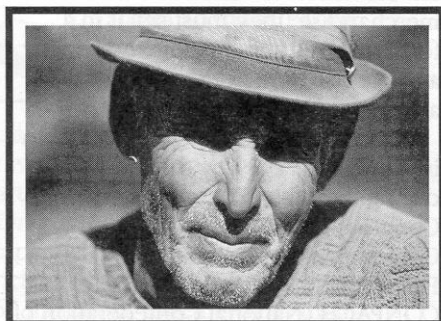


THE STRUGGLE TO HARVEST FOOD FROM THE SEA



The tradition continues but with a new face to the future.

Near Talcahuano, the country's largest fishing port, is the fishing cove of Perone. Its 60 inhabitants are all very poor but display a great deal of enthusiasm for their work. Of these 60 people, 40 are involved in gathering seaweed and shellfish and in deep-sea fishing. Perone has the most serious economic problems of the seven fishing coves in the Eighth Region, but its residents — the majority of whom are women — have embarked upon a fight against poverty.

"Production is the women's responsibility," said Exequiel Lara, president of the union, who thinks of nothing but getting his people out of their current plight.

There are 10 boats in Caleta Perone used only by the men for off-shore fishing. The women do the rest. "By five o'clock in the morning we are already on the beach," explained our contacts, Ramona Lara, María Elena Ibáñez, Rosa Chamorro, and Laura Ibáñez, four of the many women residents whose lives consist solely of work, household chores, and going down to the shore four or five times a day to look for the sought-after seaweed they call "luga." From this seaweed comes agar, a highly prized extract used as a thickening agent and sweetener in food, cosmetics, and pharmaceutical industries all over the world.

One kilogram of seaweed sells for \$2 and the 100 grams of agar obtained from it provides a return to the country of 50 times that. The amount each inhabitant of the village earns in a month to live on is between \$100 and \$150.

The Fishing Cove of Tubul

There are fishing coves with few resources where the inhabitants have very modest aspirations, such as one day being able to sell their products in a supermarket rather than, as at present, in street markets. There are others, however, like the fishing cove of Tubul that are highly organized.

The example of unity, effort, and a change in mentality set by the residents of the fishing cove of Tubul was generated by them and their tenacity and desire to move ahead.

Tubul is a rural fishing village of 1500 inhabitants, 640 of whom are involved in gathering the Gracilaria seaweed, which the fishermen call "pelillo." The remainder of their time is spent fishing or gathering shellfish in the rich Gulf of Arauco.

According to José Valenzuela, president of the Río Tubul union, they maintain a system of economic solidarity. All resources obtained from there go into a common fund, and the earnings are divided into equal parts for all associates over the age of 18.

The profits exceed \$2 million a year from the sale of seaweed and \$1 million from the sale of other commodities. Monthly per capita income in the village is \$200–300. In the average family household, this

amount may be three times that, if you combine the salaries of the husband, wife, and children over 18 who are members of the union or the trade association. If the children are studying and not working, they receive a grant worth half a salary to enable them to finish school.

"The fishermen do not allow their work to be regulated," said José Valenzuela, "but in Tubul we are implementing a management plan which we adopted for its practicality."

Half of the 640 people who fish for a living in Tubul are women. "They work much harder than we do," said Valenzuela. "The truth of this has prevailed and been recognized little by little." In addition to their work in the home, they are responsible for cleaning and baiting the fishing lines, laying on provisions, cleaning the boats, and, as if this were not enough, gathering seaweed.

This organization has enabled the residents of the fishing cove to achieve a series of improvements not easy to obtain for the rest of the artisanal fishermen. Good houses, household electrical appliances, vehicles, better



In Chile, the livelihood of nearly 300,000 people depends on what they harvest from the sea.

REPORTS



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work tools, motorboats, and, more important, the installation of drinking water for the fishing cove, an investment that costs more than 25 million pesos (\$76,000).

The project for the immediate future is to build a school for adults, because education is one of the few problems that it has not been possible to solve.

Concerns and Aspirations

The research studies done at Chile's Pontificia Universidad Católica and financed by IDRC on artisanal fisheries, technology transfer, creation of fish farms, and aquaculture operations, among others, brought us into close contact with this sector of the population. Analysis by sociologists and economists of this case study served to reveal a great deal about their lives, concerns, and aspirations.

Even if the adults like their trade, they do not want their children to follow in their footsteps because they consider this would involve great sacrifices and a life that is neither stable nor secure. "So much so," said Susana Lillo, daughter and niece of fishermen from Caleta Rocuant, "that my husband currently works as a

chauffeur." Pollution caused by local industry has led to a gradual decline in natural resources. A few years ago you could catch up to a thousand razor clams a day, whereas now the catch is no more than 200 or 300.

To help out at home, Susana works as a domestic in other people's houses because she does not want her children to go without an education. "I do not want what happened to me to happen to them," she said. "Their marks are excellent and I will fight to ensure that they continue their studies."

The Major Problems

Among the many problems confronting the sector are those related to health, education, social security, and, of course, marketing their products. Fishermen would like to sell their catch directly to the consumer, but there are many impediments. Most fishermen sell through intermediaries they call *remitentes* (remittance men) in their slang. Because the "raw material" remains fresh only a short time, and there is no adequate infrastructure to

enable fishermen to store their merchandise, they must sell it in a form that will sell quickly and usually at prices that are not very advantageous to them.

According to the conclusions drawn in November 1989 by the industry during the most recent National Congress organized by the Confederación Nacional de Pescadores Artesanales de Chile, CONPACH (National Confederation of Artisanal Fishermen of Chile), the major marketing problems are "the inequality in terms of bargaining power between fishermen and those who market the fish, the near monopoly of some of them to set prices arbitrarily, the lack of organization and training in the fishing industry, and, of course, the lack of an adequate infrastructure for cold storage and an improved transportation system for their products."

Although the fishermen prefer to work alone, it has been proven that joining forces to sell their catch offers them improved economic well being.

The organization, built up by a large body of fishermen, will undoubtedly bring real development. The 111 unions that bring them together and recent government support policies will mean that this sector will achieve its longed for social, economic, and cultural well being.

Considerable support is available through the projects currently financed by IDRC in Chile's universities. They are designed to promote the overall development of the fishermen and their families, improving not only their work but their lot in life as well. This will enable the country not only to surpass its economic expectations of the fishery industry but also to improve living conditions for the nearly 300,000 people whose livelihoods depend on what they harvest from the sea.

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