

# Women, Land and Food: Food Security from the Role of *Kamëntšá* Women\*

[English Version]

Mujer, tierra y alimento: una mirada a la seguridad alimentaria desde el rol de la mujer *kamëntšá*

Mulheres, terra e alimentos: um olhar sobre a segurança alimentar através do papel das mulheres *kamëntšá*

Received 11 March, 2022. Accepted 8 April, 2022.

Indira Andrea Quiroga Dallos\*\*

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6511-9534>

Colombia

## Abstract

› To cite this article:

Quiroga Dallos, I. A. (2023). Women, Land and Food: Food Security from the Role of *Kamëntšá* Women.

*Ánfora*, 30(54). 19-40.

<https://doi.org/10.30854/anfv.30.n55.2023.918>

Universidad Autónoma de Manizales. L-ISSN 0121-6538.

E-ISSN 2248-6941.

CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

**Objective:** To present a reflection on the role played by indigenous women and the cultural aspects of community food security, specifically, from the experiences of the *Kamëntšá mamitas*. **Methodology:** The methodology used to develop the research from which this article is derived is ethnographic. Participant observation was carried out for three months living with eight *Kamëntšá mamitas* in their ancestral territory, the Sibundoy Valley in Putumayo, Colombia. Other research techniques were also employed, such as ethnographic interviewing, recording of formal and informal conversations, and secondary source review. **Results:** The relationship between the activities, practices, and knowledge of some *Kamëntšá* women with the land was identified, specifically, with the care and cultivation of the chagras or *jajañ*. Based on this relationship, it became clear that

---

\* This article is derived from the research project "Cozinhar bonito: uma etnografia de la cultura alimentaria *kamentsá*," carried out as a degree requirement for a Master's degree in Anthropology at the Universidade Federal da Bahia, Brazil.

\*\* Master in Anthropology, Anthropologist. Universidad de Santander. [in.quiroga@mail.udes.edu.co](mailto:in.quiroga@mail.udes.edu.co)

to achieve food security, it is necessary to consider the symbolic aspects that these women attribute to food plants such as maize, the classification they make of food, the search to maintain good health and, therefore, the importance of their role in food policies. **Conclusions:** To achieve food security, it is necessary to recognize community dynamics in relation to land, traditional subsistence production systems, culturally attributed meanings of food and the role of women. This, understanding that it is not only developed in the search for the reproduction of the group, but also the productive, public, and health systems.

**Keywords:** food; food security; ethnography; indigenous women; *Kamëntšá*; health.

## Resumen

**Objetivo:** presentar una reflexión sobre el rol que desempeñan las mujeres indígenas y los aspectos culturales para la seguridad alimentaria de la comunidad; específicamente, desde las experiencias de las *mamitas kamëntšá*. **Metodología:** la metodología empleada para el desarrollo de la investigación de la cual se deriva este artículo es de tipo etnográfico. Se realizó observación participante por un periodo de tres meses conviviendo con ocho *mamitas kamëntšá* en su territorio ancestral, el Valle del Sibundoy. Igualmente, se emplearon otras técnicas de investigación, como la entrevista etnográfica, el registro de conversaciones formales e informales y revisión de fuente secundaria. **Resultados:** se identificó la relación entre las actividades, prácticas y saberes de algunas mujeres *kamëntšá* con la tierra; específicamente, con el cuidado y cultivo en las chagras o *jajañ*. A partir de esta relación se visibilizó que en favor del alcance de la seguridad alimentaria es necesario considerar los aspectos simbólicos que estas mujeres le atribuyen a plantas alimentarias como el maíz, la clasificación que hacen sobre los alimentos, la búsqueda del mantenimiento de una buena salud y, por ende, la importancia de su papel en las políticas alimentarias. **Conclusiones:** para alcanzar la seguridad alimentaria es necesario reconocer las dinámicas de la comunidad con relación con la tierra, los sistemas productivos tradicionales de subsistencia, los significados atribuidos culturalmente a los alimentos y el papel de la mujer. Ello, entendiendo que no solo se desarrolla en la búsqueda de la reproducción del grupo, sino también en el sistema productivo, público y la salud.

