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 **LIGHTHOUSE FOUNDATION**

PROJECT REPORT

COLLECTORS AND FISHERWOMEN: RHIZOMES OF LIFE II

Education and alliances for adaptation in coastal marine territories in Ecuador

OCTOBER 2025



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SUMMARY

RESPONSIBLE: National Coordinator for the Defense of the Mangrove Ecosystem C-CONDEM

BENEFICIARIES: Gatherers and fisherfolk families from the mangrove estuaries of the Ecuadorian coastal marine territories

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GEOGRAPHICAL AREA OF IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROJECT: Ecuador - provinces of El Oro, Manabí, Esmeraldas, Santo Domingo de los Tsáchilas.

KEY ALLIANCES & PARTNERSHIPS:

Latin American Alliance for the Life of Coastal Marine Territories in the Face of Climate Change (ALMAC International)

Network of women collectors and fisherfolk of coastal marine territories of Latin America and the greater Caribbean

UNESCO

FINANCIAL SUPPORT: LIGHTHOUSE Foundation

DURATION: February 2025 – December 2025

BUDGET: 25,000 EUR

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This project is designed to implement a systemic strategy aimed at enhancing the adaptability and resilience of communities within marine-coastal territories in Ecuador and beyond. It focuses on the strengthening of the programme of the Women Collectors and Fisherwomen of Coastal Marine Territories - Rhizomes of Life Educational Platform. This capacity building platform supports developing capacities, skills and providing necessary resources to manage risks and threats effectively. The goal is to establish a solid baseline for the scaling up of the platform to a regional and international levels. Building upon the insights and outcomes from the preceding pilot phase.

The project is structured around two core pillars: (I) educational platform review and iteration and (II) the strengthening of regional and international networks. These elements unite to generate a robust theoretical, practical, and methodological programme that will augment the capabilities of potential participants, while enhancing the development of the facilitators, technicians, and leaders that participated in the pilot and are associated with C-CONDEM.

The educational platform has shown wide acceptance and success. Therefore, we aim to develop a solid foundation that will allow to scale up and target women engaged in artisanal fishing, harvesting and collection, in different territories across the region. The aim is to enhance their skills to positively impact their surroundings through the integration of traditional knowledge and the promotion of sustainable practices for community benefit and the assurance of decent living conditions.

The second strategic dimension emphasizes the fortification of advocacy, international stewardship, and the extension of strategic alliances. This includes organizing a series of discussions with key allies and potential new partners. This means to facilitate the continuous engagement in international forums like the World Forum on Small-Scale Fisheries, alongside affiliations with FAO's advisory group, the international Slow Food network, Slow Fish campaign, and others.

Approximately 30 families across four coastal provinces of Ecuador (Esmeraldas, Manabí, El Oro, and Guayas) and an intermediary province (Santo Domingo de los Tsáchilas) will benefit directly from this initiative. This is a subsequent phase from the pilot that will enable additional development. The Lighthouse Foundation financially supports this project, budgeted at 25,000EUR scheduled from February 2025 to December 2025. The C-CONDEM will manage the project, striving to make a significant impact on the protection and enhancement of marine-coastal social-ecological systems through social engagement and political advocacy.

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Women Rhizomes of Life - Muisne-Cojimies mangrove estuary. Muisne Island and Bolívar Island. Association of Shell Gatherers of Concha Virgen de las Lajas

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Women Rhizomes of Life - Muisne-Cojimies mangrove estuary. Muisne Island and Bolívar Island. Association of Shell Gatherers of Concha Virgen de las Lajas

