

Youth Power

Michael Rojas, a 24-year-old fisher from Caballo Island in Costa Rica, believes that youth can pursue fishing in an artisanally responsible and sustainable way

Michael Rojas is a young fisher, aged 24, who is still in secondary school in the Caballo Island (Isla Caballo) of Costa Rica in the Pacific Ocean. He has been fishing since he was seven years old and goes out to fish at least 10 days a month, working from 5 a.m. until 9 p.m. (13–15 hours), or from 6 a.m. to 2 p.m. (seven hours), depending on the variations in the tide.

Michael started fishing with his dad and he found fishing for live shrimps very exciting. All his knowledge about fishing comes from his father and grandfather, who also taught him to ride boats and fix nets with the right weights for the particular hooks used with them.

He has attended different training sessions organized by Instituto Costarricense de Pesca y Acuicultura (INCOPESCA), the Costa Rican Fisheries Institute, through the ‘colopes’ (a local fishing organization) in Isla Caballo. In the process he learned about using responsible and sustainable fishing gear, about illegal fishing and destructive fishing techniques and the damages they cause. He also learned to value and respect the size of the fish caught, taking care not to over-harvest smaller fish. Michael uses a range of fishing gear—nets in deep waters, lines in rocky areas and shallow waters.

Besides fishing, his knowledge of naval mechanics has proven productive by keeping him busy as a boat repairer. Michael is proud of being an artisanal fisher. Today fishing is his major source of income, providing economic and livelihood sustenance. The economic contribution to the household is not the sole responsibility of the parents;

the household needs are shared among the other two or three members of the family whose earnings supplement the family income.

Michael also regards fishing as a relaxing activity. Despite artisanal fishing being a good option to earn a living, Michael feels that now with the impact of climate change and the widespread use of illegal fishing gear, fishing is becoming harder.

“The challenge is to be responsible in artisanal fishing, and improve fishing activities in the responsible marine fishing areas, which requires that people stop using illegal gear

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in favour of artisanal trawling and small nets”, he says.

Michael feels that at present, the youth, who have seen how the fishery resources have diminished, can embrace responsible fishing through the use of legal gear and valid legal fishing licenses. Artisanal fishing allows the youth to pursue an activity that generates income while simultaneously allowing them to study. The principal needs of the youth relate to access to credit to improve their fishing gear. Easy credit will encourage more young people to obtain fishing licences and fish responsibly, respecting rules and regulations.

Social security

With 18 years dedicated to fishing, Michael now enjoys social security

*This interview with **Michael Rojas**, an artisanal fisher in the Responsible Fishing Area of Isla Caballo, Costa Rica, was done by **Ivannia Ayales** of CoopeSoliDar R.L.*

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Michael Rojas at work. All his knowledge about fishing comes from his father and grandfather, who also taught him to ride boats and fix nets with the right weights

in the sea. When fish swim in large shoals, they throw up an oil-like substance which allows us to figure out the species of the fish. We can also listen keenly to the sounds of the fish and identify the species. Some species are also prone to hit against the boat. We have great knowledge about the sea which the majority of people do not possess. It is important to merge this knowledge with other types of knowledge to improve the well-being of our families and communities. All the members of the family are integrated into fishing activities”, says Michael.

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since he is part of a local fishing association. As a young fisher, he participates in meetings on fishing and the need to conserve the sea's resources.

Life at sea permits the youth to get closer to the traditional knowledge enshrined in their fishing communities, which can surprisingly enrich perceptions regarding marine life. “There is knowledge that has been handed down from generation to generation, which has to do with the odours and the sounds of fish of different species. We learn this knowledge with the time spent being

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