

**Latin America and the Caribbean:
Improving the Domestic Market for
Seafood Products¹**

What's innovative? This project brings together two established and well-respected networks representing a diverse group of stakeholders in the fisheries industry of Latin America and the Caribbean—public and private actors, large-scale fishers and processors and artisanal fishers and processors, women and men at all levels of the industry—to improve domestic seafood markets. One of the networks focuses explicitly on women in the region's fisheries and especially on issues of equity and access to markets.

Project Background and Implementation

The FAO Fisheries Department project to improve domestic markets for seafood in the Latin America and Caribbean Region is a Technical Cooperation Program that responds to an urgent need in the fisheries sector and among consumers in Latin America and the Caribbean for a more efficient seafood distribution and marketing system.² The need to develop domestic seafood markets through a set of actions at the distribution and marketing levels is already acknowledged by most fisheries authorities in the

¹ This Innovative Activity Profile was written by Helga Josupeit (FAO), and reviewed by Christine Okali, Rohana Subasinghe, Melba Reantaso, Chitra Deshpande, Susana Siar, and Ilaria Sisto (FAO); Eriko Hoshino, Kieran Kelleher (World Bank); and Maria Hartl (IFAD). This IAP was heavily drawn from the author's own experiences from being involved in the program. Other references used were Josupeit (2004) and FAO Fisheries Department (undated).

² The project covers the 11 INFOPESCA member countries: Argentina, Belize, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Uruguay and Venezuela.

region. Experience has shown that simply donating equipment or materials is not enough; government must foster a supportive environment for the domestic market to develop. This project strengthens capacity within governments and among stakeholders in the seafood distribution and marketing sector. To support these efforts, it also seeks to develop standards for the fisheries value chain. The standards are to be objective, globally acceptable, sustainable, and simple to implement and use.

Latin American and Caribbean countries share similar seafood consumption patterns, fishery products, quality control systems, and equally deficient marketing structures. Largely because of the poor seafood distribution network, supplies of seafood in the region have stagnated since 1990 and declined since 1995. Another source of concern is that individual countries apply very different standards to seafood products destined for export compared to those destined for domestic consumption. Products entering the domestic market often are unfit for export and are subject to lower sanitary standards. The lower standards for domestically sold products create mistrust among domestic consumers. For this reason, objective, straightforward standards for the domestic fisheries value chain, in line with standards for exports, are integral to improving domestic seafood markets. A common regional standard would also facilitate the movement of goods between countries and improve the relatively limited trade in fishery products within the region. The value of such standards will only be realized, however, if their implementation is monitored. For instance, it will be irrelevant to train seafood producers in Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) quality control practices if such practices are ignored by many wholesalers and retailers.

The need for a project focusing on domestic seafood markets was already recognized in 2003 as a priority by the fisheries authorities of the member countries of the Center for Marketing Information and Advisory Services for Fishery Products in Latin America and the Caribbean (INFOPESCA). Mexico and Brazil—which together have more than half of the population in Latin America—have already undertaken several activities to develop their domestic markets. In

2006, the Executive Committee of INFOPESCA reiterated the importance of domestic market development and included this issue on the agenda for the Committee on Fisheries' Sub-Committee on Fish Trade.

This Technical Cooperation Program was negotiated by INFOPESCA on behalf of its 11 member countries and provides an example of the benefits for partners of associations of this kind. Partners in the project include the national institutions responsible for fisheries marketing and the Latin American Network of Women in Fisheries (LANWF). LANWF, which is coordinated by INFOPESCA, is the implementing agency for the project. The Fish Inspector Network will be used to apply the regional standards in each country.

INFOPESCA, LANWF, and Gender Issues in the Development of the Region's Fisheries

With more than 30 years of service to its 11 member countries, INFOPESCA is a well-established intergovernmental organization that provides information and advisory services on the marketing of Latin American and Caribbean fishery products. Originally formed to address concerns about fishery export earnings in developing countries in Latin America,³ INFOPESCA has supported a range of activities that can contribute to changing norms and practices in fish processing and thus affect the livelihoods of men and women in the fisheries industry throughout the region.⁴ It has considerable experience in working with the public and private sector and has conducted various projects directed specifically the private

³ About 95 percent of fisheries in Latin America are industrial, and a large share of the products is processed and packaged in factories. One of the earliest studies of factory employment was undertaken by INFOPESCA (Josupeit 2004) and concluded that task-related payments are equal for women and men, but women rarely occupy the higher-paid jobs. Factory jobs are occupations of last resort, sometimes employing illegal workers.

