

Joined In Common Cause

More than one hundred small-scale fishworkers from five Central American countries gathered for the third fisheries congress

The city of Cahuita in Costa Rica hosted the III Small-Scale Fisheries Congress from September 26 to 29, 2023. Its theme was: 'Life, knowledge and culture linked together'. In attendance were numerous fishworkers and shellfish gleaners and their representatives from Costa Rica, along with 21 delegates from Mexico, Honduras and Panama, representing communities dependent on marine small-scale fisheries (SSF). In this region, "coastal communities display a unique cultural and social profile, derived from historical settlement patterns, that sets them apart from inland communities," according to the Central American Integration System (SICA).

"For example, the Caribbean coast in Nicaragua, Honduras, Costa Rica and Panama was initially developed by groups of African descent with a long tradition in artisanal fishing and trade with other parts of the Caribbean. Many indigenous communities, such as the Garifuna in Honduras and Nicaragua or the Kuna in Panama have traditionally depended on coastal resources for both their livelihood and cultural integrity. Fish constitutes the main protein source for many coastal communities in Central America. Marine fishery resources are consequently key for the coastal economy, and it is estimated that they provide work and income to a significant part of the local population," according to SICA.

The need to co-operate

This was the third time that CoopeSoliDar R.L and the Red de Areas Marinas de Pesca Responsable

(Responsible Fisheries Marine Areas Network) joined forces to organize an event aimed at exploring challenges and opportunities for fishworkers. On this occasion they were assisted by the TICCA Consortium, SwedBio and SSF Hub-EDF.

The Congress approached topics such as consolidation and recognition of decent work; governance; marine and coastal conservation as a consequence of sustainable use and management of resources; full participation in public policy-making; and the global challenge of lobbying to protect SSF from the Blue Economy that deprives communities of their rights to land and marine territories and their human rights in general.

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Fishworkers young and old, men and women shared their priorities in the Congress through inter-generational knowledge and experience exchange. Participants also held a night wake in order to discuss the Final Statement and express support to Cahuita's local communities, threatened by national authorities reluctant to recognize shared management systems for decision making in the area. Several national and local fisheries and environmental institutions also took part, including Costa Rica Fisheries and Aquaculture Institute, National

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Manifesto

We, artisanal small-scale fisherfolks and mollusc gatherers, present at the III Congress of Small-Scale Artisanal Fisherfolks: Intertwining Life, Knowledge And Culture from Costa Rica, Panama, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Mexico, from September 26 to 29, 2023, do hereby assert our rights.

Aware of the importance of our work for the sustainable development of our coasts and seas and of the inescapable commitments of our countries before the world, especially SDG 14, the GBF and a path full of important meetings towards the III United National Ocean Congress led by the governments of Costa Rica and France.

Present the following manifesto to our authorities, in the hope that progress will be made in the recognition of the small-scale artisanal fishing sector within the framework of justice and equity, as demanded in several agreements to which our governments are signatories.

Considering:

That small-scale artisanal fishing is more than just catching fish, it is a way of life that allows indigenous, tribal, Afro-descendant and local communities to live and work in a dignified way for their daily sustenance, a living culture that makes us happy.

That fishing allows our communities a connection with the beautiful simplicity of our ancestors.

That we need to be allowed to resume our customs and maintain our identity as fishing peoples conscious of their positive relationship with the sea and its resources.

That united we have the strength to preserve our culture, the right to access to the sea and the land in our territories.

That we must exercise our right to health, to the conservation of our marine territories and to follow up and conserve the essence and fishing identity of our ancestors.

That our contribution to the conservation of the sea and its resources is extremely important at a time when threats to the conservation of marine resources are imminent due to climate change, and the excessive development resulting from the Blue Economy such as mass tourism, pollution, and industries.

Request:

That national and regional institutions linked to small-scale artisanal fishing, as well as international organizations interested in supporting conservation with people of the sea, take into account the real needs and interests of fishers, mollusc gatherers, women and young people involved in this activity.

That we must be participants and protagonists in all policies and decisions for the sector that affect us and be present in the decision-making spaces. We assert: 'Nothing About Us Without Us.'

Respect for the traditional use and knowledge related to indigenous peoples and the use of coastal marine resources that are important for the culture and development.

