

## The Outlet: Almirante

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For me, the sea is life. This understanding also holds true with our rivers. Each are alive, and carry life with them as they reach the sea. Our rivers, are born up high in the sacred and protected lands of the Sixaola River Basin.



### **OUTLET OF THE SIXAOLA RIVER BASIN, THE PORT OF ALMIRANTE, PANAMA**

As users of the sea, fisherwomen like me, we understand that everything that enters the sea comes from the rivers. On this basis, our participation with others is joined by a shared vision of providing influence towards sustainably developing the basin region as a whole. Here, we are specifically users and family of the sea. When we are fishing we try to be as sustainable across the aquatic valleys and in the area of San San, our protected wetlands, and in the rivers of Changuinola and the Sixaola.

When the weather allows for us, all of this region carries out its fishing work. Fishing is how we support our livelihoods. Although we are fisherwomen and fishermen, and live with and by the sea, we are very interested in the conservation of the entire Sixaola River Basin.



**OUTLET OF THE SIXAOLA RIVER BASIN, THE PORT OF ALMIRANTE, PANAMA**

Naturally, if the basin rivers are contaminated, we see ourselves readily affected here in the Sea.

In recent years there have been a lot of changes witnessed in the ecosystems in the basin, beginning at the confluence and outwards into the seas. Fishing has lessened greatly for us. The climate has changed, making the rivers grow in size considerably. We have seen how all of these shifts have affected the fish. Sadly, these changes have also been accompanied by the pollution of agricultural production of the banana and plantain across the region.

Without care, some larger producers in the basin, and more recently observed, some smaller producers who have followed suit in their footsteps, to use agrochemicals. This practice has contributed to run-off

into our rivers and stream systems in the mid-to-lower basin, and for many years, it has unfortunately reached the sea. The result is dyer here.



**PORT OF ALMIRANTE, ALMIRANTE, PANAMA, EXPORT HUB TO EUROPE, THE SIXAOLA RIVER BASIN**

When I was child, the reef here was beautiful. But today, they are bleached, and white like bone. They are dead. Without healthy and vital reefs to provide critical habitat for fish and other aquatic and marine species, the fish populations decrease. Essentially, our livelihoods are at stake.

Accompanying this, Sanponsac wetlands here have also been affected. Negative terrestrial impacts have been witnessed along the banks of the rivers, and across the wetlands. There are many species of trees that have been dying off. This worries us considerably, and promotes our belief that there is much respect for conservation work to be done and carried out here. As a basin, it is my belief that we must provide each other with encouragement to investigate these issues. We need to seek support, and perhaps within the basin group of the binational commission, and of this strong partnership Tico-Panamánian, I can foresee that we are walking into something positive for the region.

Usually what we are involved in this, are people within a civil society, but in Costa Rica organized group. On the side of Costa Rica, it could be seen as if there was a little more people interested and involved – volunteers and more involved personnel within government or institutions. I think there should be more of this, the local authorities should be involved here, the governor represents the district or districts, and together with the institutions that have to do with NANA or ARAP, but who engage not only to go once and when listening if not to take actions to respect. The binational commission for me is very relevant and incredibly important because it is an initiative that civil society is to develop the border area, and it is the civil society that comes together to makes collective decisions for the health of the basin and its residents. We as civil society are doing evaluations and can make diagnoses. But in this, we need the authorities to carry out the executions of some of the corrective measures that need to be taken.

We are a rich region. The Sixaola River Basin is a basin rich in biodiversity in the human hand, the population, and ancient rich cultures. It is in holding a high regard and respect for these elements that I think we have to handle our work in water resources planning and management with kid gloves, and develop the basin carefully, so that it is sustainable. Factors that we consider within this are the changes occurring in the basin, and our need to mitigate any negative impacts that these changes may have on our water resources and natural resources.

I can most certainly cite one of these changes immediately, it has changed because the population has increased. The Increase the population use more water care less because there are more people, there are more users

and if we do not have adequate water supplies, with regards to water security, good water, and enough of it, then the concern is that people will not use these resources responsibly.

Harmonious development is key for our transboundary river basin. For me, I view this development work is truly exercised by preserving the ecosystem throughout – the residents (people and the environment), this all has to do with the true ecosystem, correct? The interconnectivity of all living things. And if one element is out of balance or damaged, the rest of the systems feels it. This is how we think here, and this philosophy, values and culture is embedded into our work on the binational commission. We operate and come together on initiatives collectively through a lens of a working ecosystem, as a bio-region, and as a basin.

I feel that this commission should be strengthened by involving more participants in the conversation. We are doing well, but with more voices, the will for us to continue to work to cultivate the ideas and innovations to towards developing the basin, managing our resources, and within this, our waters, we can accomplish this in the region, and gain more insights to also ensure that we protect the environment. We wish to fully develop as the unique bioregion that we are in our basin, both steadily, and in friendly way where impacts of development are not likely to damage the area ecologically and culturally.

And in thinking like this, form a grounded approach for all who reside in basin anywhere in the world, transboundary or not, should consider the basin as an ecosystem an ecosystem by seeing people navigating the activities undertaken by basin residents be it economic or cultural, because this should be a very harmonious way to protect our main resource,

the main resource of the planet – water. Water depends on all the residents living in the lands around the basin. They affect one another. If managed well, the agriculture and livestock production in this basin that line the river banks, the seas then, the resources within it can also be managed well.

We must see this resource of our waters as a whole. The whole population must have a relationship with our waters, and we must handle it as such. I would like to leave a message to anyone else who has not yet to be involved in current efforts across the basin. Get involved. There is room for everyone to want to work in the binational commission of the Sixaola River Basin. A multisectoral group, people are coming from many professional sectors of different branches. They are merchants, tourism professionals – all that handle the tourism, and across all the political identities (countries), and many more areas, sectors, and communities are present within the binational commission.

The cultural part of our work in our basin, we could do a good job and keep our watershed well, but it is a great responsibility for all the residents of the basin. We want to hear from the greater communities of the basin, we want their contributions. After all, they are the reason why we are coming together in the first place. We realize that there are areas across the basin who are hard for us to reach – they knowledge their concerns, and their interests. We also know that in some places in the basin there are environmental errors committed by ignorance because many times humans do incorrect things and they do not know they are doing things that are harmful to the environment and ultimately to themselves and all the residents felt at different magnitudes and levels.

As Bocatorians (residents of the Panamánian province of Bocas del Toro), we believe in holding a high regard for everything that is the environment. This respect for the environment has been informed by our roots of an incredibly rich culture of our indigenous inhabitants, residents that know to handle and care for it well. Understanding these connections and respect for the environment, we believe that we need to live and to participate in a geographic space that does not belong to either of the two countries of Costa Rica and Panamá, and importantly support these native populations that are a part of all of our identity, informing our current and future actions because we are all a part of each other lives — we are a basin. The Sixaola River Basin.

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This text is an excerpt from “*Navigating Cultural Currents: The Sixaola River Basin Story*, that can be found here:

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