

Latin America/ Chile

Women count here

In the indigenous Huilliche community women are socially, politically and economically active

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Historically, coastal communities in the large island of Chiloe have been interacting closely with the marine and coastal ecosystem. It is important to emphasize this at a time when the country is prioritizing the modernization of public services, promoting production and seeking to give an image of being part of the outside world, and, as part of this process, is mooted the construction of a bridge over the Chacao canal that will join Chiloe with the mainland (the Bicentennial Project).

The indigenous Huilliche communities have survived the onslaught of modernization, making use of the sea and establishing themselves in coastal settlements where they have freely developed the cultural model of the *campesino* household.

These communities prefer an open access regime to fishery resources, a regime which for decades has provided them with a free source of food and income from the sea. This has also attracted large migration towards the coastal strip.

A recent study, undertaken in 2001, in Quellon district (Lat42°50' to 43°40') shows that the way of life in rural areas combines work on the land with coastal fishing. It also shows that some 80 per cent of the population are of Huilliche ethnicity with low levels of formal education.

Today profound changes are taking place in the regulatory framework for fisheries development, the impact of which has not been fully evaluated. The expanding use of the coastal fringe for industrial fisheries, aquaculture, salmon farming, tourism, urban expansion, along with the gradual depletion of resources, has jeopardized the future of fishing and the quality of life of fishermen and fisherwomen in the district and in the island.

One can observe a deep sense of shared crisis. Local organizations (independent *sindicatos* or workers'

unions) recognize the need to develop their own strategies for effective reconversion and diversification of productive activities, with a better use of natural resources and adequate integration into the market and other formal systems within society.

Quellon is a district which, until recently, had no facilities to complete basic education. As a consequence a large proportion of fishermen and fisherwomen do not have the required eight years of schooling needed to register as an artisanal fisher. However, with the unconditional help of professionals dedicated to rural development, they are looking for alternative ways to overcome this problem through special adult education programmes.

In Quellon district, about 13 *sindicatos* have been formed and several proposals and projects are being elaborated. Of the 13 *sindicatos* in the area, 10 are rural and three urban. Membership in each *sindicato* varies from between 25 to 160 persons. It is noteworthy that 10 of these have significant participation of women, ranging from 35 to 45 per cent on an average.

All the organizations have legal status and a strong bias towards the Huilliche ethnicity. All organizations show high levels of participation with members and/or representatives carrying out in equal measure their rights and responsibilities.

Currently, with the help of Conapach, the national fishworker organization in Chile, a programme of adult education is being carried out in Quellon in three rural and one urban *sindicato*. The effort is to study gender equity not only in the education project but also in the context of sustainable development, incorporating social, cultural, political and economic aspects.

The presence of women in the organizations is something typical and cultural in the rural artisanal fisheries sector of the district. This, in part, is explained by the large concentration of ethnic Huilliche, where it is common to find women carrying out the most varied activities—as collectors, fishers, shellfish divers, seaweed and filter-feeding (bivalve) mollusc cultivators etc. Nor is it odd for these women to take on management responsibilities within the steering committees.

Research is needed on the important role that Huilliche culture and gender have played in helping put in place

management strategies for the environmental conservation of the wetlands (Huilidad and Compu). Thus, for example, in harvesting the *gracilaria* beds, some mixed *sindicatos* (men and women) in the area have established self-imposed closed seasons, extracting seaweed only for four days per month, during the lowest tides.

Moreover a gender perspective promotes a better understanding about what is happening today in the rural *sindicatos*. These *sindicatos* are compiling background information to identify areas available for managing and exploiting benthic resources in the Quellon District, a pre-requisite step prior to applying for Management Areas as such. In the wetland area of Huilidad, in Compu, and in the island of Chaullin, thanks to the intervention of the team from the National Professional Services (2001), a plan was developed for a zone where there is no other concession and where there are benthic resources of interest.

It is worth pointing out that in such cases, each organization funds the work of the team of professional advisers (four people) with its own income, using members' contributions. The organization also provides the vessel, fuel and transport and participates in the visits that define the most productive area. The organization also provides suggestions for the preparation of the report that will enable them to formally adopt a Management Area.

Today several *caletas* in Quellon have requests being processed by the Fisheries Subsecretariat to undertake base-line studies to identify, through a process of sampling, the location and quantity of benthic species to be managed. Following this they will develop a management and exploitation plan of the area that constitutes the Management and Exploitation Area. It is at this stage, which lasts for four years, that the level of conservation needed for managing the resource and its productive potential is realized, and where the Huilliche women take on a key role in the control and monitoring of resources. At the level of the government, in the Programme of Improved Management (PMG), it is recommended that "gender equity is applied in the Management Areas of the country".

It is hoped the women from the coastal fringe in the South of the island of Chiloe, who, thanks to the influence of their Huilliche ethnicity, will design a

work programme that will provide indicators and information not only about productive activities in the Management

Areas, but also about its natural capital (inventory of species), the state of the productive ecosystem, the division of labour by gender and aspects such as control over and benefits from the resource (economic and political).

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