To develop programmes and projects that respond to the real and felt needs of the small-scale artisanal fishing populations, considering their diversities and contexts.

That programmes be developed for elderly fishers who reach an advanced age without a pension or social security.

To consider small-scale artisanal fishing as a decent and dignified job and not to have other alternative activities imposed on us that are not linked to what we know how to do, which is to fish and make sustainable use of fishery resources.

We demand greater support from the institutional framework of our countries in our marine territories.

That there is political will to implement the sector's ideas and law proposals.

We the fishermen and fisherwomen of 24 communities of Costa Rica's Pacific and Caribbean coasts, hereby request:

A ministry of fishing (INCOPESCA) that is present and more involved, that recognizes the true importance of a shared model of our marine territories and the co-management of our fisheries. In this sense, we support our Afro-Costa Rican brothers and sisters in the defence of Cahuita and its National Park, which today suffers from vulnerability in the face of a State that does not recognize the rights of its people to the shared management of their territory.

A State that complies with its responsibilities towards us, along with its social institutions like the ministry of health, economic institutions like SENASA, and environmental institutions linked to small scale artisanal fishing, that reviews and updates, together with our organizations, the fishing management plans for the marine responsible fishing areas and follows up on them.

A ministry of fishing (INCOPESCA) that fights for us and works with us, in the search for a human rights-based approach to the conservation of the sea and its fishery resources, and that supports our proposals for fairer, more inclusive and equitable public policies.

A Ministry of fishing (INCOPESCA) that is clear of the need to provide the conditions for us to exercise our right to fish and access to the sea, as local communities, indigenous peoples, or Afro-descendant communities that deserve a humane and dignified treatment to develop our lives.

A Ministry of fishing (INCOPESCA) that accompanies us and helps us contact organizations such as INDER that develops projects that can support us, as fisherfolks, with resources and equipment for our work.

Costa Rica must recognize the traditional use of our indigenous peoples to the resources of the sea and coasts, specifically to say YES, to the traditional uses of Brunca's people in the Ballena Marine National Park.

Urgently attend to the requests of small-scale artisanal fishing organizations regarding their projects and alternatives to improve the quality of life of these communities, such as the ecotourism project proposed by El Jobo Fisher Association, the gathering centre projects of the different communities and the recognition of Cahuita Marine Responsible Fishing Area.

Cahuita, Costa Rica
September 29, 2023



Field visit during the Congress to learn of the situation of Cahuita and their National Park. The Congress was held under the motto 'Life, knowledge and culture' because small-scale fishing is a way of life with a unique identity

Conservation Areas System, Costa Rica Women's Institute, Talamanca's local government, fishworkers' associations from Costa Rica and neighbouring countries.

"Small-scale fisheries in Costa Rica are yet to be recognized in their full extent and complexity," says a report prepared as part of the 2022 State of the Union Project. "Their potential to contribute to sustainable development is neglected, making hard to imagine that the country will be able to move towards United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, namely Goal number 14, to conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development."

Ana Teresa Williams Cole, president of Cahuita's Fishworkers' Association, one of the local organizers, thinks that sustainability is a key defining element of the small-scale sector. "The Congress was held under the motto

'Life, knowledge and culture' because small-scale fishing is a way of life with a unique identity. Both our Pacific and Caribbean coasts hold a great diversity in fishing gear, targeted species or in the environment-friendly way we use marine resources. This Congress served to know the sector better and now we are joining forces to fight for other people's rights, having heard about the experiences of our friends from Mexico and Central America."

For more

Highlights III Congress of SSF in Cahuita, Costa Rica, 2023

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=043CSLnFRuY>

II Congress of SSF in Costa Rica (About Blue Economy)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gE2QFvSYDg&t=15s>

III Congress of SSF in Costa Rica – Governance

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JRp1DooiiVA&t=22s>

III Congress of SSF in Costa Rica - Women and Youth

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vecx4AU05U&t=17s>

III Congress of SSF in Costa Rica - Co management

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kau7KkYWRKo&t=28s>

III NATIONAL CONGRESS OF SMALL SCALE ARTISAN MOLLUSCHERS (AS) FISHERMEN (AS) 2023

<https://coopesolidar.org/iii-congreso-de-nacional-de-pescadores-as-artesanales-molusqueros-as-de-pequena-escala-2023/>