

Sustainability

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Sustainability Abroad #4: Consorcio Porlamar



March 23, 2020 | Kaija Schlangen

This sustainable cooperative protects local fishing zones and promotes wellbeing for both the sea and surrounding community.

Consorcio Porlamar has been fighting for more than 35 years to protect their fishing zone, community and the environment. Located in Tárcoles, Costa Rica, the cooperative supports local fishers by selling their fish to both local and international markets for them. Members of the co-op also get help funding bait and equipment.

In the early 2000s, commercial fishing industries were harming the local economy and environment. They created competition with the local fishers and depleted many species of fish and other marine animals that got caught as by-catch in their massive nets. Consorcio Porlamar pressured the Costa Rican government in 2007 to officially protect their marine zone from commercial fishers. The battle lasted until 2011, when the

government passed a new law to only allow local fishers to fish in the protected zone next to the community. It became the first protected fishing area in Costa Rica.

Jeanette is a fisher, secretary of the cooperative and its financial advisor. She's one of the few female fishers in the cooperative, though fishers in the co-op hire local women to untangle the fishing nets after they've used them. One barrel of hooks can take anywhere from five to ten hours to untangle. The women get paid around 6,000 colones (about \$10.50) per barrel. While this might not seem like a lot, fishing is a risky business and local fishers are never guaranteed daily catches. Fishers usually get from 1,300 colones (\$2.29) per fish or more depending on the species and its condition. Doña Lala has been working for the co-op for decades now and says that she enjoys her job and is one of the best at untangling the hooks.

Consorcio Porlamar also helps promote financial literacy to its members. It helps members get bank accounts and open credit cards. Fishers get paid through deposits in their accounts, which Jeanette reports has helped many families save money, because they never get handed physical cash.

Alongside the local economy, the co-op also supports local marine life. After phasing out commercial trolling, Jeanette says that the community has “seen a great recovery for the ecosystem.” If trollers do return in the future, they must follow stricter regulations to make sure they respect and understand the local ecosystems. Illegal fishing in unprotected zones results in fishers surrendering their expensive fishing nets. Jeanette says that this is more productive than giving them a fine because they cannot fish without their equipment and it's very expensive to replace. In recent years, Consorcio Porlamar has also changed their fishing hooks to be less intrusive and harmful on the fish.

Although local fishing is now protected, the co-op continues to face challenges from global warming. There are about 5,000 people in the community and Jeanette reports that nearly 90% of them depend on fishing for their livelihoods. They've noticed an unusually warm summer this year, which has affected the local fish populations, who swim to cooler water. Christmas shrimp is a staple for most Costa Rican households during the holiday season (which lasts from December to January 6th) and the co-op usually sees a big boom in business. However, this year the local shrimp populations were depleted so much that there was no annual Christmas shrimp bonus for the community. To help support their community and economy, Consorcio Porlamar has started using tourism to help supplement their income as the marine zone around them continues to change.





Global warming has replaced Consorcio Porlamar's problem with commercial fishing, yet the co-op continues to create new, creative solutions to improve life for their community and ecosystems. Consorcio Porlamar proves the power a small group of people has who demands change together.

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