

Latin America/ Chile

Breaking the mould

An experience from the far south of Latin America reveals the new roles possible for men and women in artisanal fisheries

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In the history of Latin American coastal communities, the *caleta* (settlement), a dynamic system of life and work, was initiated in the first prehispanic coastal settlements. Daily survival depended on hunting birds and mammals, collecting seeds and fruits from the surrounding valleys and forests, gathering shellfish (molluscs and crustaceans) and catching fish in the inter and subtidal coastal areas.

The activities of the artisanal fisheries sector go beyond simply catching fish, molluscs and seaweed. There are tasks that are carried out on land and on the fish quays as well. These tasks include support processes such as:

- a) Pre-harvest work: This includes activities that range from the maintenance of vessels (certified by the Maritime Authority and registered with the National Fisheries Service) and their engines, surveillance, cleaning of fishing gears and equipment, and obtaining the authorization to embark. The fishing area and the resources to be exploited need to be registered. This is especially so where fully exploited species, such as southern hake (*Merluccius australis*) and sea urchin (*Loxechinus albus*) are concerned.
- b) Post-harvest work: This includes several activities. Since 2002, all fishermen, in whatever kind of vessel (launches and boats), must fill in a catch report as part of the landing form. Artisanal vessels in Chile fall into two main categories: *botes* (boats), smaller vessels, powered by oar, sail, and small motors, making short trips and *lanchas* (launches), vessels that are larger, up to 50 GRT and 18 metres in length. Other post-harvest activities relate to the distribution, storage, processing and sale of fish.

Members of the artisanal fishing community participate in pre- and post-harvest activities: women and men, boys and girls, with varied needs and interests, who often do not show up in official statistics even though their tasks form a very important part of the sub-culture of Chilean artisanal fishworkers. In the current context, this culture is being influenced by changes in the legal, environmental and socio-economic realms. With respect to the above, and to a greater or lesser extent, the issue of gender in productive work, at the levels of decision-making and participation, is being shaped by the evolving coastal zone policy. Legal recognition of the *caletas* and the maintenance and administration of fish quays, which have been modernized along the 4,500 km national coastline, is creating new roles for men and women in fisheries work. It is worth noting that until 1997, people in fishing settlements (*caletas*) had no legal right to carry out fishing activities, to make or repair their boats, prepare their fishing gears, or even live there. In 1998, the Ministry of National Defence, together with the National Fisheries Service and the National Commission on the Use of the Coastline, recognized 436 fishermen's *caletas* countrywide (Decree 240 of 1998). This means that these *caletas* can not be appropriated by those who would like to develop tourist beaches etc.

The case (discussed below) of a woman, an administrator of the artisanal fisheries quay of Puerto Natales (in the Province of Ultima Esperanza or Final Hope) adds yet another dimension to the never-ending and unacknowledged work of women in our country's artisanal fishery. These women exhibit entrepreneurial flair and show hidden depths of personal capacity, creativity, honesty, fulfilment and persistence, as much at the professional level as in the simple tasks of artisanal fisheries.

Zoila Mayorga, a fisherman's daughter, is the Administrator of the Puerto Natales fish quay. After studying to be a kindergarten teacher, in 1995 she was sent to participate in a course for fishing *caleta* administrators, designed for fishermen. The Puerto Natales Artisanal Fishermen's Association (established in 1984), to which the fish quay had been handed over, had no fisherman able to attend the course. In this remote part of the country they put to sea for many days, even up to one or two months. They navigate vast distances to trap, with iron traps, king crabs (*centollas* or *Lithodes antarcticus* and *centollenes* or *Paralomis granulosa*), to dive for sea urchins, and long line for southern hake. In such a context the President of the fishermen's association encouraged

and assisted Zoila to participate in this course of specialization.

Afterwards Zoila took on the charge of Administrator of the Puerto Natales fish quay. She formed a team of five women, who had to share night shifts and attend to running of the quay, including operating the radio telephone, 24 hours a day. For six months they worked night and day free of charge. As the members of the Fishermen's Association showed no signs of paying them, two women resigned. Zoila and the two remaining women sent a letter to the President of the Association pointing out that unless they had a contract of work they would not continue in the Administration. This got them a contract. In Chile, in the fish quays, it is generally men who work as professionals, contracted by the fishermen. In some cases they are fishermen who have been trained to carry out these tasks. It is not normal that a woman runs a quay.

As with other women who break the mould in the artisanal fishery, Zoila had to work free of charge and to demonstrate her technical capacity before being recognized in her role. Today she has an in-depth knowledge of the legal framework. She knows the importance of registering catches of fish, sea urchins and crustaceans for SERNAPESCA (the National Fisheries Service of Chile). She knows the relevance of completing, in a timely fashion, the receipts and file copies of the embarkation and landing forms of vessel owners, and of noting the destination of fishery products. In addition she must provide facilities for investigators who measure and weigh the fish that is landed. It is very important that she completes the daily accounts, along with the status of the finances and of the outstanding debts owed by the Association.

A Fisheries Bulletin provides an annual progress report on the fish quay. Thus in 2001 it is reported that the fisheries terminal was widened, a gangway was installed to provide easier access to the vessels, a guard hut was built, and the communication system (lights, binoculars, radio station, barometer, and searchlight) for people who use the fish quay was improved.

Through SERCOTEC (the State Service for Technical Co-operation which assists small enterprises), fishermen who administer artisanal fishing port infrastructure in Region V (Valparaiso, San Antonio) and Region X (Puerto Montt, Chiloe Island) were sent on field courses to *caletas* to learn about other realities and experiences. In addition workshops were organized on themes such as a) improving the competitiveness

of the sector; b) sustainable extraction of marine resources; c) solving social problems of fishworkers and those of their family groups; and d) modernization of public institutions dedicated to promoting production.

Other projects financed a library for children and adults in the *caleta* and reserved space on the Puerto Natales Radio Station dedicated to providing information to coastal communities about the work in the artisanal fishery. This parcel of micro-projects is given shape and is co-ordinated through the Associative project for the promotion of Small Enterprises called "Assistance for the Artisanal Fishermen of the Fishing Quay of Puerto Natales". It is a demonstration of work integration between the professionals of SERCOTEC, the Members of the Artisanal Fishermen's Association and the administration of Zoila.



Thus work goes on seriously and responsibly even as the hake fishermen set out in their boats for fishing trips that last up to 30 hours, taking the bait (frozen sardine) needed for their task, and whilst the spider crab fishermen go on fishing trips that may last several weeks, taking traps and setting up island camps, and establishing storage systems for traps with crabs so that they can be brought back to Puerto Natales.

In Puerto Natales artisanal fishing is undertaken by 700 fishermen, and it sustains commercial life in the city. When there are problems with fishery resources, the lack of money in circulation is all too apparent. According to Zoila, fishermen are held in higher regard today, and whilst they go off fishing far away, their wives look after the finances and take care of the home.

Shedding light on Zoila's work, in the context of modernization of *caletas* and fishing terminals in the XII Region of Magallanes and Antártida Chilena achieves two main objectives: a) it strengthens interdisciplinary work in pre- and post-harvest fisheries, and b) it promotes self-management as well as the personal and organizational development of economically active communities in the coastal fringe of the country.

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