**Palabras clave:** alimentación; seguridad alimentaria; etnografía; mujer indígena; *kamëntšá*; salud.

## Resumo

**Objetivo:** apresentar uma reflexão sobre o papel desempenhado pelas mulheres indígenas e os aspectos culturais para a segurança alimentar da comunidade; especificamente, a partir das experiências das *mamitas kamëntšá*. **Metodologia:** a metodologia utilizada para o desenvolvimento da pesquisa da qual este artigo é derivado é a etnográfica. A observação dos participantes foi realizada por um período de três meses vivendo com oito mulheres *kamëntšá* em seu território ancestral, o Vale Sibundoy. Outras técnicas de pesquisa também foram utilizadas, tais como entrevistas etnográficas, a gravação de conversas formais e informais e a revisão de fontes secundárias. **Resultados:** a relação entre as atividades, práticas e conhecimentos de algumas mulheres *kamëntšá* com a terra foi identificada; especificamente, com o cuidado e cultivo nos chagras ou *jajañ*. A partir desta relação ficou claro que em favor da segurança alimentar é necessário considerar os aspectos simbólicos que estas mulheres atribuem às plantas alimentícias como o milho, a classificação que fazem sobre a alimentação, a busca da manutenção da boa saúde e, portanto, a importância de seu papel nas políticas alimentares. **Conclusões:** para alcançar a segurança alimentar, é necessário reconhecer a dinâmica comunitária em relação à terra, aos sistemas tradicionais de produção de subsistência, aos significados culturalmente atribuídos à alimentação e ao papel da mulher. Isto, entendendo que não se desenvolve apenas na busca da reprodução do grupo, mas também nos sistemas produtivo, público e de saúde.

**Palavras chave:** alimentação; segurança alimentar; etnografia; mulheres indígenas; *kamëntšá*; saúde.

## Introducción

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), more than 820 million people suffer hunger in the world. Approximately one person out of nine live in developing countries. The vulnerability of many populations and the decline in food production, access, or consumption places them at risk of food insecurity. Food insecurity involves different aspects of social life and, in many population groups, is related to the abandonment of subsistence agriculture for the production of market crops (Messer, 1995, pp. 60-61).

Maluf *et al.* (2000) state that rural hunger, rural poverty, and exodus result from the lack of small and medium-scale productive activity in the rural sector with an emphasis on agricultural production. Other factors are the concentration of land ownership, the precarious conditions of small and medium-sized urban commercial and industrial enterprises, the relatively lower average wages in the food industry, and the environmental impacts of the technological pattern.

On the FAO hunger map, Colombia appears with moderately low rates of hunger, between five and 14.9 percent. However, in 2022 this same organization published the report *Hunger Hotspots FAO-WFP early warnings on acute food insecurity* (WFP y FAO, 2022). It concludes that this country, after the pandemic, migratory crises, and continuous internal displacement, is at high risk of suffering from hunger.

The conditions of risk and vulnerability of the population in Colombia are associated with social inequalities that are reflected in the urban-rural distinction. "The departments with the highest proportion of poor people and/or the highest number of people with unsatisfied basic needs present the highest prevalences of food insecurity" (Díaz, 2013, p. 78).

In the case of Colombia, recognizing the increase in dependence on food imports, mainly corn, beans, tubers, and cereals is also relevant, together with the high import of inputs for agricultural production. According to Darío Fajardo (2002), imports went from representing 15.5% of GDP in 1990 to 46.9% in 1997 due to the decline in the production of transitory agricultural goods. Mara Alejandra Mejía (2017) stresses how the agricultural sector's contribution to GDP decreased from 22% in 1981 to 20% in 1990 to just 7.9% in 2000. The previous due to the neoliberal economic opening that occurred in the 1990s.

The above is grounded in the reality that the same food is no longer valued for its nutritional or symbolic qualities, but rather, as noted by María Eugenia

Arango in 2017, the economic theory has turned food into a commodity that may be purchased through trade or through humanitarian aid (in some cases).

In contrast to this last viewpoint, which is a product of economic theory, and in line with Maluf *et al.* (2000), the following factors need to be taken into consideration when discussing food security: a) The quality of food free of chemical components that may be harmful to human health; b) Respecting the customs of the culinary culture by taking into account the dimensions of the cultural heritage, culinary preferences, and preparation and consumption customs; c) System sustainability without compromising potential future levels of production, distribution, and consumption.

Due to the rent that women are able to get, at least one-third of all rural economies are able to overcome their food insecurity. However, these people own less than 2% of the world's land. These women, who typically handle land-related work directly, settle on parcels that are not their own. This prevents them from breaking the precarious circle they are now in (Espinosa & Diez-Urdanivia, 2006, p. 22).

The women who remain in the field fulfill a crucial role as producers of income and food. Typically, they focus on subsistence agriculture, producing basic crops like maize, rice, and tomatoes that can meet up to 90% of the nutritional needs of underprivileged groups. In this way, they carry out a crucial function for food security. This is also because they participate in the many stages of agriculture (Ballara & Valenzuela, 2012).

In keeping with Maluff *et al.*'s suggestion (2000), a brief reflection on the relevance of the deepening cultural components for achieving food security is presented in this article. This is made possible by the recognition of the contribution made by women to food production (Menasche *et al.*, 2008; Alvarez, 2005). In contrast, the commensality, a factor important to food security, "[...] is composed of complex processes that involve cultural and emotional values specifically tailored to historical and economic contexts, and that the absence of understanding on this issue precludes policies that minimize cultural elements" (Soares & Lopes, 2007, p. 78).

