

The Sea Gives Us Everything

Several lessons can be learned about the conceptual and practical linkages between artisanal fishing communities and marine protected areas in Costa Rica

The sea gave me everything...my livelihood, sustenance, my children's education and daily food.

—Teofilo Naranjo, artisanal fisherman from Tárcoles

Teofilo Naranjo is an artisanal fisherman from the Pacific coast of Costa Rica. He has lived close to the sea for more than 70 years, and has three children—Jeannette, Rolando and Gilberto—who all live and work in Tárcoles, making a living from artisanal fishing, which has great significance for communities and livelihoods in Costa Rica, as in other parts of Central America.

Costa Rica is a country with an extensive marine territory of 598,682 sq km, (eleven times the country's land territory) and two coasts, the Pacific and the Caribbean, each with particular marine ecosystems and distinct cultural characteristics. The coastal and marine geography of both coasts has shaped the culture and way of life of many coastal communities in Costa Rica who depend on the ocean and its resources for their livelihoods and development.

Artisanal fishing is of great relevance in Costa Rica, as in other parts of Central America and elsewhere, from a social, environmental, economic and cultural perspective. Artisanal fishing is the source of work, income and food security for many fishers and coastal communities. Fishing in the coasts of Central America is not only an economic activity but is also a way of life that permeates and shapes individual and collective identities. Cultural and social values associated with artisanal fishing are a constant in

the ways of life of coastal communities and in their everyday living, expressed in language, traditional knowledge, navigation and fishing techniques, traditional cooking recipes, and other particular sociocultural values that characterize fishing communities along the coasts.

It is a fact that artisanal fishing contributes to the social and human well-being of many coastal communities in the country and region. However, the artisanal fishing sector and fishing coastal communities in

...some coastal communities have been displaced by exclusionary conservation approaches that have denied or restricted their rights of access to resources...

the country face numerous serious problems that are putting their livelihoods at risk. Among them are fish stock depletion and marine and coastal resource degradation; pollution; restricted or denied access to resources; minimal access to public services (like education and healthcare); unequal resource competition with the industrial fishing sector; exclusion from mass coastal tourism development; poverty; and marginalization from the country's development policies.

Communities displaced

Furthermore, some coastal communities have been displaced by exclusionary conservation approaches that have denied or restricted their rights of access to resources, and that have not recognized their rights

*This article, by **Vivienne Solís** (vsolis@coopesolidar.org) and **Daniela Barguil**, (dbarguil@coopesolidar.org), associates of CoopeSoliDar R.L., is based on the collective knowledge of the organization. It also draws on discussions with coastal artisanal fishing communities in Costa Rica and other parts of central America*

of participation in decisionmaking and their roles as relevant actors of conservation and responsible use of natural resource management.

In Costa Rica, the National System of Protected Areas (SINAC), of the Ministry of Environment, has not been able to conjugate successfully conservation efforts and policies with the well-being of the local communities that live in designated protected areas or in adjacent areas, even though the mission of this State institution clearly notes the need to promote participation of local communities and respect their efforts towards conservation. It is not until very recent (2009), that two new categories of marine protected areas (MPAs) have been recognized by this institution; *Reservas Marinas* and *Areas Marinas de Manejo*, categories that in theory, should promote the benefit sharing for the satisfaction of the local communities' needs and quality of life, and the sustainable use of resources, respectively.

However, it has been very difficult to implement, at the level of the

An innovative approach that allows the dignified and respectful inclusion of fishers and fishworkers in conservation and resource management is urgently needed...

national Ministry of Environment, the recognition of new models of governance of MPAs, which allow the local communities and indigenous people to take part in the conservation and development decisions of their territories.

Thus, conservation through protected areas and national parks in Costa Rica have often resulted in the displacement of local communities from their territories and from their traditional livelihood activities, and, as a consequence, has denied local communities' their basic rights. As a result, local populations and, in particular, fishing communities along the coasts are left without any alternatives for their development

and without decisionmaking power over their territories and resources. The case of the Ballena Marine National Park in the south Pacific coast of the country exemplifies this.

