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Long road ahead

Seeking allotments of management and exploitation areas can be a major challenge for women engaged in artisanal fisheries in Chile today

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In Chile, use and exploitation rights are granted to organizations of artisanal fishermen in the five-mile coastal zone through management and exploitation areas (AMERB), an administrative measure of the Fisheries Subsecretariat (Subpesca).

The AMERB process involves a number of steps, starting with a request from the interested organization, with an outline and co-ordinates of the possible management area. This must be submitted to Subpesca, which then, together with other public bodies (the National Fisheries Service, the Marine Subsecretariat, and the General Direction of the Marine Territory), elaborates a technical report. This is followed by the publication of the decree in the Official Diary publicizing the fishermen's proposal.

The request from the fishermen's organization goes through the following stages in an AMERB project: proposal for a baseline study (ESBA); undertaking the ESBA; and formulation of a management and exploitation plan (PMEA).

Once this is sanctioned by the fiscal institution, the area is handed over to the fishermen's organization through a user contract. The PMEA is formulated based on a modern understanding of coastal management that balances conservation and exploitation objectives, so as to achieve sustainability of the coastal ecosystem. It requires the technical advice of relevant professionals. In this way, fishery access is regulated, conservation of resources attempted, and the capacity of the fishermen/fisherwomen for responsible commercial management, enhanced.

Requesting management areas is a major challenge for women engaged in artisanal fisheries in Chile today.

In this context, it is important to note the efforts of a group of 45 women who have overcome major hurdles to enhance their basic competence and capacity to use new technologies, and to administer and manage their scarce economic resources.

These 45 women live in the *caleta* (village) of los Moros in the bay of Coliumo, Chile. Of the 1,200 people in the *caleta*, 380 are fishermen, belonging to four *sindicatos* (unions). Two of the *sindicatos* are of men (fishermen and vessel owners), one is mixed, and the other groups the 45 women. These women are engaged in administering three management areas for the following seaweed species: 'marine chicory' (*Chondracanthus chamissoi*); 'black luga' (*Sarcothalia crispata*); and 'spoon luga' (*Mazzaella laminariodes*). The first species, highly sought after in Taiwan for direct human consumption, requires ever more stringent quality certification, a lot of care to control growth and profitability, as well as systems for replanting and protection. The value of the other species comes from their gel and agar content.

These 45 women formed the *sindicato* of "Independent Women Workers, Fisherwomen and Women Gatherers", a legally constituted body that meets the requirements of the Labour Inspectorate. The president is Sara Garrido, who started off her career in fishing 16 years ago when still in her teens, gathering seaweed in spring and summer, and later going with her husband to sea to fish for conger eel and crabs. She learned to commercialize the catch and administer the income for the wellbeing of her family and the education of her two daughters, now 17 and 12 years old.

In 2002, this group of women decided to apply for a seaweed management area, in view of the overexploitation affecting this resource. Even today, there are no regulations or administrative plans for exploiting seaweeds. The women, therefore, "became alarmed and took defensive action". They were allotted three management areas, and a management plan (PMEA) for sustainable management of the resource was finalized.

The women have three management areas: the first of 0.6 hectares, already in use, and two others of 4 hectares each. Due to a dispute with a men's *sindicato*, which is against ownership by the women's *sindicato*,



there is objection to all of these. The problem may finally be resolved through a negotiation process that will provide the women with access to other areas, in exchange for the ones under litigation, even though these already have their ESBA's approved, and are co-financed through a project that they put together and got approved. The areas they will receive in exchange have no ESBA, and, moreover, they have no natural banks of seaweeds.

The vision of Sara Garrido is striking. In the tiny assigned management area of half a hectare, and with the management plan accepted, she is thinking about how to effectively assess and replant seaweeds, so that the spores of 'marine chicory' will take root and grow. She feels confident because she listened attentively to the university specialists and technicians who helped her with the ESBA and she always took their advice and heeded their warnings.

She also has another approved project comprising a seaweed drying and dehydrating plant, with which profitability can be greatly improved. The women have worked hard to obtain funding through the organizations, Fosis (Social Solidarity Fund for Investment), Sercotex (Service for External Credit) and Chile Barrios (a development programme to alleviate poverty in vulnerable settlements). This has allowed them to establish a micro-enterprise to start activities within an appropriate legal (co-operative) framework.

In future, they want to manage a project for an "experimental fishery" for seaweeds, and through this, gain access to co-financing, which will also help them get effective technical advice on socioeconomic and environmental sustainability of the coastal areas where the natural seaweed banks are found.

In the fiercely oppressive atmosphere arising from the response of the men's *sindicato*, which may influence local fisheries policies, listening to Sara, feeling her energy and understanding her courage, makes one realize how long a road must be travelled before there is a genuinely transparent and gender-balanced participation in the development of artisanal fisheries.

(This article has been translated by Brian O'Riordan of ICSF's Brussels office)

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