

WOMEN FISHING FOR FREEDOM

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FISHING AND GENDER

The 'Integrated Protection and Management of Marine and Coastal Biodiversity' project, better known as the TerraMar Project, encourages the integrated and participatory management of marine and coastal environments in Brazil, promoting conservation measures and the sustainable use of their natural resources. Based on the vital connection between sea and continent, the project has two main regions of operation, both with exuberant biodiversity and a complex and challenging socio-environmental scenery – the Coral Coast, which involves part of the states of Pernambuco and Alagoas; and the Abrolhos region, which covers the southern coast of the state of Bahia and northern Espírito Santo. Under the scope of strategies for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, the project has been directing efforts towards the valorization of artisanal fishing and the sustainable management of fishing resources.

Artisanal fishing is one of Brazil's oldest and most important economic and social activities, accounting for more than 60% of the fresh fish produced and consumed in the country. A practice ingrained in our culture, it ensures employment, income and food sovereignty for millions of people in coastal communities and on river basins throughout the country. This small-scale fishing involves family labor that has developed and improved traditional techniques and knowledge that usually have a low environmental impact. For many of the country's riverside and coastal communities, fishing is the main - if not the only - source of subsistence and income. It is estimated that there are one million people in Brazil directly linked to artisanal fishing, which mobilizes another three million indirectly. Women play an important role in the artisanal fishing chain, but most of the time with little or no recognition.

Most of this population lives in conditions of social fragility marked by poverty, precarious housing, land insecurity and a high level of illiteracy or low schooling. These factors are compounded by the devaluation of the women's work, the invisibility of the category and the difficulty of accessing urban infrastructure and markets. However, these women have an invaluable social, economic and environmental value, as they are agents for the conservation of coastal and marine ecosystems.

They develop and improve traditional techniques and knowledge that have a low environmental impact; they organize themselves into groups and lead a way of life in harmony with the waters of rivers, lagoons, seas and estuaries, from which they extract what they need to make a living. They usually respect life cycles and nature's ability to replenish fish stocks, promoting the sustainable use of natural resources and contributing to the conservation of river and coastal-marine environments.

Without necessarily being an objective or an indicator, the issue of gender in the scope of artisanal fishing has come to the fore throughout the implementation of the TerraMar

project. It has highlighted the importance of the role and participation of women in this activity and the need to increase their voice and representativeness. Thus, since 2018, TerraMar has supported specific and structuring initiatives to strengthen the links among these women, increase their visibility, deepen their knowledge and promote their articulation in the territories, especially in the Abrolhos and Costa dos Corais regions.

The initiatives supported can be grouped within the broader scope of strengthening the social organization of fisherwomen and extractivists, either by structuring a new network (in the case of the Costa dos Corais) or by strengthening the existing collective (Abrolhos region). Below we briefly describe some of our contributions to fisherwomen and extractivists.

POWER AND STRENGTH FOR A WOMEN'S NETWORK

On the coast of Bahia, it is remarkable the articulation in favor of women's participation in the social processes of fishing communities that is led by the Network of Extractivist Fisherwomen of Bahia. This collective brings together more than 2,000 women representing Bahia's marine Extractive Reserves. The Network has been expanding its activities to other areas and is a reference in the organization of women from traditional communities. Its purpose is to empower the fisherwomen and extractivist through capacity building, income generation and mutual support.

With a view to strengthening this movement, TerraMar supported, from 2019 to 2022, initiatives to strengthen this Network and train its members with a view to productive inclusion, empowerment and autonomy. The Network itself coordinated and executed a subsidy contract that offered learning cycles with a series of face-to-face and online workshops on the rights of traditional communities and populations, herbal medicine, product marketing and good practices in fish handling. Coordinating this grant enabled the Network to improve its technical and financial project management skills.

In addition to the usual difficulties with their labor, social organization and lack of adequate infrastructure for the disposal of products, in recent years Bahia's fishing communities have been affected by episodes that have had a major impact on their environments and ways of life, such as the oil spill that reached the beaches of the Brazil northeast in 2019, the Covid-19 pandemic and the floods caused by heavy rains in the south of Bahia at the end of 2021. Events like these directly impact the main activity of fisherwomen, shellfish gatherers and their surroundings and make the need to create economic alternatives and encourage new community enterprises even more evident. To help on this issue, in 2021 TerraMar carried out a study to identify opportunities for generating income from non-fishing activities in the Canavieiras Extractive Reserve (Resex). Priority and potential production chains were mapped to increase financial autonomy, help increase income and reduce the exclusive dependence on fishing by the women who benefit from the Resex. Four productive chains were identified as promising: crochet crafts, mangaba extraction, community-based tourism and coconut oil production. This study has served as a basis for the Women's Network to raise new funds.

