

## The pride of being a fishingwoman

By Mayri Espadas<sup>1</sup>

Chuburna Puerto at the north coast of Yucatan Peninsula in Mexico has been a village with a natural fishing vocation: a history of exploitation of the mollusk "chivitas" (*Melogena corona bispinos*) can be traced to the sixties when the abundance of this resource was high and the fishery was not of significant relevance, but as the years went by in 1988 with the pass hurricane "Gilberto" water levels of mangrove augmented and more people started to recollect<sup>2</sup>.

This fishery is very important for our community, as a source of food security, employment and income. The activity is predominantly is exercised by women of the community that need to walk distances of 20 km inside mangroves to gather chivitas, in journeys that may take 5 hours.



---

<sup>1</sup> Chairwomen of fishing cooperative "U-Meya Coolelo" (woman working) in Chuburna Puerto, Yucatan Peninsula, Mexico.

<sup>2</sup> Victoria Patiño Suárez, Arturo George Zamora, Miguel Tapia Arjona y Dalila Aldana (2003) La nobleza, belleza y via crucis del recurso pesquero caracol "chivita" en Yucatán. Revista Ciencia, vol.54 num.3 de julio-septiembre 2003.

Afterwards, the transformation process is a complicated task since the mollusks need to be boiled and cleaned in order to extract the meat. Shells as waste are piled and then sold for the elaboration of handicrafts - in this way the whole product is used.

As chairwoman of fishing cooperative "U-Meya Coolelo" a Mayan name meaning woman working, we are a collective of 15 members. Our history dates back to 20 years ago, when we were an informal working group, until one day fishing and environmental authorities were at the community working with men, on themes such as sustainable management of fishing resources. Then, as women we approached authorities looking for support and decided to organize ourselves formally as a cooperative. Today we are dedicated to gathering, processing and local commercialization of chivitas.

Since then, our path has been difficult and in many ways still is, since small-scale fisherwomen face a double vulnerability, caused by gender inequality in the sector: inside the community, where we have been overlooked by our male companions, and by fishing authorities since too often supports and training for capacity development has been destined only to men.

But this situation has not stopped us, and as cooperative, we are constantly searching for opportunities to improve our livelihoods. Through this effort recently we achieved to obtain support to take advantage of market opportunities and add value to our product, in order to obtain fairer prices for our work.

Our efforts have produced positive outcomes not just for our members, but for ecosystems and the whole community. As a result, in 2019 I received the second place at the Sustainable Fisheries and Aquaculture Awards, as a recognition of our efforts and sustainable practices at mangrove exploitation.

Moreover, the cooperative has meant a way to empower single mothers of the community and to achieve economic independence. Environmental values are very present in our daily practices: for us fishing in the mangroves is a noble activity that keeps us in constant touch with nature, while enjoying every fishing journey.

"*Women who conquer the coast in Yucatan*,<sup>3</sup> that's the title of the reportage in the local newspaper about women involved in small-scale fisheries, and proudly I can say that we have not only conquer, but rather we love and work the mangroves of our territory, where we had found a source of community identity, a way of life and pride.

---

<sup>3</sup> Rejón K (6 de marzo del 2020) "Las mujeres que conquistaron la costa de Yucatán" La Jornada Maya, disponible en : <https://www.lajornadamaya.mx/yucatan/7538/Las-mujeres-que-conquistaron-la-costa-en-Yucatan>