natural wealth and source of resources they possess, each of them is located within a biological corridor, and in the case of Puerto Jesus, the community extracts a great diversity of mollusks and fish from the mouth of the Tempisque River, as well as the community of Playa Lagarto who take advantage of the abundance of lobsters to create new dishes.

Despite their natural wealth, these communities face significant socioeconomic limitations, food insecurity and the scarcity of sources of employment are the most important needs, situations that were greatly aggravated by the arrival of the pandemic, where the Chorotega region was one of the most affected regions, and within this, female-headed households the most affected (State of the Nation Program 2021).

On the other hand, public waste collection and recycling services, bus service, streets, educational centers, health centers, sources of recreation and sports for children and young people, and public infrastructure in general are goods and services that are not present or are scarce in most of these communities.

These situations, added to the lack of collaborative social exchange initiatives, spaces for appropriation and cultural recreation and livelihoods, generate hopelessness, crisis and pressure on the natural resources of the area.

The following map shows the geographical location of these communities with respect to Protected Areas and Biological Corridors. Although we do not work with communities located only within these spaces, we seek to strengthen the efforts of other initiatives already present in the territory that promote conservation.

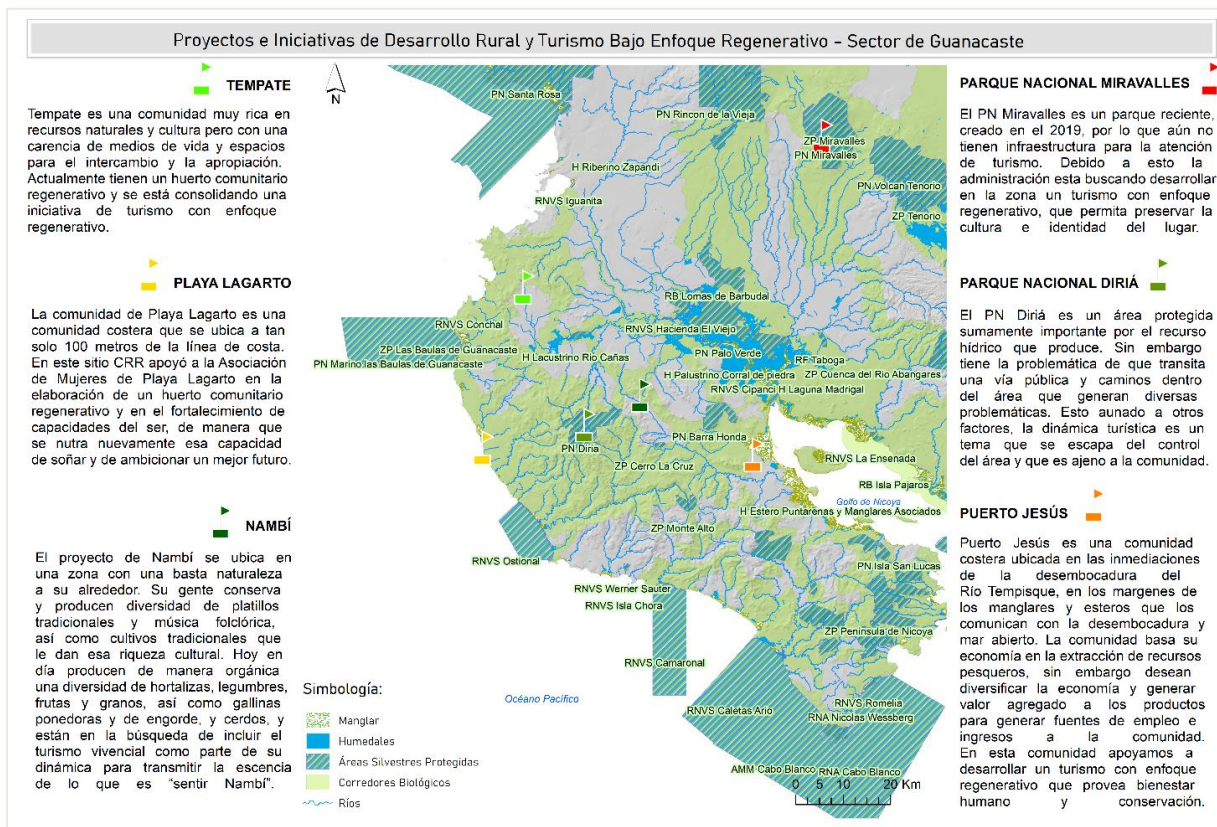


Figure 1. Location of the communities involved.

Objectives of the study:

General objective:

- ✓ Analyze the process of approaching local communities within the framework of rural development and tourism projects under a regenerative approach.

Specific objectives:

- ✓ Present some problems identified in the dynamics of rural communities in Guanacaste Costa Rica.
- ✓ Visualize some limitations in the development of extension and cooperation projects in rural communities.
- ✓ Share lessons learned and good practices in the processes of approaching rural communities.
- ✓ Identify those first steps in introducing the concept of regenerative development to rural communities.



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Boarding:

In the new conceptions and approaches of rural development, the analysis of the multidimensionality of the territories and the interaction with the social actors from a holistic point of view acquires greater importance, so that obtaining a deep understanding of the meaning of the place from a socio-ecological perspective is key to generate processes that promote the appropriation of the territory and that are integrated into the physical characteristics and identity of the place and of the people who inhabit it.

Harnessing the sense of place aims to: *"unleash the potential inherent in a place and develop mutually beneficial relationships that aim to elevate the capacity and capabilities of all stakeholders and stakeholders by creating relationships that leverage existing assets and generate new long-term value. Create and maintain a symbiotic and mutually beneficial relationship with its surrounding interior, not only minimizing its environmental impact, but actively improving and generating the productive capacity of the ecosystems on which it depends."* (Socatelli, 2022).

