

Women in fisheries

Gender agenda

This is an account of a meeting of women in artisanal fisheries, organized by the National Network of Women: Northern Zone at Antofagasta, Chile

The First Meeting of Women in Artisanal Fisheries: Northern Zone was held in Antofagasta, Northern Chile from 27 to 29 June 2001. It attracted 37 participants from 14 women's groups belonging to all three zones of Chile—northern, central and southern—engaged in fishing, aquaculture, baiting hooks, processing and marketing fish. Nine of these groups were from the northern region. The event was organized by women members of the *Sindicato de Buzos Mariscadores* (Syndicate of Shellfish Divers) of the *caleta* Constitución-Isla Santa Maria, a part of the National Network of Women in Artisanal Fisheries of CONAPACH (the National Confederation of Artisanal Fishers of Chile).

During the workshop, women discussed their expectations from the sector and their role in promoting artisanal fisheries. They elaborated on the concept of “sustainable development” and drew up guidelines for “community, economic and environmental development”.

Various public service organizations of Region II, as well as officials from the central level, were represented at the meeting. These included officials from Sernapesca, Dirección de Obras Portuarias, (Port Works Management) Sercotec, Sernam and the UECPS (Unidad Coordinadora del Ministerio de Obras Públicas or the Coordinating Unit of the Ministry of Public Works). They expressed their support towards developing the ideas put forward during the meeting.

The meeting was part of the project “Women Weaving Networks for the Sustainable Future of Our *Caletas*”, being executed by CONAPACH with financial support from the *Fondo de las Américas*. In

January 2001, women from the artisanal fisheries sector in Chile organized themselves into a National Network and selected co-ordinators for each zone. The members of the Network have been meeting regularly, every two months, to discuss strategies to strengthen, broaden and consolidate their movement. They have worked out zonal plans to identify new women's groups, deepen ties with those already in contact with the network, disseminate information on work being carried out by the network as well as identify sources to fund the initiatives of the movement and grassroot groups.

The Antofagasta meeting, a product of these zonal-level projects, was the largest event that the National Network of Women had ever organized. It marked a milestone for the co-ordinators of the northern zone and for the Conapach Women's Network, and was an important step towards valorizing the role of women in artisanal fisheries.

One of the main tasks of the meeting was to gauge the expectations of women from such events and to discuss how these could be integrated into the workplan of the National Network of Women. The women gave practical suggestions for achieving concrete results in their respective *caletas* and suggested creating permanent channels of communication between their organizations. There was a strong sentiment in favour of holding more such meetings in future to increase communication between groups and to strengthen the movement. They also stressed the need to elect more representatives for better co-ordination.

Local contexts

Gender issues were approached within the context of legitimizing *caletas*, and looking at them as groups that comprise

both men and women. The need for women to develop their self-potential and power was stressed, and to ensure this, it was proposed that new spaces for sharing and analyzing experiences and learning from the experiences of others be created.

The women also drew the attention of authorities to illegal fishing by the industrial sector in the 5-mile zone reserved for artisanal fishing. It was evident that even if women from the northern zone, in general, are not closely integrated into the activities of *sindicatos*, they are well informed about at least two major issues: the 5-mile zone and the fisheries law.

Their interest in protecting resources, respecting closed seasons and getting better prices demonstrated their appreciation of problems arising from overexploitation of marine resources.

Having discussed the concept of sustainable development and the need to link it to the development of communities, the economy and the environment, the women identified possible areas of intervention.

For economic development, they highlighted the need to support productive projects to improve the quality of life, based on a responsible use of resources through controlling, for example, the size of fish harvested. They

also stressed the need for feasibility studies and training programmes on organizational aspects. Possible projects proposed related to culinary skills, tourism, processing and marketing of shellfish, and making diving suits, among others.

In community development, they highlighted the need for their better organization into groups and for establishing alliances with other community-based and environmental organizations. They also proposed efforts to influence public opinion about problems faced by communities, though the involvement of the media.

The various other problems they faced included: poor accessibility of *caletas*; lack of transport, especially affecting school-going children; lack of proper sewage and drinking water facilities; and poor access to health services.

They stressed the necessity for providing decompression chambers for divers exposed to pressure-related problems and a high accident rate. They also stressed that in *caletas* where there are no medical facilities, men and women need to be trained to provide first-aid to victims of accidents, either at sea or in the *caletas*.

School dropouts

The women expressed concern about the significant number of children who drop

out of school or repeat academic years, and they highlighted the need for nursery and other schools.

As for the environment, the women proposed two broad areas for action. First, they stressed the importance of promoting citizen's participation through the efforts of neighbourhood groups, schools and unions, and with the involvement of CONAPACH, Servicio País, and the authorities. They emphasized the need to keep the community informed about these issues through various media.

They also proposed other alternatives for improving the environment, including recycling of organic and inorganic waste, developing green belts, controlling pollution (waste water, heavy metals, dregs, etc.), effectively enforcing the closed season, protecting resources (size and quality) and promoting environmental awareness.

The Antofagasta meeting is perhaps a landmark in developing new perspectives in the artisanal fisheries sector, in general, and in efforts towards increasing the visibility of women, in particular. Although it is a fact that women are the most marginalized in terms of direct participation in artisanal fisheries in the northern zone, what is noteworthy is that they do understand the role they play in the development of the sector. They articulate the need to control and manage resources, obtain better prices and improve the quality of products. This reassures us that it is possible to succeed in promoting development initiatives for women in the sector.

Until now, the country and different public services have invested in large-scale capture and production, within fisheries, in general, and artisanal fisheries, in particular. Analyzing the existing level of development of artisanal fisheries, we think it important to integrate women through strengthening their incipient organizations and supporting their plans for socioeconomic development. In the past, although the authorities have always intended to elevate the role of the female "actor", the efforts have, for the most part, been disjointed and based on isolated activities

rather than on an integrated approach to development. The women from the northern sector of the country require support in their activities, along with their partners—husbands, fathers, companions, etc.

It is clear to women that the issue of their integration into the sector is generally glossed over by the predominantly male organizations. In this regard, we believe that we are at a juncture where there is a strong possibility for success on an issue which is highly complex in nature.

At the meeting, women suggested several development projects directed towards *sindicatos* and the various public services of Region II. We are inviting these bodies to form a working platform that could help us define strategies and concrete opportunities for the integration of women into the development agenda. ♣

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