This reflection was specifically based on the experience of the indigenous *Kamntá Biyá* people who live in Putumayo, Colombia, and have seen changes in how they obtain their food (even though this is a situation that is well recognized throughout the nation). Currently, agriculture is a single-crop conventional system, as opposed to the traditional way of subsisting on the products of the *jaja* or the *chagra*. The primary goals of the economy are subsistence and self-consumption, and the agricultural system does not provide a material financial return (Juajibioy & Gómez, 2014). More than 50% of families now obtain their primary source of economic resources from

the sale of services; examples include Tamabioy and San Félix communities (Palacios & Barrientos, 2014).

Despite the fact that Colombia currently has high food import numbers, which were reflected in the decline in food products in 2020 and 2021 due to the pandemic's closure of air, sea, and land ports, the Putumayo department reports higher import numbers for basic industrial supplies, equipment, and machinery, while the agricultural sector experienced a negative variation of 100% in import prices (MinComercio, Oficina de Estudios Económicos, 2022). These figures do not mean that the overall Colombian context, in which food security is being threatened, should not be taken into consideration; rather, it is important to recognize that Putumayo economic dynamics still make it possible to demonstrate the use of domestic agricultural production for local and regional food supplies.

## Methodology

This article is derived from the research carried out in the Masters of Anthropology program. The research was carried out through an ethnographic approach. For the development of this, secondary sources were consulted, semi-structured ethnographic interviews, formal and informal conversations and participant observation were carried out.

In particular, a group of eight women was privileged in this work. They are called “*mamitas*” within the community. These women are recognized for their knowledge of culture, tradition, and reflection on the community’s current situation. They have a high status within the community. This reinforces the thesis put forward by José Alfonso de la Cruz-Melo and Lirian Astrid Ciro (2019), who, from their work with Afro-Colombian women, highlight how midwives through gastronomy keep the history of their community alive, as well as the visions of the world, and the use of the elements offered by the environment in their daily lives:

The role of women is vital in the family aspect, as well as socially; therefore, the consent for her ancestral knowledge is also necessary and peremptory, symbolically, as well as economically, which highlights the importance of the role of the midwife as a cohesive force in her community through her expertise and empowerment. (p.133).

The participant observation was carried out through the experience in the Sibundoy Valley in the department of Putumayo over a period of three months in 2015. There they shared moments of cultivation, harvest, preparation, transformation, and food consumption.

### ***Jajañ*: the Land, the Chagra, the Food**

Currently the economy of the *Kamëntša* town is based on salaried work, omitting the work of the land and individual production of food. This community lives from the payment of wages and the sale of handicrafts, which allows the generation of parallel sources of income.

The *kamëntša mamitas* are characterized by having a more traditional way of life and continuing to obtain most of their food from work in the *chagra* (Figure 1). The surpluses that are produced are sold in the town market. They buy gas and some industrial foods with the proceeds. They also pay for health contingencies.

**Figure 1.** *Mama Georgina* harvesting beans.



Note: Photograph taken on May 23, 2014.



The foods that comprise the mothers' meals, in good part, although differentiated by time, are obtained through the production of the chagra. However, this production is diminishing. According to Menasche *et al.* (2008), the factors that affect the decrease in food destined for self-consumption are: the reduction in the size of the properties, the concentration of agricultural activities in fewer crops destined for commercialization, too many local markets, the increase in the supply of food available there, mobility between the town and the countryside, and the flight of women from rural areas (especially young women).

The mothers have chagras where they can obtain up to 70 types of foods, forage plants, medicine, a way to conduct forestry, and a place to maintain livestock. From the plants they can obtain monetary income, food, medicine, fuel, and raw material for handicrafts, among other things. The home gardens are generally located in the back of the houses and are smaller than the chagras, which are located far from the houses and only go there "when they feel like it," according to the mothers.

When food produced in the chagra is not available, it must be purchased in town. Sometimes it is ordered through neighbors or acquaintances. Industrialized foods such as vegetable oil, sardines, pasta, coffee, sugar, salt, and rice, are purchased in the municipality market. In the market square, perishable foods that are not harvested, that were lost or that were not planted are purchased or exchanged through barter; for example: arracacha, corn, beans, carrots, onions, garlic, fruits, etc.

### **Corn: Food of Life and Hope**

From the indigenous perspective, the definition and importance of maize transcends its physical dimension. Its meaning implies symbolic elements that are even recognized by FAO. For the Mayans and Aztecs, both blood and human flesh have been formed by corn. Sedentary civilizations, for the most part, have reached a remarkable development and have managed to consolidate themselves thanks to the cultivation of a certain complex carbohydrate, such as: potato, rice, millet, wheat or corn (Mintz, 1996, p. 35).



It is the only species of the genus *zea*, a name that has several meanings. One refers to the grains and another to the sustenance of life. *Mays* in the Caribbean language means “that which provides life.” For the *Kamëntša* the *šboachan*, as it is called in their own language, is the fruit of strength and hope.