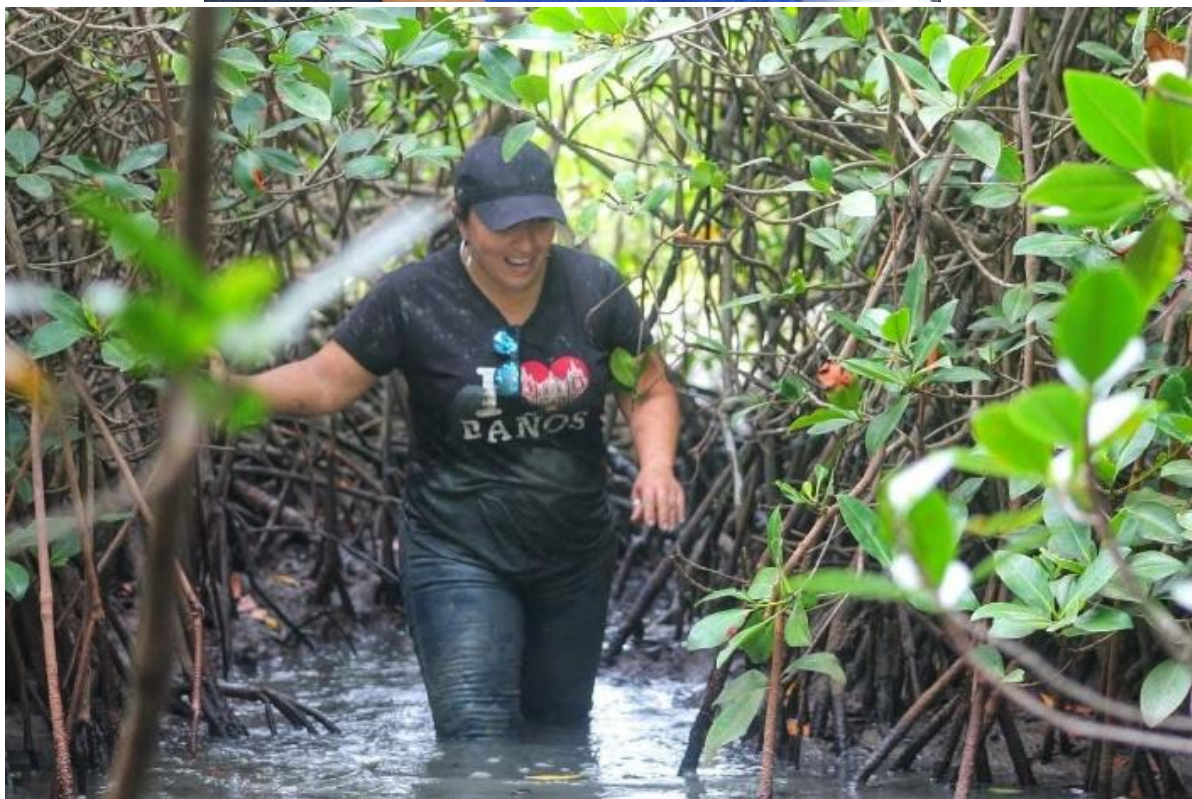


Women Rhizomes of Life - Mangrove estuary of the Esmeraldas River system. Community of Piaguapi



Women Rhizomes of Life - Mangrove estuary of the Chone River system, Portobelo community. Mangrove Youth Association

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Women Rhizomes of Life - Mangrove estuary of the Portoviejo River system. San Jacinto Community

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Women Rhizomes of Life - Mangrove estuary of the Pagua-Jubones-Santa Rosa system, Huyla estuary, Jambelí archipelago. Communities of Venecia del Mar and Los Sauces

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Women Rhizomes of Life - Guayas Delta. Cerrito de los Moreños and Puerto Libertad communities

OBJECTIVES

General Objective

The project focuses on empowering local women through the Women Collectors and Fisherwomen - Rhizomes of Life Educational Platform. By fostering a strategic, regional, and collective comprehension of structural challenges, the initiative encourages critical thinking and collaborative multi-stakeholder actions to create "Beautiful, Tasty, and Safe Living Spaces". This strategic vision incorporates time-bound and scalable solutions for long-term impact.

Specific Objectives

- **Objective 1:** To strengthen the capacity building platform that will allow for scaling up to regional and eventually international levels.
- **Objective 2:** To build on the skills of community facilitators and promoters from the first phase, assessing their theoretical, practical, and methodological abilities.
- **Objective 3:** Strengthen international and regional cooperation for the exchange of knowledge, advocacy and solidarity among peoples and organizations dedicated to sustainable development of marine-coastal territories.