A NEW NETWORK

Start from a mobilization of a small group of fisherwomen from the Costa dos Corais, who felt the need to shed light on the role of women in the artisanal fishing sector – a mostly male activity – various workshops were held to increase the connecting and coordinating of other women, join forces, expand the fight for rights and spaces and improve their qualifications, bringing autonomy and valuing their identity.

Throughout 2019, there were municipal and regional meetings, seminars and workshops that engaged more than 400 coastal and marine extractivist women, representing communities in 14 municipalities. On these occasions, they were able to get to know each other, improve their knowledge, establish connections, share experiences, dreams and challenges. This process culminated in the creation and structuring of the Network of Fisherwomen of the Costa dos Corais ([Coral Coast Fisherwomen's Network - YouTube](#)).

In addition to supporting the process described above, TerraMar has been supporting the Network by providing guidance and specific courses to increase the communication skills of the connectors, always respecting the role of the women, in order to encourage the registration of fisherwomen with class associations.

A COURSE AND A PRIZE

Among the various courses offered to the Women's Networks by TerraMar, there was one on writing projects for fundraising, with both theoretical and practical parts. Throughout the course, the participants wrote, in groups, interesting and important projects for their communities based on their own ideas. The projects involving topics such as community-based tourism, recovering damaged environments, combating garbage at sea, cleaning up beaches and mangroves, making useful the waste from processing crab, shrimp and aratu. At the end of the course, some of the projects were well-structured and could easily be adapted to apply for funding.

One noteworthy among these projects was written by a group of women from the Lagoa de Jequiá Marine Extractive Reserve, located in the state of Alagoas. The Association of Women in Action of Jequiá da Praia (Amaje), submitted the project about reusing crab processing waste to produce organic fertilizer to the 'Rural Women - Spain Recognizes' 1st Edition Award, which promotes gender equality and is awarded by the Spanish Embassy together with other partners. The crab is an abundant resource in the lagoon, which, after being caught, is benefited by the fisherwomen who sell the crab meat (crab fillet) for their livelihoods. Now, in addition to another source of income, they are responsible for protecting the lagoon, since waste is no longer dumped into the environment.

AND THERE'S MORE...

TerraMar has been an active partner for these Networks. We would also like to highlight our support for:

- adapting a virtual sales platform (Gestor Orgânico) to support women in marketing fresh, sustainably harvested fish, molluscs and crustaceans, which can also be used to publicize and market other community products, such as handicrafts and family farming products;
- provision of personal protective equipment for removing oil from beaches and mangroves;
- publication of a booklet compiling the rights of fisherwomen and extractivists in Brazil (in the final stages of publication);
- support for Network representatives to take part in events;
- support for structuring and publicizing small warehouses for trading and exchanging products produced by the community;
- promotion of meetings to improve the use of social networks.

CHALLENGES

It's easy to recognize that women's groups manage to take advantage of opportunities and project themselves into scenarios that aren't necessarily friendly to them. They face challenges, impositions and restrictions from various sectors, often even from their own families. With courage and determination, they have managed to position themselves and make themselves respected.

But the road to consolidating this scenario is long and complex. It is up to the various sectors of society (governmental, private, trade associations, international cooperation) to recognize, validate and support the work of these women.

THE TERRAMAR PROJECT

Despite being categorized as a GG0 project by GIZ, TerraMar has a strong gender footprint, its team of collaborators is made up mostly of women; we value gender equality and equity in our work. Recognizing the importance of fisherwomen in the traditional fishing sector has resulted in significant support for the Fisherwomen's Networks. Our work is a reference for other GIZ projects in Brazil; we have a space on the cooperation website for good practice, and we present the networks' experiences at GIZ themed cafés and GADeR-ALC Network webinars.

The TerraMar project is a partnership between Brazil's Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change, the Chico Mendes Institute for Biodiversity Conservation (ICMBio) and Germany's Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection (BMUV), as part of the International Climate Initiative (IKI). It is implemented by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, in the context of the German-Brazilian Cooperation for Sustainable Development.