

Youth and small-scale fisheries in Central America ¹



During the “Jornada de Aprendizaje” in Honduras supported by ICSF, CONFEPESCA, and CoopeSoliDar R.L with the support of the organizations RECOTURH and APROCUS, a session on youth was held in order to open up a space to talk about the importance of youth in small-scale fisheries, where the young representatives attending this workshop participated facilitating discussions. It was a space where youth and adults talked about the value of youth in fishing. They exchanged life stories, challenges, and shared from their experiences the multiple roles played by young people in the small-scale fishing sector. They also shared their proposals and expectations for their well-being and suggestions to strengthen the artisanal fishing sector and youth in Central America. This space of discussion also achieved an intergenerational dialogue where adults could listen to the experiences and perspectives of youth, through their life stories, while young people listened to the feedback and perspectives of adults and more experienced leaders on issues that were raised by the young representatives, issues concerning the fishing sector, youth strengthening and empowerment and the development of small-scale fishing communities. Furthermore, the adult leaders shared with the youth their proposals to support youth in the fishing sector. They also shared and discussed important elements to meet the challenges that were highlighted by the young representatives, such as destructive fishing practices, youth’s participation in fishing organizations at local, national and regional levels, access to education and opportunities, human rights, access to natural resources and land, among others.

¹ This summary is based on the discussions held in the youth session during the workshop, in which the following young representatives participated: Isamar Aguilar, Felipe Alcerro, Mynor Bautista, Carlos Benedith, Marco Antonio Dubón, Juan Antonio Guardado, Arnol Ramón Gómez, Franklin Gómez, Cesar Alexis Hernández Suarez, Omar Edgardo Hernandez, Ariel López, Juan Maltez, Laura Morales, Gilberto Naranjo, Elmer Iván Perez, Rosa Sandoval y Ricardo Serrut.



Situation, roles and perspectives of youth of small-scale fishing communities:

Through their testimonies and life stories, the young representatives highlighted three important elements:

1. Concern over declining fish stocks, destructive fishing practices and food security. The young leaders expressed their concern related to decreasing fisheries resources in their areas and the use of harmful fishing gear.

"There has not been enough fish, we have to go to other areas to fish in order to live" (Omar Edgardo, Honduras).

"Fishing is my livelihood, but I have not gone fishing in the last two months, because we are working the land, as there is not enough fish now. I work in an area that has been seriously affected by trawling" (Marcos Dubon, Honduras).

"Fish resources suddenly declined and we decided to work hard because the situation was difficult" (Rosa, El Salvador).

"In Honduras, a destructive fishing gear called "chinchorro" is the worst enemy of shore fishermen, we need fish for our food security".

2. Artisanal fishing as an opportunity and as a way of life and sustainable livelihood. Fishing activities has allowed many of the young leaders to pay for their studies. The income generated from this activity has enabled the development, well-being and welfare of themselves, their families and their communities.

"We fished for three months to pay for our books for school" (Ricardo Serrut, Panama).

"With fishing we have paid my brothers' education and mine " (Arnold Gomez, Honduras).

3. Youth contributes significantly to the small-scale fishing sector and to the well-being of their communities. Young people contribute significantly to the development and "buen vivir" of their communities. Many young people are not only fishworkers but also leaders that are part of small-scale fisheries sector's organizations and other community organizations. Young women also fulfil an important role within the sector: in fishing activities, pre and post capture activities, and many are leaders in community and local, national and regional organizations of the small-scale fishing sector.

"In APROCUS (Artisanal fishing association) I like to participate and be positive, I want my community to improve and be well" (Carlos Benedith, young representative from Honduras)

"I support the administration of the National Federation of Artisanal Fishers of Panamá and UPASABO (a local artisanal fishing organization). I do this in support of the small-scale fishing sector" (Ricardo Serrut, young representative from Panama.)