Accomplishment

The initial group of students along with new communities, families, and women have joined and continue to engage with the platform. Throughout the project, the development and expansion of several "Espacios de Cuidado de la Vida Familiares y Comunitarios Hermosos y Sabrosos" (Beautiful and Tasty Family and Community Care Spaces - ABIFs) have been successfully established. These spaces embody the core values and process this initiative entails.

The evaluations emerging from the reflective processes with platform participants, key stakeholders and local families have provided valuable insights to further strengthen capacity-building efforts. The project has proven success in fostering meaningful exchanges among academia, practitioners, and local communities, promoting experience sharing and co-creation of knowledge.

The platform's success has been validated by positive feedback from key partners, including the students, the university and UNESCO, as well as a growing interest from more local communities in joining the platform. Nevertheless, challenges remain on the organizational side, particularly in funding and allocating enough resources to address the rising demand from women wishing to join and study in the educational platform.

RESULTS

1. Robust Local Capacity Building Platform

Following up the 2023 - 2024 work with the initial fisherwomen group from the first project phase. In 2025, A group of 20+ women have concluded two accredited diploma programs that promote knowledge in marine ecosystems, fisheries, food sovereignty, socioecological restoration, sustainability, and leadership skills to strengthen community development. The programme included the following five modules (extended description in appendix 1):

1. *Methods*
2. *Language, knowledge, and skills*
3. *Memories and marine territories. Rooting identities of gathering and fishing cultures*
4. *Social ecology of coastal marine ecosystems, systems without passports. Their value in the context of global change*
5. *Art and music as a transversal module*

The platform promoted collective, experiential, and context-based learning that valued local knowledge and exchanges among students, professors, and guest practitioners. While formal assessments could not fully capture the richness of the process, participant reflections and project outputs (maps, exercises, writings, discussions) demonstrated strong engagement, critical thinking, and commitment to community and environmental well-being. Students also deeply discussed the importance of developing leadership skills, safeguarding their cultural traditions, and strengthening community organization to face current challenges.

The initiative fostered collaboration between women leaders, academics, and community facilitators, creating an inclusive learning environment grounded in respect, horizontality, and real-world relevance. One of the key final outcomes includes a collection of poems which turned into songs performed by the students. This experience symbolizes the integration of creativity, culture, and empowerment achieved throughout the process.

The platform established itself as a meaningful space for women, not only because of the technical learning, but also because of the value of peer-to-peer interaction. The pedagogy implemented favored the horizontal exchange of knowledge and experiences, allowing ecological and local knowledge to take center stage in the process. This approach strengthened community ties and promoted an atmosphere of collaboration and mutual recognition.

The participants' testimonies show that the experience at the platform was deeply transformative, both in their personal lives and in their community and/or professional practice. Incorporating knowledge and analytical tools has strengthened their role as community leaders.

The diploma course on Climate Change with an Emphasis on Safe Community Territories was implemented between June and September 2025 in partnership with the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Ecuador PUCE, Quito campus, through the Center for Continuing Education.



Women Rhizomes of Life - Diploma course on Climate Change with an Emphasis on Safe Community Territories 2025

Evaluation and Documentation

A comprehensive systematization of the 2023 – 2024 Collectors and Fisherwomen – Rhizomes of Life Educational Platform was conducted. The evaluation was performed with active participation from beneficiaries and partners on the platform three main components:

- **Beautiful and Tasty Family and Community Life Care Spaces** - inspired by ASPROCIG's agroecological initiatives (ABIFs) in Colombia and Ecuador's Botica Campesina.
- **Collectors and Fisherwomen – Rhizomes of Life Educational Platform** - launched in July 2023 with support from Light House Foundation, Utrecht University, PUCE, UNESCO, and the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation.
- **Regional Knowledge Exchange Network** – connecting Latin American women leaders through REDMANGLAR International.

