Caribbean fisherfolk in EAF
Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries

Paula Jacobs Williams
A woman advocating for sustainable fisheries and alternative livelihoods that support women in the fisheries sector

Paula Jacobs Williams is a sustainable fisheries advocate, fisherwoman, village council chairperson and restauranteur from Punta Negra—a small fishing village in southern Belize. Her efforts to promote sustainable fisheries in Belize have involved educating fisherfolk in her village; as well as working with co-managers of the Port Honduras Marine Reserve: a marine protected area that is important to Punta Negra as the community lies directly on its boundary.

Punta Negra is a tiny, remote coastal community—set on miles of pristine, beautiful natural beach—that is only accessible by boat. Residents’ main sources of income and livelihoods include fishing and small-scale tourism services. As a coastal community, Punta Negra is vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, such as rising sea levels, more frequent and intense storms, coastal erosion and warmer sea temperatures which have direct effects on the health and productivity of the marine ecosystems that support the livelihoods of the people living there.

Paula has long envisioned having a restaurant in her community that not only offers women an alternative livelihood to fishing, but also favours sustainable practices that support a healthy ecosystem and her community’s development.
An alternative livelihood for Punta Negra women

Paula, as the leading member of a women’s group called the Seabreeze Women’s Group, helped to establish a cultural restaurant that provides an alternative livelihood to the women of Punta Negra. Working with the co-managers of the nearby Port Honduras Marine Reserve the Toledo Institute for Development and Environment (TIDE) and with support from the Mesoamerican Reef (MAR) Fund, the women’s group constructed and now manage the ‘Punta Negra Grill and Tavern’ restaurant which serves traditional Belizian cuisine.

**Punta Negra Grill & Tavern**

is a cabin-style restaurant located only a few meters from the seashore. Here, visitors can sit back, relax and enjoy traditional creole cuisine while soaking in the beautiful Belizian scenery featuring mesmerizing ocean views and enchanting sunsets.

The restaurant, which opened in 2015, is managed by four women and functions in a sustainable manner that promotes wise use of fisheries resources. For example, the women practice sustainable fishing by catching only what is needed daily. This practice minimises waste and ensures that the restaurant’s customers are provided with fresh, quality seafood dishes. Additionally, if there is a surplus in the kitchen, the women share it with the community. Visitors are also encouraged to book in advance or cancel on time – so that prepared food would not be wasted, and a day’s profit lost. When they are not able to go fishing themselves, the women restauranteurs ask community fishers to sell them lobster and fish, thereby contributing to the local economy and ensuring that benefits spread beyond them and into the wider community. In its years since establishment, these innovative women have also expanded the restaurant’s services to offer visitors classes on how to make coconut oil, fudge and traditional creole food. This innovation has allowed for additional sources of income as they promote the restaurant, not only as a dining experience, but a more versatile, eco-conscious tourism experience - encouraging further avenues for tourism possibilities in Punta Negra Village.

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