

Caribbean Small-Scale Women in Fishery Learning Exchange in Costa Rica: Women's Voices

Femmes Caribbeennes de la Pêche Artisanale à L'echange D'experiences a Costa-Rica: La Voix des Femmes

Intercambio de Experiencias de Mujeres Caribeñas en La Pesca a Pequeña Escala en Costa Rica: Voces de Mujeres

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ABSTRACT

The Small-Scale Women in Fishery Learning Exchange, facilitated by CoopeSoliDar R.L. in July 2017, strengthened the capacities of women in fisheries from several Caribbean countries as well as their Costa Rican hosts and counterparts. The Caribbean women, selected by the Caribbean Network of Fisherfolk Organisations (CNFO) learned from experiences in Costa Rica, while contributing their knowledge on Caribbean artisanal fishery value chains. The women were from the fishery sectors in Barbados, St. Kitts and Nevis, Grenada and Belize. They shared experiences with the women from the Tarcoles Fishing Cooperative and Chomes Mollusks Cooperative. They visited Consorcio Por La Mar, and had a close look at the co-management process of Cahuita National Park and the South Caribbean Diving Centre: Embajadores del Mar. This knowledge exchange sought to build links and shared experiences among women from fishing communities from personal, economic and political/organizational empowerment perspectives, strengthening bridges among islands of the Caribbean and Costa Rica. It was designed with a participatory approach, favouring a horizontal transmission of knowledge. Each experience showcased significant and different aspects of learning such as social, economic, cultural and organisational present in Costa Rica's artisanal fisheries, with special emphasis on women. The visitors shared their perceptions, recommendations and learning, maintaining a two-way communication with the women from Costa Rica. The women co-designed an Innovation Plan that was formulated along the sharing and learning exchange route. In this way they could progressively include new visions and strategies observed on site visits. Parallel to the site visits there was the design of artistic material representing the discussions and learning. It was shared with a wider audience through social media.

KEYWORDS: Learning exchange, small-scale fishery, empowerment

INTRODUCTION

The Gender in Fisheries Team (GIFT), led by the Centre for Resource Management and Environmental Studies of the University of the West Indies and the Caribbean National Fisherfolk Organisation (CNFO) with funding from the Food and Agricultural Organization, coordinated the exchange in an effort to bring together Caribbean women from the fisheries sector to discuss their role in the implementation of small-scale fisheries voluntary guidelines.

At this first of its kind women in fishery learning exchange, the women were treated to an opportunity to strengthen their capacity. The generated lessons learnt are expected to contribute to the programs, projects, and policies of small-scale fisheries with a focus on gender equality.

People learn from practice and experience; therefore, the findings of this learning exchange are added to the baggage of knowledge we carry with us. The lesson learned is evidence that allows us to generate trend with the idea of creating change in this case, in favour of women and equality.

LEARNING EXCHANGE

In Tárcoles, the visiting women had the opportunity to learn through the key people of the organization, the value chain in operation, combined with the experience of guided tours and rural community tourism. It was possible to share with the women how Jeannette, their manager, has achieved personal empowerment and perseverance for increasing knowledge and experience. In addition, the visiting women were part of a practical experience where they learned about the management of CoopeTárcoles R.L, its collection center, the experience of traceability, the sale of fish, among others.

In Chomes the women explained, in four stations, everything related to their productive activity. The first station referred to the process of mollusk extraction in the mangrove, and for this, they did not only share knowledge of the mangrove species but also the mollusk's they extract and the dangers they face. In addition, they explained in depth the participatory research that has given rise to the Mollusk Sustainable Management Plan and the negotiation process with different actors. In the second station, it was possible to share the obstacles they face in order to carry out their activities, mainly due to the presence of an aquaculture shrimp company that does not comply with stipulations and regulations, which affects the women and the health of the mangroves. The third station discussed the process of mangrove reforestation and the traditional knowledge of women, and each of the learning exchange participant planted a mangrove seedling. Finally, an entrepreneurship initiative and its added value were visited. They shared the obstacles they encountered to obtain the electricity connection to set up and make operational their small business. As a sign of solidarity, the visiting women

decided to write a letter of support for the women of the Chomes cooperative.

In Cahuita the final visit was made in collaboration with the Afrocostarican Women Forum Association. The visit was to a model experience in terms of co-management in community participation and decision-making. They learned about the experiences and history in the co-management of the resources of a National Park where its inhabitants were always present despite the obstacles they faced. With the Ambassadors of the Sea, we recognized the experience of young people who are entering diving practices and learning opportunities offered by the Diving School such as underwater archeology, in addition to other activities such as cleaning the seabed and recognition of the sea riches.

LESSONS LEARNT

The role of women in artisanal fisheries is essential throughout the value chain. It is necessary to generate support for equitable policies. It is also necessary to strengthen the identity of Caribbean women as women of strength, empowerment and leadership. This can be accomplished by providing empowerment and leadership training spaces. As empowered leaders, the fisherwomen must multiply that knowledge and attitudes with other women in the fishing communities, and along the value chain: opening spaces to advance the implementation of human rights.

The process of implementing the Voluntary Guidelines for Small-Scale Fisheries must take place jointly with civil society and government. Working on the issue of climate change required perspectives from prevention, adaptation, and approached via holistic working collaboration with women.

Co-management is shared decision-making that helps to set up opportunities for social, environmental and economic improvement in the lives of fishermen and fisherwomen at all points along the value chain. Co-management works if we give it a chance to succeed. It is important that we ensure that traditional knowledge of fishers is recognized. Furthermore, must rescue cultural traditions in fishing to help strengthen the identity and roots of our people, as well as their commitment to the restoration of a country and an activity such as responsible fishing, including the contributions of women and young people. Through education, you can reach young people.

There is hope and motivation that change will come soon. Change is a beginning of work among women working together. Start working towards a better relationship between fisherwomen. The change begins with “me”. Stop, scream, cry, but do not let yourself be defeated. Take the strengths of other women, make them yours and share.

NEXT STEPS

Once the women are back in their respective communities they have agree to a series of follow up activities that will permit them to share the experience and lessons learn among their peers. These in the words of the participating women will be to:

- i) “Put information together in a report and present it to the association and fishermen cooperative. Organize the women community group, have a meeting with them and through meetings pass on the experiences and the knowledge I gain here.”
- ii) “Report back to the Gender in Fishery Team (GIFT) and to the CNFO and also help create a women in fisheries network.”
- iii) “Increase CNFO work on gender to increase the presence of women representation and women leaders within their country and organization’s activities.”
- iv) “Participate more and more actively in activities that address fisherwomen issues.” and
- v) “Use what I have learned for personal growth and to assist the fisherman and women in the community as it relates to SSF.”

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