Two systematization documents capture the experiences and perceptions of all participants to guide future implementation, along with a compilation of student testimonies reflecting individual and family-level impacts. Studying at PUCE, a nationally recognized university, significantly enhanced the participants' confidence and sense of achievement. Many students described the experience as transformative, linking continued learning with empowerment and leadership and sense of self-worth. For instance, a student mentioned *"I feel very happy because I didn't have the opportunity to go to school first, or to be at a university... I dreamed since I was a child of being someone, of getting some education... I feel very happy to continue learning."* She also recognizes learning as a path to empowerment: *"Success is continuing to learn in the training sessions and strengthening ourselves as women."*

Women reported that access to the university's facilities and interaction with academics strengthened self-esteem and discipline among participants, while teachers adapted their methods to respect and integrate diverse knowledge systems. They highlighted the importance of a pedagogy based on respect, horizontality, and adaptation to the realities of women living in marine-coastal territories.

The experience also provided C-CONDEM and the university with valuable lessons on partnership management, curriculum design, and organizational growth that feed into 2025 initiatives and will support future training efforts. Moreover, the platform has also been a challenge for lecturers due to the students' levels of education, their different realities, experiences and the knowledge they bring with them in their practices that can

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challenge academia. However, the didactic methodology based on respect allowed to facilitate safe space that enhanced co-creation of knowledge and mutual exchange.

The evaluation process included document analysis, workshops, and interviews with students, families, facilitators, and partners. Two exchange visits in 2024 - 2025 to ASPROCIG (Colombia) with 15 participants enriched cross-border learning and collaboration.

Overall, the School has strengthened women's leadership, advanced the co-creation of knowledge, and contributed to C-CONDEM's long-term goal of fostering the next generation of resilient, equitable, and sustainable coastal communities.

“Access to education is a fundamental right that has historically been denied to the most impoverished populations, mainly women. Education is essential as far as knowledge empowers and provides tools for understanding reality, strengthening collective identity, and actively participating in community and political decisions and in the appropriation of their territories, which in turn results in improved living conditions for families and the community.” UNESCO

2. Comprehensive Revised Programme

Building on the 2023-2024 pilot phase initiatives which include the first accredited diploma programme under the Collectors and Fisherwomen – Rhizomes of Life Educational Platform, the platform entered a new phase in early 2024. Strategic partnerships were formed to launch a follow-up accredited diploma named: *“Facilitators for Adaptation to the Climate Crisis”*.

After several iterations, building on the insights from the earlier experiences, we have designed the structure and curriculum of the upcoming 2026 programme named *“Diploma in Global Change with an Emphasis on Safe Community Territories”*. It has been collaboratively developed by teachers, students, and the C-CONDEM technical team. Together with the support of key partners including the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Ecuador (PUCE), UNESCO, the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, and the Lighthouse Foundation.

For 2026, this programme aims to be jointly implemented by the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Ecuador, the Universidad del Valle de Cali (Colombia) and the C-CONDEM, with participation from women across the “Mujeres Rizomas de Vida” Latin American network and early partnerships with international institutions.

Proposed 2026 Programme Structure and Curriculum

Module 1. Ecosystems and Socio-systems

- Characterization of territories and populations
- Origin and history of coastal-marine communities
- Socio-ecological data from global to local contexts

Key topics: Social ecology of mangrove ecosystems, sea meadows, sandy and rocky beaches, and interconnections between ecosystems and communities.

Module 2. Marine Ecosystems and Keystone Species

- Food webs and marine biodiversity
- Ecosystem values and services (debate on values vs. services)

Key approach: Present content in accessible, engaging ways, translating academic concepts into practical community knowledge.

Module 3. Marine-Coastal Socio-Ecological Restoration

- Theory and practice of socio-ecological restoration
- Field visit to Bahía Málaga (Colombian Pacific Coast)

Key themes: Restoration, regeneration vs. reforestation, and cultural dimensions of ecological recovery (examples: ASPROCIG, ABIFs).