Therefore, although these initiatives seek to involve the entire community, it is through organized groups that the process begins, this in order to facilitate that first approach, and in a collaborative way with these groups, to add more organizations and people to achieve a vision of community that includes the different interests and expectations of social actors, and to seek equity in general for all people.

This first approach always arises from the intention of the communities and a series of clearly identified problems, so it is from collaborative alliances that comprehensive and multidisciplinary solutions are proposed under a widely adaptable process according to the complexity of each particular territory.

Although there is no methodology to apply regenerative development, there are important premises that guide the planning and design of initiatives under this approach. Some starting points according to Socatelli (2022), correspond to systems thinking, permaculture, nature-based solutions, cyclical flows, circular economy and for the common good, evolutionary leadership, ancestral wisdom, youth empowerment and participation, spiritual restoration, collaborative governance, functional landscapes among others.

In this sense there is no list of steps to follow to reach a regenerative development, but rather a list of intentions that seek well-being and human development through regenerative livelihoods, intergenerational collaboration, and the restoration of connections with nature and with ourselves, so that from a change in the way we think and act internally as people, We can be at the service of life and work on its regeneration.



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Based on this, the visits to the communities were broadly adaptive according to the vision of the community, therefore they did not follow a structured line of work but they did start from the analysis of the different components and opportunities for the community, from a regenerative point of view according to the precepts mentioned above, always paying special attention to the sense of place and its appreciation from the point of view of the local inhabitants, as well as identifying the social fabric and its ability to evolve into regenerative livelihoods.

Results:

From the interest of the community, a first visit is made in order to listen to them and get to know the team and in a very general way the intention that is sought with a regenerative approach. This first approach generates an initial idea of the needs of the community, its interests, its livelihoods and its relationships. It also gets an idea of the physical, biological, social, cultural, political aspects and the interrelationship between these components and the interests of the community. So this first approach is simply a first photograph of the complexity of the territory, and a first notion of regenerative development and the possibilities of support by ICU/CRR.

