

# The Sea in Bildo's eyes

A story for the fisheries  
of Belize



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*Pristis*



*The Sea in Bildo's Eyes: A story for the fisheries of Belize*

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### **The voice of the sea**

Reading means preparing to catch a voice that will come up when you least expect it. A voice that lets itself be heard from an unexpected place, beyond the book, beyond the author, beyond the writing: it comes from what has not been said, from that which the world has not yet formulated about itself because it had no words to say it.

Italo Calvino



# Introduction

At the beginning of 2019, I moved from the Mexican city of Guadalajara to the coast of Sarteneja in Belize to learn about the efforts promoted by the Mesoamerican Reef Fund (MAR Fund) in that community, in order to conserve ecosystems from the Mesoamerican reef.

I interviewed dozens of people about successes and opportunities in the protection of the environment, experiences that I documented in journalistic chronicles published in the book *Written with Blue Ink 2*.

On that trip, I got to know the wonderful work carried out for years by the non-governmental organization Sarteneja Alliance for Conservation and Development (SACD). That, with the support of MAR Fund among others, has protected the Corozal Bay Wildlife Sanctuary (CBWS), a heavenly place in northern Belize.

Joel Verde, director of SACD explained to me how they managed to bring together different sectors to watch over the ocean. He also told me that in that town of Sarteneja lived "Bildo" or Leobihildo Silvino Tamai, a man who in 2017 was recognized as the fisherman of the year in his country, due to his effort and dedication in caring for marine species.

From that conversation came the idea of writing this book that shows not only Bildo's personality and history, but represents the voice and memory of several generations of Belizean fishermen who have been aware of protecting the sea, a symbol of life and food refuge for humanity.

This work entitled *The Sea in Bildo's Eyes* allows you to get closer to the fishermen of Belize, their country, their history, their roots and their successes. Also to the way they overcome adversities: shipwrecks, hurricanes, robberies, piracy and health problems. The book tells especially about Bildo's childhood house made of guano stick, his activity in the cornfield, his approach to the ocean and about the decision to make fishing his life job.

The facets of this captain are glimpsed through the voice of his relatives, parents, brothers, daughters, wife and friends. It is an example of how Bildo and other fishermen became convinced of being part of the Managed Access Program, designed by the Government of Belize to counter the depletion of marine resources, improve fishing profitability, contribute to the economy and develop communities.

Captain Bildo reveals the way in which his thoughts, actions, resources and desires were filling with new concepts related to the urgency of conserving ecosystems in the face of a decline in fish and coral populations. It reveals the history of a country concerned about the extinction of natural resources and the strength of its conscience, union and work to protect marine life.

*Adriana Navarro Ramírez*



# Contents

**1**

*Bildo's story*

9

**2**

*When the ocean opens its mouth*

11

**3**

*Conserving the sea*

15

**4**

*Fisherman of the Year*

19

**5**

*Bildo in the eyes of others*

21

**6**

*The ocean as a home*

25





# Bildo's story

I saw him walking on the sand. It seemed as if he was just coming out of the sea, enveloped by the breeze and salty wind. That man of 47, with sunglasses, was awarded as the Fisherman of the Year in Belize, in 2017. And he told his story on a February afternoon.

“My name is Leobihildo Silvino Tamai. My friends call me Bildo. I was born on February 17th, 1972, in the area of Orange Walk, in Belize. I am the son of Carlos Tamai and Margarita Verde. My mother brought me to this world at eleven in the morning with the help of a midwife. It was one of the most difficult births she had ever had. I weighed nine and a half pounds. I am the second of nine siblings.

“We use to live in a humble house built with guano sticks. We were corn growers. At age 5 I already knew how to work the land. There was no time for playing, I worked all day long. Sometimes I would go to school, but that didn't happen very often.

“My education came from the streets. Even though I am not so good at reading and writing, I try. At the age of 7, I'd rather be selling bread, tamales or empanadas in the village because that was a way of being out of the fields and avoid getting bitten by mosquitoes. We had already left Orange Walk to live here, in Sarteneja, this coastal village. When I was out selling, I would pick up the clams sitting on the sand and observed the life of fishermen. They seemed happy and I thought that they made good money. It was then and there that I decided to engage in fishing.

“At 13, I met Valdermar Verde, who suggested that I work on his ranch in Cousin Island. I agreed. I learned to swim, freediving and to make lobster traps in that archipelago. My first payment was 40 Belizean dollars (20 US dollars). It was a lot of money back then. My life consisted of staying on the island for a month and then returning home. I didn't like staying on the caye, but the money I was making helped my family.

“After a year, I met Ismael López, who hired me as a kitchen helper in a small fishing boat sailing for Half Moon Caye, very close to Blue Hole, a place located almost thirty miles from Belize City, in the middle of the ocean, which was formed centuries ago as a result of a collapsed marine cave.

“I was 14 and I remember that I was awed by the marine life out there. So, then I learned the trade of fishing that I liked. I had dreams, like any other boy that starts to like something. I was convinced that the sea would be my craft. It was a more profitable way of helping my family.”



