

Giving Back to the Sea

Victor Rocha, President of the Golfo Dulce Fishermen Federation (FENOPEA) in Costa Rica talks of the challenges facing the region's fishers

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On the challenges facing FENOPEA:

For the small-scale fishermen from the South Pacific coast of the Central American country of Costa Rica, the challenge of promoting a fishermen's organization in this part of the country has to do necessarily with ensuring the economic stability and sustainability of the fishermen and their families. We also need to keep in mind responsible fishing. We don't want to fish out and finish the marine resources; we need to take care of the resources.

Our coastal societies have existed for generations, but because of weak organizations and wrong agreements with the government and local agencies, our communities have been disappearing. Our present effort is aimed at maintaining our culture and valuing our way of living. We need to rescue our way of life, which is akin to that of a peasant, only that we rely on the sea. We believe that a small group of small-scale fishers with the will to achieve the objective of responsible fishing can rescue our culture and way of life.

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This is the challenge before our federation, which is working with different small-scale fisher associations in the Golfo Dulce region, with a common vision of responsible fishing that it hopes to spread to others.

On marine conservation:

What is wrong is how the resource is being exploited right now, even by the small-scale fishers. In our case, we were using environmentally damaging fishing gears. But having realized the harm, we have made a collective effort through a small group of fishermen who have embraced the objective of conservation and promotion of responsible fishing. Our motto is: "Fishing to conserve and conserving to fish; just as the sea gives to me, I give back to the sea".

On the difficulties in organizing the small-scale fishing sector:

The hardest part about organizing small-scale fishers is to get them to believe in their value as fishermen and also to get them to realize that other sectors can value their work too. We need to realize that others depend on our work, and we must ensure that other sectors do not harm us, as some have done in the past. In this way, the small-scale fishermen will not only value themselves but also the products that they bring from the sea.

On the future vision of FENOPEA:

I think that we are bringing to life a creature that, in time, will motivate the fishermen at the national level. Since FENOPEA is an organization that was born to fight for the rights of small-scale fishermen and to bridge the needs of these fishermen, it not only manages their social and economic affairs but also looks after the fishermen's families. To tell a fisherman that he has to keep away from the sea is to kill his spirit. FENOPEA is an institution that will fight for the inalienable rights of fishermen.

*This interview was conducted with the support of **Coopesolidar R.L.**, and its associates, **Daniela Barguil** (dbarguil@coopesolidar.org) and **Vivienne Solís** (vsolis@coopesolidar.org), who helped in transcription and translation*



Researchers discussing the outcome of a study with a fishing community in Costa Rica, which is working to sustain livelihoods and promote conservation of resources

On adaptation to climate change:

The best we can do is not to use damaging fishing gears that will affect our resources in an irreversible manner. We also need to obtain training in climate-change adaptation so that we can all work together towards the common aim of sustaining our livelihoods and promoting conservation.

For more



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www.marviva.net/index.php/es/por-una-pesca-artesanal-responsable-en-el-golfo-dulce

Marviva: Responsible Artisanal Fishing in Golfo Dulce