"I am also studying and working in fish commercialization. We process fish and sell it, we also prepare fish and prepare food as fish tacos, fish burgers to sell. In my cooperative we are half men and half women" (Isamar Aguilar, young representative from Nicaragua).

Youth's expectations for the future:

The young representatives also expressed some of their expectations for their future and the future of youth in their fishing communities.

1. Opportunities and better access to education.

"We have the right to study and to opportunities of capacity building and training and working with others. We should work and not waste our life on alcohol or drugs" (Mynor Bautista, Guatemala).

2. Contribute to their organizations and communities for collective welfare and well being, and "buen vivir"!

"We want a group of young leaders who will support the small-scale fishing sector and we would like young people from all Central America to integrate and join "

"The youth movement's real objective is to tackle fishing communities needs."

3. Be taken into account and take responsibility for it as young leaders.

"For youth to be taken into account is very positive. It generates a sense of responsibility" (Gilberto Naranjo, Costa Rica).

Let prepare for the challenges!

From this dialogue concrete proposals emerged that give important key elements and feedback to prepare for the challenges and to strengthen the small-scale fisheries sector and the young people who are part of it:

1. Youth inclusion

The young representatives raised the issue of the need for fisherfolk's organizations at local, regional and national level to involve youth at their meetings and activities and open up spaces for youth's participation.

"Organizations need to be visionary and promote the participation of young people."

2. Importance of education for youth empowerment

The young leaders expressed their interest in new opportunities in education and innovative topics that can be developed in conjunction with their fisheries activities.

"It is important to improve the education of our young fish workers" (Felix).

"We don't have almost any professionals in fisheries issues that come from our local communities and from our sector" (Gavino Acevedo, Panama).

"In Nicaragua, in Ometepe children study and fish at the same time, there should be a scholarship scheme for the children of fisherfolks and fish workers to get educated and prepared".

3. Access to territories, human rights and advocacy

Adult leaders highlighted the issue of access to land and the struggle for the rights of the artisanal fishworkers as an important element for future generations and fishing communities. This would allow them to continue with their occupation in fisheries as their livelihoods and to be able to have their human rights secured. A call was made by the adult leaders to the young leaders to continue advocating for their rights. The issue of advocacy was highlighted as

fundamental for the recognition of the rights of the small-scale fishing sector and fishing communities.

"We need principles and values to defend the sector " (Gavino Acevedo, Panama).

4. Strengthening youth leadership, capacity-building and support

An intergenerational support and a follow up that allow the strengthening of youth leadership and the transmission and exchange of knowledge and experience is essential.

5. Recognition of the contribution of small-scale fisheries to the economy

The contribution of the artisanal fisheries sector to the local and national economies should be recognized and valued at the governmental level.

What is the proposed follow up?

There must be commitment, will and responsibility of the adult and young leaders and of fisheries organizations at different levels to follow up on the strengthening of youth and youth issues. Three concrete proposals are:

- Continuous monitoring and follow up on efforts to strengthen young people's leadership and capacity building.
- Open up spaces for youth participation in local, national and regional fisheries organizations.
- Strengthen the Young Fisherfolks Network of Mesoamerica and the Caribbean²

Results:

Specific results and outcomes of the workshop in relation to the subject of youth are:

- ✓ The value of youth and the importance that youth has in artisanal fisheries.
- ✓ Awareness of the importance of empowering youth, strengthening youth leadership and creating new spaces for participation.
- ✓ The young representatives that participated were strengthened with the discussions and learning that took place in this workshop and their exchanges with other youth leaders and adults leaders from all Central America. They also raised their awareness of the importance of their responsibilities as young leaders.

As youth, we need to move forward with our ideas and dreams to take actions that contribute to solutions. That's how we build the well-being and "buen vivir" of our communities and families!

² The young Fisherfolks Network of Mesoamerica and the Caribbean, is a network of young artisanal fishworkers from countries of Central America, Mexico and the Caribbean.

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/337586646329909/?fref=ts>