The subsequent visits are about knowing the vision of the community and the strengths and opportunities they have to achieve it, and through the dialogue of knowledge, the possibilities observed by the team to reach that vision are discussed, or the existence of better opportunities according to the resources and characteristics of the territory. For this exchange it is key that the community has an idea or vision of the future, although it is not something consolidated it is important that there is that desire for better living conditions.

Despite this, there are unmotivated communities, without a vision of well-being or expectations for their territory, as well as there are social problems or aspects of culture in the community that can hinder or prevent achieving good results and the sustainability of initiatives with a regenerative approach. In these contexts it is important to first reconstruct these intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships so that they are the basis for generating a true social change that generates better living conditions.

In this sense, the paradigm of regenerative development is not something that is tried to explain to the community through master classes, but rather, what is sought is that through examples and practices they understand what is behind the approach, its intentions and what it implies that it is applied to rural development initiatives. So the internalization of this approach is a complex process that requires time and creativity with communities.



On the other hand, it is important to point out that these processes of collaborative or participatory construction usually need more time and therefore more costs for their construction, but nevertheless have greater possibilities of being maintained over time due to the sense of belonging generated by participating in the initiative since its formulation.

In the community development initiatives of the UCI, it has been possible to establish collaborative spaces that generate various benefits, some of them mentioned below:

- ✓ Economic benefits through the reduction of household spending and the creation of small enterprises from the products of orchards and fishing.
- ✓ Benefits to the environment by recovering soils to produce organically and provide a healthy space for diverse organisms from microorganisms in the soil to mammals.
- ✓ Food security, nutritional enrichment and diversification of people's diet with 100% organic and fresh products.
- ✓ Social benefits in various aspects such as the creation of spaces for exchange, at a personal level with the exchange between people generated in these spaces and recreation, the exchange of experiences, the strengthening of community organization, alliances, strengthening and capacity building, community empowerment, the development of spaces and opportunities for women housewives, among others.
- ✓ Cultural benefits through the recovery and dissemination of intangible heritage such as gastronomy and traditional products, and verbal folklore and customs.



In addition to these direct benefits, there are other synergistic benefits that are generated from these actions, some of these are adaptation to climate change, conservation of water resources and air quality, diversification of the rural economy, environmental education, among others.



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In general, the approach and accompaniment of CRR to the communities occurs mainly in the design stage of the initiative and implementation, what is involved is to create the necessary capacities so that the communities alone can follow up on the initiative, so that the accompaniment usually decreases over time, but unlike other rural development initiatives, the work of CRR in the communities does not have a period of completion, since it is always tried to be aware of the work of the communities to give assistance in case they require it.



As for this "know-how" established in the communities, it includes competences related to the cultivation and maintenance of the garden, in the identification of the wildlife associated with the garden, in the diversification of the diet with products of the garden, in the paradigm of regenerative development and its incorporation into daily life, in strategies for the creation of SMEs and commercialization, in the enrichment of social relations, in the provision of tourism services in initiatives with that potential, among other capacities that are strengthened according to the needs and interests of the community.

The success of these initiatives depends on many factors, but a limitation for their sustainability over time is linked to the generation of economic benefits, which is why the development of SMEs and marketing strategies are key to establishing them as regenerative livelihoods.



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Conclusions and recommendations:

- ✓ The processes of building initiatives with a regenerative approach take more time and costs than other initiatives that are built in non-participatory ways.
- ✓ Initiatives with a regenerative approach generate various benefits to communities, beyond just economic benefits, however for the sustainability of the initiative it is important to generate livelihoods, so economic benefit remains a key factor for communities.
- ✓ Healthy human relationships, both intrapersonal and interpersonal, are the basis for the creation of initiatives with a regenerative approach.
- ✓ Capacity building is key for communities to continue the initiative on their own, these capacities must be linked to the interests and needs of the community.

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