⁴ For example, through INFOPESCA Cuba has assembled statistics on male and female workers in the fishing industry.

sector, such as Common Fund for Commodities (CFC) projects. Among other activities, INFOPESCA works directly with fishers, processors, and traders to enhance the quality of their products in response to market needs. It coordinates and works with a number of networks, such as the Latin American network of fish inspectors and the network of fish technologists. It is under the aegis of FAO organizes regular meetings of these networks, in which inspectors, technologists, and quality experts from the public and private sector participate. Finally, INFOPESCA also promotes issues of seafood marketing and trade through the network of fish inspectors and managers of quality control in seafood processing industries.⁵

In 1996 INFOPESCA initiated a survey of seafood markets in Latin America's largest cities. To date, INFOPESCA has surveyed 20 cities and reported the results. The reports confirm the deficiency of the seafood distribution and marketing systems throughout the region, with a few exceptions. Aside from gathering these data, INFOPESCA monitors seafood prices throughout the region and publishes them in the fortnightly newsletter *Infopesca Noticias Comerciales*, which reaches some 2,000 professionals in the region.

LANWF, also known as Red Mujer, is instrumental to implementing the project because women are instrumental to fish processing and fish marketing throughout Latin America. Through LANWF, the project will ensure that women as well as men will receive training and other assistance based on the role they play in fish handling, processing, and distribution.

Although gender concerns are not mentioned specifically in the project document, the participation of INFOPESCA and LANWF reflects the potential to scale up action on gender, based on the experience of both organizations in

⁵ For example, a 1999 workshop organized by FAO and INFOPESCA on seafood marketing was attended by 43 experts from nine countries (Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Cuba, Chile, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, and Uruguay), who concluded that the governments of the region still lacked the capacity to organize with the goal of developing successful regional and domestic marketing strategies.

addressing gender issues in developing the region's fisheries. For example, LANWF has recently been involved in a number of small projects in artisanal fisheries financed by the FAO Livelihood Diversification and Enterprise Development (LDED) program. These fisheries are largely managed by indigenous groups in which women and young men play key roles in fishing, processing, and trading. With additional skills to develop their enterprises, these communities could potentially supply Latin America's large supermarket trade or provide specialty artisanal products to restaurants. Details of this work are provided below.

Honduras and Mexico: Training in marketing skills for women fish processors

The coastal communities along the northern Caribbean coast of Honduras are highly dependent on artisanal fishing, but over the longer term they will need to diversify their source of livelihood to better sustain themselves. A LDED/FAO project assisted women and men from these communities in evaluating other livelihood options and provided training in marketing skills to add to the income generated from artisanal fishing. A CFC/INFOPECA project presently provides marketing skills and equipment to artisanal fishers in the region. An ice plant was installed in the coastal town of Tela, and the indigenous (Garífunas) fish traders were equipped with refrigerators and a freezer cabinet for their market stall.

In Mexico, the Tamiagua community includes mostly indigenous women and young fishermen who lack basic marketing and business skills to take their fish enterprises forward. A LDED/FAO project offered participatory training in marketing, financial planning, enterprise planning, and quality control assurance which culminated in a community-drafted business plan to produce high-value fish products.

Colombia: Training in marketing research and quality assurance for high-quality fish products, Wayuu indigenous community

Outside the main Colombian cities, consumption of fish and fish products is low because supplies are low and prices are high compared to other

sources of animal protein. To begin to address this issue, a pilot project focused on the extraction, process, and marketing of fish products for the Wayuu indigenous community in Manuare, La Guajira Province. This project had much in common with the project in Mexico: The community consisted of mostly indigenous women and young fishermen; these people lacked the basic skills to expand their enterprises; and they received similar training in marketing, financial planning, enterprise planning, and quality control assurance, which enabled them to devise a business plan to develop a high-value commercial fish enterprise.

Lack of Funding for Continued Work

Since 2003, LANWF representatives from the various member countries have found it difficult to meet because of financial constraints. FAO assisted financially with the first two meetings but is unable to help further. To sustain a regional network such as this, face-to-face meetings are always useful, not only to reinforce the commitment to the group but to develop new strategies for implementing development plans that involve women. Such meetings are the basis for group or collective action that can be called upon when there is a need.

INFOPECA, being an intergovernmental organization, depends on payments from member countries. Because the organization proved instrumental in promoting the quality of fishery products in Latin America, member countries started to pay their dues regularly, but the declining value of the US dollar (the currency in which dues are paid) threatens the availability of funds for carrying out all the activities envisaged.

References

- Josupeit, H. 2004. "Women in the Fisheries Sector of Argentina, Uruguay and Southern Brazil,". FAO Fisheries Circular. No. 992. FAO, Rome.
- FAO Fisheries Department. Undated. "Improvement of the domestic markets for seafood in the Latin America and Caribbean Region." Project number: TCP/RLA/3111 (D)

Further reading

For information on INFOPESCA, see
www.Infopesca.org.