



Maritza Mena is a 51-year old fisherwoman from Costa Rica. She was selected by her community to be their representative at the International Congress of Women in Artisanal Fisheries held in Chile in June this year (see page 5).

Maritza was born in La Pita de Tarcoles, Puntaarenas in Costa Rica, into a fishing family. As a young girl, she yearned to go out to sea but the family was too poor to afford a boat for her. Her fortunes changed one day when her brothers enquired if she wanted to go fishing. “But how am I going to get there?” she asked, pointing to the horizon. They told

joyful Maritza came home with money in her pockets.

Maritza has travelled a long way from those early days. Today she owns a launch with an outboard motor and is dreaming of a bigger boat for her 16-year old son, also a fisher. Fishing is more than just work for her: “When you are out fishing, all is forgotten and when you get back home you feel renewed, yearning to get back again.” Deeply committed to protecting the environment, Maritza is a strong supporter of the “closed season”. She explains that her community has succeeded in getting INCOPECA, the national fisheries authorities in Costa Rica, to recognize a zone within the eight-fathom line. This zone, which extends out to almost one nautical mile in some places, is forbidden to shrimp trawlers.

On the eve of departure, the prospect of travelling by air to Chile for the Congress kept Maritza awake all night. But she convinced herself that being a fisherwoman, if she didn’t get seasick, then she wouldn’t get airsick either! The Congress was a great learning experience for Maritza, a dream come true. Though saddened by the experiences of machismo and sexism in the artisanal fisheries that women shared, she was greatly inspired by the stories she heard of women gaining strength through organizing. Although the women fish very differently in Chile, for seaweed and shellfish, they all experience the same challenges to earn their livelihoods and manage their resources. Maritza is happy that she too was also able to share the fishing experiences from her community with women and men who had come from many countries. ❧

PROFILE

Maritza Mena

Born to Fish, Selected to Travel: How dreams came true for Maritza Mena, fisherwoman from Costa Rica

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her she would soon find out. Maritza still recalls with delight the skiff with oars that her brothers built, which she almost instantly launched. The boat, however, was fragile and could not stand up to the strong sea winds. Her brothers then built her a stronger boat. “Then” says Maritza, “I could really and truly start fishing!”

Catching fish proved to be easier than selling it. “There being so few people where we live, there was nobody to sell my fish to!” says Maritza. Undeterred, she made bundles of her first little catch and set off barefoot to town, spending the day going from house to house in search of buyers. That day, a tired but