As a graduation requirement, each participant will design and present a territorial project applying the knowledge gained, addressing a local issue through a socio-ecological lens. This curriculum structure for 2026 strengthens the Collectors and Fisherwomen – Rhizomes of Life Educational Platform and will apply the updated “Tamborere” methodology, aligning with C-CONDEM’s vision of creating a regional network of facilitators capable of front running community-led management, adaptation, and mitigation strategies for global change in marine-coastal territories.

3. Regional and International Solidarity Network.

During this period, C-CONDEM actively participated in several key international events and collaborative processes that strengthened global and regional alliances. For instance, The Global Forum on Small-Scale Fisheries (WFPP) efforts was reinforced through C-CONDEM’s participation as delegates in international meetings held in Brazil, Panama, and Sri Lanka. In this platform, Ecuador and Colombia jointly presented their proposal for the recognition of collective territorial rights in coastal-marine territories, highlighting the experiences of the Women Collectors and Fisherwomen – Rhizomes of Life Educational Platform. These experiences emphasize socio-ecological restoration

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and the creation of Beautiful and Tasty Life Care Spaces, which serve as exemplary models for these international forums and networks.

Similarly, the International REDMANGLAR Network was strengthened through a regional assembly in Cali, Colombia, bringing together delegates from Mexico, Ecuador, Peru, and Colombia. This meeting advanced the coordination of the network and contributed to planning the 2026 Diploma programme.

Throughout 2024–2025, C-CONDEM took part in multiple regional and global meetings, workshops, and assemblies. Key engagements included:

- Preparatory meetings for the People’s Summit, to be held alongside COP 30 in Belém do Pará, Brazil (November 2025).
- World Assembly on Food Sovereignty, Sri Lanka (September 2025), where C-CONDEM participated as WFPP delegates.
- Regional Workshop – Women Rhizomes of Life School, hosted at the Universidad del Valle in Cali, Colombia.

These activities collectively strengthened C-CONDEM’s leadership in promoting socio-ecological resilience, territorial rights internationally, and women’s empowerment across Latin American coastal-marine communities.



Brazil People's Summit (Cipula Dos Povos)

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Panama preparatory meeting Nyeleny World Forum on Food Sovereignty, Fisherwomen



Nyeleni Sri Lanka World Forum on Food Sovereignty



REDMANGLAR International meeting - Univalle Cali-Colombia 2025

APPENDIX

1. Programme Content and Methodology

Módulo 1 Metodologías

Temática	Contenido
Enfoque Metodológico para la Planificación Participativa y Comunitaria de Territorios de Cuidado de la Vida Hermosos y Sabrosos Territorio e Identidad	<p>Se propone facilitar una exploración crítica, situada y vivencial sobre las relaciones entre identidad, arraigo y territorio marino en los pueblos costeros, a partir de la experiencia personal, el símbolo del pez tamborero y la aplicación de una metodología rizomática basada en la observación de la naturaleza, la memoria colectiva y los vínculos comunitarios. Se plantearán 5 preguntas para desarrollar la clase: ¿Quién soy yo? ¿Qué me sujeta al territorio? ¿Qué me desterritorializa? ¿Qué me puede volver a conectar? ¿Cómo construimos una cartografía viva?</p> <p>Se promoverá una pedagogía situada, basada en lo vivido y en el entorno, se buscará favorecer el diálogo intergeneracional y de saberes adaptándose al ritmo y contexto de las participantes. La propuesta metodológica tiene un enfoque socio -ecológico, considera las relaciones, interconexiones e interdependencias en un sistema complejo que incentive el pensamiento crítico, el compartir de saberes, la capacidad de replantear la vivencia en las comunidades y la proyección en un trazado territorial que considere lo rizomático, lo fractal y la adaptabilidad.</p> <p>El componente rizomático se anclará en el reconocimiento de estructuras no jerárquicas y en las posibilidades de entablar conexiones fluidas que rompan la verticalidad en las interacciones y promuevan un aprendizaje colaborativo.</p> <p>En el componente fractal, la idea de auto-similitud se planteará para entender que los comportamientos a nivel individual pueden reflejarse a distintas escalas: en la comunidad cercana, en la sociedad, en el ámbito global y está tomada de la metodológica Z trabajada por ASPROCIG, que es abordada para la implementación de los espacios comunitarios de cuidado de la vida Hermosos, Sabrosos y Seguros que son parte de la metodología de la Plataforma Escuela de Mujeres Rizomas de Vida.</p> <p>La metáfora del pez globo, en cuanto su capacidad de adaptación, de traslado y de mutabilidad, será la entrada para la discusión de las capacidades colectivas en las respuestas a los cambios en su entorno y globales.</p>