The *Kamëntša* mamitas make use of their capacity for agency through the deliberate actions they carry out to conserve the seeds of the varieties of maize that are being lost. In the case of Mama Pastora, her father, a well-known traditional doctor from the community, taught her to “[...] not let her culture, the tradition, be forgotten or lost.” She keeps four types of maize in her chagra (see Figure 2). The association of which she is a member has also organized *mingas* to share seeds. On these occasions each woman carries a plant planted for each of the members, they must be plants that they do not have in their chagras. For example, Mama Pastora shared garlic and the other types of corn that the other mothers don't currently plant.

**Figure 2.** Four types of corn that Mama Pastora preserves.



Note: Photograph taken on May 11, 2014.

The symbolic dimension of corn is also evident when some mothers report that corn talks, moves, sighs, and cries in the chagras at night. On a specific occasion, Mama Margarita heard how the corn said: “I’m left with a pity... They hit me and they hurt me.” Another voice replied: “Of course, I feel sorry too. They hit me and scratched me with a knife.” Then, another said: “We must talk to the taita so that he can take us to heaven. We are suffering a lot because he doesn’t love us. Why do they catch me, beat me, and burn me? They burn my whole side and then they hit me and throw me out.”

In addition, this human capacity that is attributed to corn also has the function of representing the situation of the community, since in the same way that this plant has undergone transformations in the territory since the pre-Hispanic period, the community has received similar actions. Corn, moreover, is present in the axis of life of the community. It allows the reproduction/production of thought as groups, as expressed by Sidney Mintz (1996), for whom what people eat expresses who they are for themselves as a group and for others (external to the group).

Once the corn is harvested by the women, they transport it in sacks to their homes. Sometimes they go on foot, other times, by motorcycle or on animal-drawn floats (“vixens”<sup>3</sup>). They sit on their traditional benches, in the kitchen or in the patio, and in the company of other women or alone they begin to shuck it, while they talk about their families, neighbors or the harvest.

Corn is transformed through the use of different techniques such as: boiling, roasting, steaming, peeling, and fermenting, among others. Some of the main preparations are: *uamesnen* or mote, *bishana*, *uandëtsajón* or roasted tamale, *jangnëntsna* [“/ i”] or wrapped, *jangnëntsna tsëmbec* or bean wrapped, *enabsmacna* or corn broth with beans, *aco* or toasted corn, colada, *becoy ntsbonen* or chicha colada and *sangonan ou smen mesquenán* roasted millet colada.

### Food Classifications: Chemical additive food or Natural Food?

Human nutrition also involves rules, classifications, and categorizations that have their origin in culture. The foods chosen and preferred for daily and special consumption respond to the ways in which foods are classified (Douglas, 1995; Lévi-Strauss, 1964; 1981; Fischler, 1995; Contreras and Gracia, 2005).

---

3. The term ‘fox’ refers in the Colombian context to the use of different harnesses, means and vehicles for the transport of people, agricultural products and other materials with animal traction.

Likewise, it is proposed that to achieve a state of food security, considering how populations classify food is necessary.

The way food is categorized and classified also influences food perceptions and practices. From the field work, it was possible to identify two main categories under which the *Kamëntša* mamitas

group food: “natural food vs. food with chemicals” or “food from now vs. old food.”

These categories have a direct relationship with time. After more than 500 years of coexistence in the same territory with the white population, the impact and the differences between the indigenous *Kamëntša* and white people or settlers is revealed through food.

On the one hand, settlers plant under the monoculture modality, they use pesticides and fertilizers that have also affected the lands of the indigenous community, and do not respect the agricultural calendar for planting or harvesting. For the members of the *Kamëntša* community, these elements mean that food that is produced by the settlers are not considered “healthy,” but is food with a high content of chemicals that directly affect people’s quality of life.

Likewise, the way of relating to the land has been negatively impacted, since from the *Kamëntša* conception the land is affected by the actions that are committed against it and the results are the reduction of productivity and the deterioration of quality of food. “The earth is tired, it is sad, that’s why it doesn’t give like before and you can’t eat like before” (Luis Pujimuy, personal communication, May 21, 2014).

People who eat food that is classified within the category of “chemical additive food” are considered weak, prone to contracting diseases, since by eating this food, they are directly consuming poison, incorporating it into the most intimate of the being, both at a symbolic and physical level, polluting elements (Fishler, 1995).

The speeches and programs of professionals of the formal health sector (such as doctors and nutritionists) that recommend that the community have a balanced diet are questioned because, generally, the food they should eat is produced by the food industry or as food with chemical additives.

On the other hand, there is foods that come from the *chagras*, which generally have not been produced with fertilizers or pesticides and, in the cases that are used, they are made at home and are organic. These foods are considered “natural” products and they allow one to be stronger, healthy and to live longer. In addition, they are products that are sold easily in the market; mainly because white people also consider that they are produced through clean production.

