

## Latin America/ Chile

### The story of a women's group

*A video film describes the experiences of a women's group in Chile in mollusc culture*

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*De mar y tierra : historia de un grupo de mujeres* or *The land and the sea: The story of a women's group* is an ethnographic video that describes the experience of CULTIMAR, a local association of fisher women in the Xth Region of southern Chile. This has been made possible by a working agreement between the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the Memorial University of Newfoundland (MUH), and the Universidad Austral de Chile (UACH).

CULTIMAR is based in Caipulli, a village of the Ancud County in the Province of Chiloé, east of the Pudeto River. Here, two hundred people live by seaweed gathering, mollusc culture, agriculture and animal husbandry.

In the early 1980s, this agricultural village found in seaweed exploitation an unexpected resource that soon became its main source of income. The fast expansion of this activity was related to the "pelillo boom" (*Gracilaria spp*), a new international market that had its impact on the entire southern coast of Chile.

CULTIMAR, the production co-operative, was created in 1996. An earlier woman leader of seaweed gatherers suggested the creation of an organization that would unite the wives of members of the Pudeto union. She remembers: "In the year 1996, we created CULTIMAR ... We realized that every woman here was a ribereñas (person who lives near a river), and that they did not find jobs easily."

Earlier, women were trapped in their daily routines with few opportunities for generating an income from their activities. They earned some income from the seaweed, but it was too little. That is how the idea to ask for a concession for cultivating mussel (*Mytilus chilensis*) came about.

The first activity of the newborn organization was to invite people to be members. Announcements were

made over the local radio. The women from Caipulli were ready: 36 of them joined the organization of which five were already union members. Today, eight women have left the organization. This was partly due to the lack of immediate earnings, and partly due to the long distance that some women had to travel on poor roads.

Members of CULTIMAR went through a training program on mussel culture in November 1997, under the working agreement of CIDA/MUN/UACH. Beyond the initial aim of learning about mussel culture, these women found in this program a space for personal growth, for mutual support, and for encounters with other women. This was greatly facilitated by existing kinship ties among the women.

In November 1999 these women received an additional training on oyster culture. Simultaneously, they benefited from a grant for the acquisition of the materials required for installing the cultures. Currently, they are seeding both mussel and oyster.

CULTIMAR has applied for an aquaculture concession from the Subsecretaría de Pesca (the branch of the Secretary of Agriculture that regulates fishing activities in Chile) and from the Chilean Navy. This has, however, been delayed for bureaucratic reasons. The work of the group, however, continues.

The video tells the story of CULTIMAR, including the testimonies of each one of its members. It goes through their story that includes the initial change, the learning process of these women, and the consolidation of their organization. The increasing depletion of resources motivated them to search for new alternatives of production. They found an answer in an organization that provided them with a community space for meeting. For them this has been a liberating and empowering experience.

This 50-minute video has been produced by three students from the Universidad Austral de Chile, two from Journalism and the other from Anthropology. If you are interested on the video, please contact: Gabriela Araya: [je\\_munoz@entelchile.net](mailto:je_munoz@entelchile.net) or Debbie Guerra: [dguerra@uach.cl](mailto:dguerra@uach.cl)