Módulo 2 Lenguajes y conocimiento

Temática	Contenido
Lenguaje, conocimiento del mundo y percepciones	<p>Aborda la comprensión de la cultura popular como un sistema producto histórico del desarrollo y la transformación de la sociedad humana. Representa el medio específico en el cual la humanidad existe, trabaja y construye valores. La cultura, al igual que otros subsistemas, posee una relativa autonomía, un nivel de operación y expresión propio, distinto a los demás componentes del sistema societario, pero a la vez íntimamente vinculado y relacionado con ellos. El lenguaje tiene un papel fundamental en estos procesos constructivos culturales y de organización de la sociedad a través de sus diferentes formas expresivas.</p> <p>Se busca identificar las conexiones entre realidad y lenguaje, entre pensamiento racional y pensamiento simbólico. Además, plantea identificar diferentes narrativas en la construcción de relatos identitarios.</p>



<p>Construcción de historias: La travesía del manglar</p>	<p>Este taller de lecto-escritura se desarrollará a partir de la lectura en voz alta y el intercambio colectivo de fragmentos de tres obras fundamentales: <i>La travesía del manglar</i> de Marysé Condé, <i>Aguas de estuario</i> de Velia Vidal y <i>Sutura de las aguas</i> de Daniela Catrileo. A través de estas voces literarias, que abordan el territorio, la memoria, el agua y la resistencia desde perspectivas afrodescendientes e indígenas, se propondrá una aproximación sensible a la escritura como forma de registro de la vida cotidiana en los manglares. El taller está especialmente diseñado para mujeres recolectoras de moluscos, portadoras de saberes ancestrales vinculados al cuerpo, el barro y el agua. Se propiciará un espacio de confianza para conversar sobre sus propias experiencias en los estuarios, sus memorias familiares, los cambios en el ecosistema, y los vínculos entre trabajo, comunidad y naturaleza. A partir de estas conversaciones, se invitará a escribir textos breves —en forma de carta, relato o poema— que recojan fragmentos de sus propias travesías por el manglar. El taller busca reivindicar el valor de sus palabras y saberes, reconociendo en ellas una narrativa profunda sobre la relación entre cuerpo, territorio y cuidado.</p>
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Módulo 3: Memorias y territorios marinos. Arraigando identidades de las culturas recolectoras y pescadoras