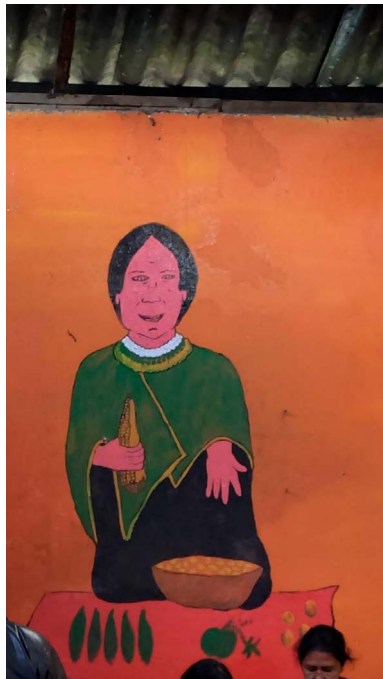
Usually, “old food” is clean food, it has been produced without chemical additives. It is also recognized as a traditional food and is made up, for example,

of *tumaqueño*, *arracacha*, *achira* and, in general, tubers. *Bishana* also falls into this category and it is recommended that children and sick people eat it.

### Woman, Land, and Food

To talk about food security of *Kamëntšá* people, explicitly recognizing the role of women in relation to food and nutrition is necessary (see Figure 3). According to the conversations held with the mothers, to be a *Kamëntšá* woman, to feel like a woman, you must have dogs, hens, chickens, ducks, pigs, and all kinds of animals at home.

Figure 3. Mural in the Sibundoy market square.



Note: Photograph taken on June 29, 2014.

The pig, the *cuy* and the hen coexist with the woman, because, at six in the morning, the woman is sleeping, but the pig is already squalling. The *cuyes* are chirping. Hens are singing, they are clucking, they are already hungry. The chicks are already yelling “cheep, cheep, cheep.” And that is the coexistence of women’s lives. (Mama Georgina, personal communication, June 18, 2014).

Since they were little girls, *Kamëntša* women learn that, in addition to domestic tasks, learning to live with the animals of the house and to plant corn, clean it and cook it is essential. With tools they helped with the work of the land and sowed the seeds of beans, *arracacha*, cabbage, etc., that their mothers gave them. The planting of corn and other seeds is similar to the development of the *rondador*, a wind musical instrument. The growth process of the sown plant is a simile of the growth of the woman.

*Kamëntša* woman expresses to be in a close correlation with the “*bastana mama*” or mother earth. The recognition of her work as a reproductive of the group is similar to that of the land, producer of food. That is why the earth grieves and suffers when mistreated. “Because one day she is going to be like mother earth, productive. And she is going to create many generations and for that she has to learn to work with the earth” (Mamá Georgina, personal communication, June 18, 2014).

Groups from the Colombian Amazon, such as the Murui, believe that girls are formed as models of mothers: mother of *chagra*, because she supports her children and contributes to feeding her community; mother of nature, for her duty to take care of the vegetation; mother of her own children, for the training that her fertile character gives them; and mother of people as an example of work, kindness and human simplicity (Bríñez, 2002).

In the case of the mamitas, there is an acceptance and concern in cases of losing this model. Their way they related with the land, animals and other beings are a form of reproduction of the group. But the manifestation of an expectation is also identified. To be a woman, they must have and know how to raise animals, clean the house, follow certain behavior patterns, know the work of the *chagra*, know and develop the sowing of corn, other food plants, and cook.

Gender expectations in relation to food have effects on the expression of conflict and on relationships of service and deference (DeVault, 2008). Men demand results in taste and quality of meals. However, in most cases, the mamitas with whom the research was carried out did not have any male figure in their residence.

Marjorie DeVault (2008) states that women accept their husbands’ demands and are sensitive to their evaluation of their meals. However, in what was

observed with the Kamëntšá mamitas, they do not depend on the relationship with their husbands. And in the case of the mamitas, more than a tool of male domination, food fulfills the function of sociability and enables social relationships with members outside their nucleus. Food and drink make it easier to access the men's labor.

The possession of land allows the *Kamëntšá* mamitas to get their food and independence for their subsistence and, if they require any help, they have the support of relatives. For them, the domestic and the economic spheres are interdependent. Women and work are polyvalent, they oscillate between the reproductive/productive and the simultaneity of their activities. This sense of polyvalence is the particular feature of their economic and social participation from the group toward society and different productive sectors (Espinosa and Diez-Urdanivia 2006, p. 14). In all cases, to strengthen the activities of these women favors the possibility of maintaining autonomy and food security. It ensures both the production of food diversity and monetary income to getting additional products and the payment of health services (not included in the mandatory health plan).

