

Katie Wilkinson Scholarship Report 2014/5

Hooked on Fishing? An analysis of the effectiveness of alternative livelihoods in reducing fishery pressure.



Figure 1: Miami village (Source: own photo)

On June 24th, I began my journey to the other side of the world. Before then, the furthest I'd ever travelled on my own was from Norwich to Manchester, so I knew already that my trip to Honduras was going to be life changing.

My love of the sea probably came about because I grew up with the beach on my doorstep. The underwater world became a place of discovery and enchantment after learning to scuba dive in my second year of university.

Regarding our dissertation, one main piece of advice was to 'choose a topic that truly interests you because for 6 months it's all you will think about'. As an Environmental Geography and International Development student I combined my love for the aquatic environment with my understanding of what it means to be a human living in a developing country.

Operation Wallacea provided a loose framework for a research topic but it was up to me to build upon it. Many hours of background reading led me to understand more about Tela Bay, an area on the North Coast of Honduras, and its fishing history. Upon learning of the fishery collapse here, I decided to focus on



Figure 2: *Sparisoma viride* (Source: own photo)

the role of alternative livelihoods as a means of reducing further pressure on the fishery without increasing the vulnerability of its users.

My experience

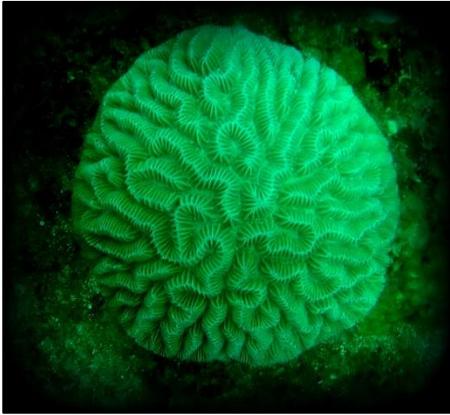


Figure 3: *Meandrina meandrites* (Source: own photo)

I arrived in Tela on June 25th 2014 and immediately began a week long course; Caribbean Reef Ecology. After intense theory classes, and daily practical classes through diving (many of which involved throwing up over the side of the boat), I learned to identify over 60 species of corals, algae, invertebrates and fish by both the common and Latin names. This course allowed me to see the effects of overfishing for myself and the impacts on the coral reef, and provided a foundation for the interviews that I would conduct in the following weeks.

The interviews were conducted throughout 5 villages in Tela Bay: Miami, Triunfo de la Cruz, Tornabe, San Juan and Ensenada. These interviews were more than just a series of questions and answers; many times we were invited into the homes of fishermen so that they could better explain about the way that they fish, and in some cases, other members of the family wanted to get involved! For example, the fisher in Figure 4 explained that he uses a hose pipe to breathe underwater at a depth of at least 40 feet for over an hour when fishing! The girls in Figure 5 were all too happy to pose for a photo. Having never been to a developing country before Honduras, it struck me suddenly that the girls I met that day had led and would continue to lead a very different childhood and teenage life than that of my own.

Research Findings

In total 44 interviews were conducted with the local Garifuna fishermen in all five villages. Maria, an Operation Wallacea employee and native Mexican accompanied me and translated when the fishermen could not speak English.

According to the data collected in interviews compared with a secondary source, there has been a decrease in the proportion of fulltime fishers in Tela Bay from 71.0% in 1998 to 50.0% in 2014. This exit from the fishery could assume the 'push factor' that the stocks have become so low that they are unable to support the livelihoods of the local people any longer. On the



Figure 4: Garifuna fisher (Source: own photo)

other hand, it could also assume that a better standard of living offered by other employment has driven an exit. The reduction of fulltime fishers has occurred alongside an emergence of the leisure and tourism industry; nearly 20% of fishers interviewed indicated some form of involvement in this sector.

The data collected suggests that the proportion of new fishers, with less than 10 years of experience has decreased since 1998. This could be because fishing is becoming a less popular option for the young Garifuna people of Tela who are more attracted to work or education abroad, particularly in the United States of America, for a better standard of living. On the other hand, the proportion of people with high levels of experience



Figure 5: Garifuna girls (Source: own photo)

of experience has increased since 1998. These results suggest that fishers who have been practicing for a lengthy time period may either find it difficult, to exit due to lack of skills in other disciplines, or in fact may not wish to exit the fishery due to an attachment and a sense of identity that they may have.

Final Thoughts

I came home from Honduras a different person to the girl who left. Firstly, I have found a new and fantastic feeling of independence and self-confidence. Through traveling alone and spending time in a country that couldn't be more different to home, being out of my comfort zone brought out the best in me.

Furthermore, I learned so much about what it's like to research in the field. No amount of lectures and textbooks could have prepared me for what it's like to actually collect data whilst dealing with hundreds of mosquito and ant bites (not exaggerating), near 40°C heat, and an unreliable electricity supply, let alone internet!

The Katie Wilkinson Research Scholarship made my trip to Honduras possible and it is for their support that I am so grateful. In the future, I know I will look back on my time in Honduras as one of the most incredible and best experiences of my life.