



STRENGTHENING GOVERNANCE PROCESSES IN THE GALAPAGOS MARINE RESERVE

Fishermen Seek Sustainable Income Sources

By: Patricia Leon, Fundación Futuro Latinoamericano (FFLA)

January 2006



The Galapagos Marine Reserve (GMR) is one of the world's most well known protected areas, mainly due to high levels of endemism and abundance of charismatic species. Thus in the past decades, many efforts have been made towards the conservation of the islands. However, most conservation activities, have had little participation from the islands' inhabitants.

Today, FFLA is part of a new trend which recognizes that successful conservation of the GMR, is only possible, if local actors are engaged in the search for sustainability. Hence, during the first year of a project supported by the Overbrook Foundation, FFLA worked to strengthen pre-negotiation processes among the islands' conflicting sectors (fishermen, tourism, local natural guides, Conservation organizations and the Galapagos National Park).

In this second year, FFLA is concentrating its efforts in supporting the Fishing Sector to find sustainable economic alternatives, which will reduce pressures over traditional fisheries, like the sea-cucumber and lobster.

One of the alternatives, the fishermen identified prioritized, (during the first year of the project), was the implementation of an alternative economic activity known as ***Traditional Fishing Tourism***. In this non extractive source of income, fishermen take tourists on their daily fishing routine, in which they demonstrate the traditional fishing techniques. During the trip, tourists also have an opportunity to meet local fishermen's and experience their customs and culture.

The idea of taking tourists to experience a traditional local fishing day was conceived in 1998, by one of the members of a fishing union. However, when he first spoke about this idea during Fishermen Union meetings, few of his fellow fishermen believed it could actually turn into a viable non-extractive income source. In 2005, when a slightly larger group of fishermen had bought the idea, they requested FFLA's to facilitate a union meeting in which they could further discuss it.

For two months, FFLA worked along with the fishermen, facilitating large assemblies, small work groups and individual meetings. Finally the fishing sector, divided into four different Unions, agreed and adopted one unique Proposal for Traditional Fishing Tourism. However, this was only, the first of many steps, which had to be followed by presentation of the proposal to the *Junta de Manejo Participativo (JMP)*¹.

During the next stage, FFLA assisted the fishermen in the pre-negotiation of the proposal with other JMP sectors, before the official meetings. Pre-negotiation proved to be efficient, as after only two official meetings, the JMP approved the proposal. This was followed by the presentation of the proposal to the *Autoridad Interministerial de Manejo (AIM)*², which also unanimously approved the proposal.

The approved Regulations for Traditional Fishing Tourism established a positive precedent for future alliances among the conservation and fishing sector, which will lead the way for future joint endeavours. This event evidences the possibility of transforming traditional confrontational relationships into collaborative dynamics, through an adequate dialogue process.

Never the less, there is a long road before Traditional Fishing Tourism is a successful non- extractive income alternative for fishermen. One of the major obstacles is the initial investment needed in order to comply with the safety regulations imposed by the JMP and the AIM. Most fishermen need to buy additional equipment to ensure tourist safety, (i.e. additional engine, good quality life vests, etc) which require a considerable amount of investment. Thus, many fishermen will have to get in debt, in order to buy equipment, and then deal with the risk of not having enough business in order to be able make the payments.

Thus, FFLA is now working with the conservation and organizations in the GMR to raise a fund, managed by the Fishermen Unions, which can make small, low-interest loans to fishermen. Several institutions have pledged to the fund, which has now amounted to \$50,000. Simultaneously, FFLA has approached several tourism companies, so that they can promote this traditional fishing experience among their tourists and refer them to those fishermen who are in debt with the Unions.

After a long, dialogue process fishermen in the GMR have agreed upon a common proposal for Traditional Fishing Tourism, negotiate it with other sectors and get official authorization to implement it. However, they still have a long way to go in order to successfully implement it, which will probably unveil new challenges. Yet, the dialogue process has, by itself, strengthened fishermen's capacities to implement this and hopefully other non extractive activities; which in the long run will decrease fishing pressure over Galapagos' marine resources.

¹ As explained in past issues of the Overbrook Newsletter, the JMP is a participatory management board, where all sectors (tourism, conservation, local guides, fishermen and authorities of the Parque Nacional) make decisions concerning rules and regulations within the Islands).

² AIM: Inter. Ministry Authority: Maximum Authority Board of the Islands, comprised by the Ministers of: Natural Resources, Defense, Commerce, Tourism and a representative of the fishing, commerce and tourism sectors.