In their role as producers of food and transformers of these products into food, the *Kamëntšá* mamitas become consumers-producers and also users of what is eaten. They produce cultural notions that belong to them, they are translated into user operations with particular combinations that seek to describe a given fact (Aguilar, 2001, pp. 15-16).

These women are creators, although sometimes anonymous, they give meaning to food in daily practice through related determinations that may be incoherent: multiform, fragmentary practices, related to events, insinuated, or hidden that respond to a logic (Certeau, 1996, pp. 17-18).

*Kamëntšá* women invent their own styles, they emphasize some element in practice, create personal ways to continue their routines, they take new ingredients and give each one special flavors, a special way of eating them, a particular way of getting them. With respect to corn, the diversity of food preparations made from a single product was identified, thus increasing the possibility of use and consumption by community members.

According to Penny Van Esterik (1999), women should be the key in the formulation of food policies because of their special relationship with food, with the land (essential in food production) and, in many cases, their tendency toward malnutrition. Additionally, when they categorize food, they assign meanings to foods that foster the consumption of the "healthy" foods by cleaner production.

Women are in charge of the different stages required for the proper food system development: production, transportation, processing and consumption

and, above all, daily meals. They are the ones who, once the food has been transformed into meals, choose the portions for each family member, the food order, composition, and compatibility (Fischler, 1995). They are also in charge of giving meaning to food and make it part of the culture. The food system has not been considered a cultural right (Van Esterik, 1999), on the contrary, it has been used to justify the deprivation of women's and girls' rights to food and, therefore, their health conditions.

## Health and Nutrition

Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that “Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services” (UN General Assembly, 1948, p. 5). Thus, the rights to health and food are certainly considered basic rights and their lack prevent the achievement of a decent standard of living.

Food transformations – which lead to the population loss of food security – create risky and vulnerable circumstances for health conditions, mainly for children and women. The lack of agricultural production and economic resources to buy food that is not produced on the farms and the loss of agrobiodiversity have led to malnutrition and obesity, resulting in an increase in cardiovascular diseases and diabetes.

The right to health is closely associated with the right to water and food, not only in theory, but also explicitly. Several indigenous communities consider the relationship between health and food. In the *Diagnosis of the Kamëntšá safeguard plan* (Cabildo Indígena Camentsá Biyá, 2012), food security is described as part of this component, to the extent that the community's health problems are explained by difficulties associated with the poor nutrition and the scarcity of traditional products for obtaining nutrients.

In relation to this, there is a need of territory to plant traditional products considered part of the diet and good nutrition of the Kamëntšá people. At present, a high percentage of indigenous families of the *Kamëntšá* people do not consume the food of the *jajañ* resulting in malnutrition of children, teenagers and seniors who are more vulnerable to this situation. Likewise, illnesses related to mental health can be caused by the lack of a good diet, because there is no *chagra* with a variety of natural products. (Cabildo Indígena Kamëntšá Biyá, 2012, p. 244).



In this regard, other studies on indigenous women from Cumbal and Guachucal from the Andean and rural areas of Nariño, have defined food security as the possibility of having access to a balanced diet made up of sufficient food, providing good health and culturally appropriate for the type and production method (Sinclair *et al.*, 2022).

Particularly, the case of the *Kamëntša* mamitas evidences a clear concern for good health through the observations of the community's youth and children, to whom they express that to "[...] have good health and reach old age, they must consume traditional foods such as, *bishana*; a soup made with corn and cabbage, with a recognition as the most traditional soup by the community members" (Quiroga, 2020, p. 58).

Added to the aforementioned food categories, there are chemical additive food vs. natural food. The latter refers to food produced in the chagra under organic production methods by the mamitas. As a result, healthy, wholesome foods are obtained that strengthen the construction of the person and the maintenance of optimal health. There, seed conservation and cultivation of medicinal and food plants are promoted, ensuring the different food nutrients to satisfy nutritional and cultural needs.

Guaranteeing food security based on the recognition of cultural elements means guarantying the right to health. This to the extent that it involves reducing risk conditions for the loss of food security, because good healthy food expectations and perceptions are satisfied, thus agrobiodiversity is fostered and food from clean production is consumed.

## Conclusions

Difficulties accessing land and economic and social transformations have led to a decrease in the use of traditional subsistence systems as the chagra, which are fundamental for food security. These lands are used to grow and harvest foodstuffs, medicinal products, raw materials for handicrafts and fuel, among others. This land also has a great social and cultural significance. Strengthening these lands allows local communities and populations obtain different and sufficient food for self-sufficiency without having to depend on monetary resources for the purchase of industrialized products with high purchase costs, considered "unhealthy" and with an impact on the reduction of culinary diversity.

The *Kamëntšá* mamitas – senior women with cultural recognition (most of them with better access to land) – play a decisive role in the continuity, transmission, knowledge and use of this land. They are interested in providing continuity and have the knowledge of working the land from polyculture and symbiosis with plant and animal species. The role of women is not just a reproductive and private one, it is a productive and public one.