The Ballena Marine National Park was established in 1989 and its limits re-defined in 1992. As in the case of many other protected areas, the creation of the Ballena Marine National Park was done with an exclusionary approach and limited consultation with the local communities, which had to suffer the consequent social and cultural disruptions. Three fishing communities in Bahia, Uvita and Ballena were displaced and then disappeared. That caused serious conflicts between resource users and the management authorities of the park.

The local communities demanded legitimate and representative structures for collaborative management. However, this co-management initiative failed due to the lack of legal instruments that allow the State to support a different kind of governance in protected areas. The collapse of the co-management structure generated frustration, and deteriorated the dialogue among the stakeholders, augmenting the situation of conflict that persists to date, and furthers irreversible human impacts.

The exclusion of social considerations and the unequal distribution of power in protected area management calls for a change and efforts to find, and implement, new ways that bridge the conservation of marine and coastal ecosystems with the development of the local communities.

Resource management

An innovative approach that allows the dignified and respectful inclusion of fishers and fishworkers in the processes of conservation and resource management is urgently needed, along with an approach that strengthens community development and re-centres local populations as actors of responsible use of resources and as agents of conservation efforts.

It is only very recently that INCOPECA, the National Institute of Fishing and Aquaculture, recognized the interest and efforts of local communities towards marine conservation, fisheries management and development. This was done through the approval of a decree that recognizes what has been called, "Marine Areas of Responsible Fishing".

In response, there has been a new wave of positive examples where the artisanal fishing sector is carrying out its own community-based initiatives of responsible use and management of fisheries, and marine and coastal conservation.

The Association of Fishers of Palito (ASOPESPA) in Chira Island, one of the islands located in the inner area of the Nicoya peninsula, has created and implemented a voluntary initiative for the protection of a reef zone, a site of great importance for the reproduction and growth of different species of fish. This area was delimited and is regulated according to the fishers' own management decisions. Regulations, such as the ban of destructive fishing practices for this zone, have had a positive effect on the local fishery and ecosystem, and, as a consequence, on the fishers and fishworkers of the locality.

The sustainable fisheries management policies and the regulations for responsible fishing put in place in Palito have been successful thanks to the efforts and initiative of the artisanal fishers to conserve the area's resources. This zone has now been recognized as a "responsible fishing area" by INCOPECA. However, there is still a long way for the country to move forward, towards more community-based models of governance. ASOPESPA has made a good start, and local communities are beginning to see the benefits of conservation and are moving towards a more commanding position of recognition for their conservation efforts.

San Francisco of Coyote is a community located between two protected areas: the National Wildlife Refugees of Caletas-Ario



An artisanal fisher in CoopeTárcoles R.L., the local artisanal fishing organization of the community of Tárcoles

and Camaronal in the north Pacific. The Association of Artisanal Fishers of Coyote (ASPECOY), created in 2003, is the organization that brings together fishers from three different communities of San Gerardo, San Jorge and Barrio Caliente.

These artisanal fishers face serious conflicts that affect their activities. These problems are related to land rights, organizational issues, and conflicts with industrial fishers and other artisanal fishers who use destructive fishing gear. Furthermore, the artisanal fishers have serious limitations in commercializing their products and are already facing the decline of the fishery's resources as are many other communities along the coast.

Turtle nesting sites

The neighboring protected area of Caletas-Ario and Camaronal are important sites for marine turtle nesting, and so it is important to protect them from industrial fishing and destructive fishing practices. It is necessary to create mechanisms that incorporate conservation principles in the management of fisheries. A first step towards this objective was done with the formation of ASPECOY. A participatory mapping of the fishing area was done as an effort

for the management of the local fishery. Five fishing zones and their capture species were identified.

This first initiative goes in line with the necessity of incorporating the social element—specifically, artisanal fishers and their knowledge—in marine/coastal conservation. The creation of alliances with civil society and local government bodies, which strengthen local empowerment for the management and conservation of marine resources, is imperative to build solutions for the problems facing our oceans, coasts and our people.