	Contenido
<p>Historia de las culturas precolombinas</p>	<p>Con el propósito de dar valor a las culturas prehispánicas —e incluso posteriores a la colonización hispánica que resistieron a su dominación— este módulo se enfoca en explicar y difundir la vida de las comunidades de los territorios marino costeros de lo que actualmente es Ecuador, así como su relación con otros espacios, hoy diferenciados por fronteras nacionales, pero que entonces eran extensos territorios sin ese tipo de distinciones, que solo se producirán con el paso de los siglos, pero que se conocían y transmitían información mediante el comercio, que también se constituyó en la posibilidad de intercambiar saberes desarrollar tanto una cultura local como una comunidad extensa que reconocía la existencia de unos y otros.</p> <p>El mar fue la ruta que facilitó el contacto y conocimiento de los diversos pueblos que poblaban el continente hace más de 500 años, culturas recolectoras y pescadoras, que conocieron su espacio vital, lo transformaron y lo habitaron de una manera que hoy resulta prácticamente desconocida o extraña, pero que perduró durante varios siglos: una forma ecosistémica de vida que procuraba tanto la conservación como la reproducción de la naturaleza, de la cual se entendían como parte y no como dominadores, lógica distinta a la desarrollada por la sociedad moderna, donde la acumulación del capital, implantada en los territorios costeros de lo que hoy es el Ecuador, desde inicios del siglo XX.</p>
<p>La memoria social escribe la historia</p>	<p>La voz de la gente es el plural que sostiene el relato del somos, porque para el ser humano recordar es traer al corazón, una acción que busca en los calendarios del tiempo y sus hechos, en el corazón de la gente y su camino, el nosotros y sus pasos el fin del caminar, la pertenencia y la identidad como abrazo. Por ello cultivar la memoria es una necesidad esencial para la vida de la gente, pueblos y comunidades. Y esa necesidad hoy, en este milenio, significa también imagen y sonido, el lenguaje audiovisual como instrumento de la memoria de los pueblos. Se proyectará para la discusión y análisis filmografía de mi autoría, los cortometrajes: <i>The Soul of the forest</i> (Cambodia), <i>Requiem</i> y <i>Aquí nos quedamos Biejo Lucho</i> y extractos del largometraje <i>Manglar Ley de mujer</i>.</p>

Módulo 4: Ecosistema y socio-sistemas marino costeros, sistemas sin pasaporte. Sus valores en el contexto del cambio global

Temática	Contenidos
<p>Ecosistema y socio-sistemas marino costeros, Sus valores en el contexto del cambio global</p>	<p>Caracterización de los territorios y sus poblaciones: Ecosistemas marino-costeros, sistemas sin pasaporte: manglares, planos lodosos, playas arenosas, playas rocosas. Conexión entre ecosistemas. Relación pueblos de manglar: caracterización social, situaciones de las poblaciones costeras son similares</p>

	<p>Ecosistemas marinos y sus especies: Redes tróficas, Biodiversidad marina Valores ecosistémicos. Restauración socio-ecológica marino-costera Que es la restauración socio ecológica. Un enfoque participativo y comunitario</p>
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Modulo transversal: Canto y Percusión

<p>Canto y Percusión</p>	<p>Este proceso artístico busca resignificar lo aprendido y facilitar herramientas de expresión desde una perspectiva de reencuentro, escucha activa y continuidad sensible. Se contemplan cuatro sesiones de trabajo de ocho horas cada una, con una estructura clara que alterna y combina actividades de percusión, canto y exploración teatral. A través del ritmo, la voz y el cuerpo, las participantes accederán progresivamente a herramientas expresivas que les permitan canalizar inquietudes, contar sus historias y fortalecer lazos colectivos.</p> <p>Se propone una metodología participativa y vivencial, que reconoce la sabiduría y experiencia vital de cada mujer. El proceso combina la práctica musical con dinámicas de juego, improvisación, exploración vocal y rítmica, escritura espontánea y teatralidad.</p> <p>El trabajo rítmico con instrumentos de percusión se intercala con el desarrollo de la <i>voz cantada</i>, generando un diálogo creativo entre cuerpo e instrumento, palabra y sonoridad, presencia escénica y memoria colectiva, todos plasmados en una presentación como cierre del proceso</p> <p><i>El reencuentro con los saberes aprendidos</i> Enfoque: Reactivar experiencias anteriores, presentar la metodología y abrir un espacio de confianza. Exploración de ritmo (cumbia), canto, juego y escucha</p> <p>Creación del nuevo canto del mar Enfoque: Composición colectiva a partir de inquietudes recogidas en la primera jornada. Desarrollo de recursos expresivos y puesta en práctica de las herramientas adquiridas.</p> <p>Ritualidad ancestral de la música y los mitos Enfoque: Exploración simbólica del sonido y su dimensión ritual. Creación de relatos sonoros y teatrales a partir de mitos y leyendas locales. Uso de ocarinas, creación de paisajes sonoros.</p>
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