The mamitas' productive activities mainly occur in the chagra and home gardens. These lands produce “healthy” foods as opposed to the foods produced by the colonists, which are linked to the notion of poison, human and environmental pollution.

The food processing (culturally consumable), the composition of a “good meal” (healthy) and its distribution within the members of the group are also women's tasks. Therefore, food availability is not just regarded as a group need. Instead, it is the understanding of the relationships and the social dynamics within these groups, the construction of categories and classifications around food and their introduction process into what is considered “food.”

With respect to the *Kamëntša* people, the symbolic dimension of food, the relationship with the land and the role of women are important to understand the meaning of having healthy, sufficient, and sustainable foods and, a possible food security within the framework of food habits and practices. Similarly, these aspects are considered for improving current diets by including other foods in the symbolic system to reduce malnutrition and obesity.

This article is an invitation to recognize the importance of cultural aspects for food security and, in particular, the role of women, their relationship with the land, classification of food, and concern and care for the other (human and non-human). It is the start of researching in the place of food in cultural rights, in the right to health and the role of women in a possible food sovereignty project.

## References

- Aguilar-Piña, P. (2001). Por un marco teórico conceptual para los estudios de antropología de la alimentación. *Anales de Antropología*, 35(1), 11-29. <http://www.revistas.unam.mx/index.php/antropologia/article/view/14884/14183>.

- Álvarez, A. (2005). Mujeres zenú: manejo, uso y conocimiento de la biodiversidad: un aporte a la soberanía alimentaria, la medicina y la cultura material. In Escobar, E. M. Pazmiño, A. Escobar, P. y Ulloa, A. (Eds.). *Las mujeres indígenas en los escenarios de la biodiversidad* (pp. 91-104). UICN, Fundación Natura Colombia, ICANH. <http://ibdigital.uib.es/greenstone/sites/localsite/collect/cd2/index/assoc/uicn0010.dir/uicn0010.pdf>
- Asamblea General de la ONU. (1948). *Declaración Universal de los Derechos Humanos*. Naciones Unidas.
- Arango Ospina, M. E. (2017). Efectos negativos de la globalización sobre la seguridad alimentaria en los países latinoamericanos. *Ánfora*, 11(19), 102–118. <https://doi.org/10.30854/anf.v11.n19.2004.248>
- Ballara, M. N.; Valenzuela, R. (2012). *Mujer, agricultura y seguridad alimentaria: una mirada para el fortalecimiento de las políticas públicas en América Latina*. <https://www.marcelaballara.cl/genydes/2012%20Mujer,%20agricultura%20y%20seguridad%20alimentaria%20Ballara%20Damianovic%20Valenzuel.pdf>
- Bríñez, A. H. (2002). *Casabe: símbolo cohesionador de la cultura Uitoto*. Ministerio de Cultura de Colombia.
- Cabildo Indígena Camentsá Biyá. (2012). *Sboachan jtabouashentsam natjēmban nýestkang jtsyññengam. Sembrando el maíz, fruto de la fuerza y la esperanza para asegurar el buen vivir camëntšá*. Ministerio del Interior de Colombia.
- Contreras Hernández, J. y Gracia Arnáiz, M. (2005). *Alimentación y cultura: perspectivas antropológicas*. Ariel.
- Certeau, M.(1996). *La invención de lo cotidiano: artes de hacer*. Universidad Iberoamericana.
- DeVault, M. (2008). Conflict and deference. In Van Esterik, P, y Counihan, C. (Eds.). *Food and culture: A reader* (pp. 240-258). Routledge.
- De la Cruz-Melo, J. A. y Ciro, L. A. (2019). Caracterización de un glosario sobre el léxico gastronómico de las matronas de Mulaló. *Ánfora*, 26(46), 111-135. <https://doi.org/10.30854/anf.v26.n46.2019.555>.