The Community-based Marine Area of Responsible Artisanal Fishing of Tárcoles in the central Pacific is part of the community-based initiatives that have been put forward for responsible use and marine conservation in Costa Rica.

CoopeTárcoles R.L., the local artisanal fishing organization of the community of Tárcoles, and CoopeSoliDar R.L., have made a great effort in bringing back fishers' knowledge and decisionmaking into fisheries management and marine conservation. The Community-based Marine Area of Responsible Artisanal Fishing of Tárcoles has been recognized as a model of governance that not only sets regulations for sustainable fishing but that also secures the artisanal fishers' rights of access to resources and their right

to participate in decisionmaking in fisheries management and conservation. This initiative is based on the values of equity and social inclusion in marine conservation.

The fishers and fishworkers, as daily users of the resources and the ecosystem, have been the key stakeholders in this process and they have been the central actors in building this initiative. A locally adapted Code of Responsible Fishing, a locally managed data-base, and a participatory mapping of the fishing areas, have all been key processes that have enabled the recognition of this community-based marine area. Furthermore, the locally managed database and the participatory zoning repositions the importance of local knowledge in the management of fisheries, and has given a better position and greater authority to the artisanal fishers as decision-makers and resource managers.

It is important to promote and strengthen strategies that advance the sustainability and protection of the livelihoods and well-being of local artisanal fishing communities who depend on the ocean and need to have their rights defended. These efforts can be strengthened by working with the traditional national park services. Costa Rica can also use other channels like the national fishing institutes, which are mandated to promote responsible fishing efforts.

Lessons learned

The following lessons can be learned from the experience of this small Central American country:

1. The artisanal fishing sector recognizes the need for sustainable use of marine diversity. The coastal communities' interest in responsible use and conservation has been confirmed by their efforts to develop fishing based on their livelihood needs and survival strategies.
2. Artisanal fishing as a culture should be safeguarded and defended by government bodies and non-governmental organizations. Artisanal fishing is not only a productive activity for

COOPESOLIDAR R.L.



Artisanal fishers prepare their lines to go fishing in Coyote. The Association of Artisanal Fishers of Coyote (ASPECOY) was created in 2003

these communities but also a way of life and culture that includes local knowledge about marine resources. Artisanal fishing communities want to keep fishing as a way of life, and that desire should be respected by the conservation sector.

3. The fishing sector is very heterogeneous (artisanal, small-scale, semi-industrial and industrial are all different segments of the same sector) and this aspect needs to be acknowledged. There are big asymmetries in the way the law is implemented. The artisanal fishing sector has large needs but is being socially and economically excluded. Organizations need to be reinforced at the local level and alliances strengthened to work with other sectors.
4. There are no examples in the context of the National System of Protected Areas (SINAC) of active participation of the artisanal fishing sector in the decision-making processes for conservation and fisheries management schemes. It is of great importance to promote other models of MPA governance where communities and local fishers are integrated and constitute part of the initiatives.
5. The establishment of relationships by the conservation sector with the artisanal fishing communities creates an opportunity not only to understand their culture, thinking and knowledge, but also to enrich the focus of marine and coastal conservation with a livelihoods- and sustainable-living perspective.
6. Equity and access rights should be central in the creation of MPAs and in marine conservation.
7. Understanding the social, cultural and economic dynamics that characterize artisanal fishing communities is key for processes that intend to bridge conservation with human development, and that seek to achieve the recognition of the artisanal fishers and fishworkers as actors of responsible resource use and marine conservation.

8. Community strategies for conservation and resource management are equally important tools for the safeguard of cultural identity.

There is still a long way to advance towards inclusion and equity in the management of the world's seas. The Costa Rican experience adds to other regional and global initiatives' fight for community-based governance models of protected areas in the

The artisanal fishing sector has large needs but is being socially and economically excluded.

context of sustainable living and human-rights approaches. 

For more

www.coopesolidar.org

CoopeSolidar R.L.

www.coopetarcoles.org

CoopeTárcoles R.L.

www.consorcioporlamar.com

ConsorcioPorLaMar R.L.