- Díaz, J. M. (2013). *Inseguridad alimentaria en población indígena y afrodescendiente en Colombia* [memoria final de maestría]. Universidad de Barcelona. <http://diposit.ub.edu/dspace/bitstream/2445/55530/1/Diaz%20Scarpetta%20C%20Javier%20Mauricio.%20Inseguridad%20alimentaria%20en%20la%20poblaci%C3%B3n%20ind%C3%ADgena%20y%20afrodescendiente%20en%20Colombia.pdf>.
- Douglas, M. (1995). Las estructuras de lo culinario. In Contreras, J. (Ed.). *Alimentación y cultura: necesidades, gustos y costumbres* (pp. 171-197). Universidad de Barcelona.
- Espinosa Cortés, L. M. y Diez-Urdanivia, S. (2006). Notas sobre la contribución de la mujer a la seguridad alimentaria de la unidad doméstica campesina. *Nueva antropología*, 20(66), 12-31. <https://revistas-colaboracion.juridicas.unam.mx/index.php/nueva-antropologia/article/view/15883>
- Fajardo, D. (2002). *Para sembrar la paz, hay que aflojar la tierra: comunidades, tierras y territorios en la construcción de un país*. Universidad Nacional de Colombia.
- Fischler, C. (1995). *El (h)omnívoro. El gusto, la cocina y el cuerpo*. Anagrama.
- Juajibioy, D.A; Gómez, J. (2014). *Análisis socio-ambiental de los sistemas de producción agraria en la comunidad indígena camentsa-íya en la vereda las Plamas Sibundoy-Putumayo* [tesis de pregrado]. Universidad Piloto de Colombia, Bogotá. <http://repository.unipiloto.edu.co/bitstream/handle/20.500.12277/837/00001926.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>
- Lévi-Strauss, C. (1964). *El pensamiento salvaje* (trad. F. González-Aramburo). Fondo de Cultura Económica.
- Lévi-Strauss, C. (1981). *El origen de las maneras de mesa*. Siglo XXI.
- Maluf, R. S., Menezes, F., Bleil-Marques, S. (2000). *Caderno segurança alimentar*. <http://docplayer.com.br/423030-Caderno-seguranca-alimentar.html>.
- Mejía, M. A. (2017). *La seguridad alimentaria en Colombia: cambios y vulnerabilidades*. Universidad Central, Facultad de Ciencias Administrativas, Económicas y Contables. [https://www.ucentral.edu.co/sites/default/files/inline-files/2017\\_Seguridad\\_alimentaria\\_001.pdf](https://www.ucentral.edu.co/sites/default/files/inline-files/2017_Seguridad_alimentaria_001.pdf)

- Menasche, R., Charão-Marques, F., y Zanetti, C. (2008). Autoconsumo e segurança alimentar: a agricultura familiar a partir dos saberes e práticas da alimentação. *Revista de Nutrição*, 21, 145-158. <https://www.scielo.br/j/rn/a/SzrvBZQwb3N63QfhjtG4fcf/?lang=pt>.
- Messer, E. (1995). Un estado de la cuestión. Perspectivas antropológicas sobre la dieta. En Contreras, J. (Ed.). *Alimentación y cultura: necesidades, gustos y costumbres* (pp. 27-84). Universitat de Barcelona.
- MinComercio, Oficina de Estudios Económicos. (2022). *Información: perfiles económicos departamentales 2022*. <https://www.mincit.gov.co/getattachment/35f426f4-7a95-4dd7-8b8a-f7d7b7919906/Putumayo.aspx>
- Mintz, S. W. (1996). *Dulzura y poder: el lugar del azúcar en la historia moderna*. Siglo XXI.
- Palacios Bucheli, V. J. y Barrientos Fuentes, J. C. (2014). Caracterización técnica y económica de los agrosistemas de producción en dos resguardos indígenas del Putumayo (Colombia). *Acta Agronómica*, 63(2), 91-100. <https://doi.org/10.15446/acag.v63n2.29358>
- Quiroga, I. (2020). Aproximación etnográfica a la alimentación y la comida de las mamitas kamëntšá en el Valle de Sibundoy. *Maguaré*, 34(2), 49-83. <https://revistas.unal.edu.co/index.php/maguare/article/view/92580/77607>
- Sinclair, K., Thompson-Colón, T., Bastidas-Farm, A., Matamoros, S. E. D. C., Olaya, E.; Melgar-Quiñonez, H. (2022). Women's Autonomy and Food Security: Connecting the Dots from the Perspective of Indigenous Women in Rural Colombia. *SSM-Qualitative Research in Health*, 2, 1-13. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2667321522000403>
- Soares, M. C.; Lopes, P. G. (2007). Segurança alimentar e nutricional: a produção do conhecimento com ênfase nos aspectos da cultura. *Revista de Nutrição*, 20(1), 69-81. <https://www.scielo.br/j/rn/a/tScWCNKLLh9QJtZsbRFCM4n/?lang=pt>.
- Van Esterik, P. (1999). Right to Food; Right to Feed; Right to Be Fed. The Intersection of Women's Rights and the Right to Food. *Agriculture and*

*Human Values*, 16, 225–232. <http://laps-dept.apps01.yorku.ca/anth/faculty/esterik/documents/1999Righttofood.pdf>

World Food Program (WFP) & Food and Agriculture Organization of United Nation (FAO). (2022). *Hunger Hotspots. FAO-WFP Early Warnings on Acute Food Insecurity: February to May 2022 Outlook*. World Food Program & Food and Agriculture Organization of United Nation. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cb8376en>

Quiroga Dallos, I. A. (2023). Women, Land and Food: Food Security from the Role of Kamëntšá Women. *Ánfora*, 30(54), 19-40.  
<https://doi.org/10.30854/anf.v30.n55.2023.918>