# When the ocean opens its mouth

Bildo speaks unhurriedly. He has a hard and lonely expression. Strong, rough, and tanned hands. He is proud of being a fisherman. He knows his trade more than anything. His memory is filled with sails, anchors, marine plants, big fish, and coral paths.

He declares that he became an independent fisherman when he was 15 years old, back when he started working with Israel Sosa, southeast of Belize, in Dangriga and Placencia, and the north, in San Pedro. He would spend entire days out in the sea, fishing, cleaning and packing lobsters.

At 16, he became a member of the cooperative community of northern fishermen. In the following years, he would go on a sailboat called La Reina, with his mentor Udalberto Muñoz. They would go up to Glover's Reef, 28 miles out from the coast of Belize, where there is a ring of coral reef and also islands and cayes that sit on a seamount.

They would float on this paradise for a week. It is customary that fishermen remain out sailing for seven days, surrounded by deep waters, to have a successful catch. There are seven to ten people on board, with enough fuel, food, and water to endure days and nights out at sea.

Bildo spent several years like this: freediving and fishing with hook and line in the area. He would think a lot about Regina, a woman he had met outside a temple in Sarteneja. Resting over the gunwale, Bildo recalled her face and wanted to return to his village to see her.

Since he met her, he knew that he wanted to be with her forever. He confessed his feelings to her and his love was requited. They joined each other when they were very young and were excited when they found out that they were expecting Alexis, their first daughter. It was 1994. He was barely 22 years old, yet he was ready to become a dad. However, he didn't know that a tragedy would sneak up on him in August.

As usual, Bildo got ready to sail out for a week. In the nineties, Belizean villages had no internet available to advise fishermen on weather events nor to warn them of raging winds and tall waves. The only way to find out if the ocean was getting rough was from mouth to mouth communication or through the radio. Weather news was broadcasted at six in the morning, at noon, and six in the afternoon.

Even though Bildo knew it was hurricane season, he sailed out with a crew of eight fishermen, including his elder brother Ángel, captain of the sailboat. They went up to Glover's Reef. They were happy because they had had a good catch. But, suddenly, the clouds became thick and a wet cool wind made Bildo shudder. As he watched the sea, the young fisherman suspected that it would be very difficult to sail the ocean on that boat.

"We need to wait it out and return tomorrow," recommended Bildo to his fellow fishermen. The rest of them, also quite young —no more than 24—, decided to set out encouraged by the thought of returning soon to their homes. The rain began falling. They took off at three in the afternoon from one of the islands in Glover's Reef.

The boat rocked more than expected. The further they sailed, the stronger it lurched under the strong winds. The increasing waves were hitting against the hull. The main deck was flooded with salty water. The whistling wind blended with the constant pounding made by the huge waves. The sound was so loud that sailors could not hear each other. Suddenly, the rudder lost direction and they couldn't hold their balance.

Forty-five minutes after having sailed out, the boat capsized and the crew fell overboard. The load was spread out on the surface. Voices were lost under the roaring waves and pouring rain. Bildo was yelling, "Don't scatter!"

"We floated for more than eleven hours in the open sea, without masks nor fins. There was no one to help us out. A tropical storm had left us adrift. We swam until we came closer to each other and thought through some ideas to survive."





Amidst the colossal setting of rain and surge of waves, Bildo remembered the advice that his mentor Udalberto Muñoz gave him to stay afloat after a wreck.

“He had shown me how to anchor in deep sea. We organized as a team. We tried to remain positive. We recovered the pieces of the sailboat and righted it. It was really difficult. We managed to pull the boat out on the shores of the island of Water Caye. It was already three in the morning.

“I felt sad because the whole situation could have been prevented, yet I also felt fortunate for having survived. Thank God nobody died or had a broken bone. When we got home we told our story. Regina was very concerned. I told her that we had lost everything. There was nothing left from our catch or our clothes. After that episode, some of the fishermen didn’t return to the sea, but I wasn’t discouraged.

“You have to understand that rushing into decisions has fatal consequences. I am 47, and from that day on, I have shared the experience and reminded my fellow fishermen about the importance of being informed on weather changes and know which months are the most dangerous for us, fishermen”.

Bildo recalls his memories and claims that thanks to Udalberto Muñoz he survived the wreck. He inspired him to be honest and kind to the sea.

“Udalberto was one of those people who taught me how to use a fish hook and dive; to weave the nets; to have a work plan; to use the money efficiently, and to save 25% of my income. He would advise me, “Never spend all your money.” That man made me realize the value of fishing and taught me how to survive in the sea, be responsible, and care for the resources.

“He would say that honesty could not be bought or learned: it is practiced every day. It is a trait that prevails in each person, even without diplomas or schooling. He urged me to be honest and to respect my integrity, my community, and my environment. And I try to instill these principles in my colleagues.”

Bildo is aware of the importance of preserving the marine resources, because he has witnessed that the passage of mankind and hurricanes destroy islands, coasts, reefs, and species; ecosystems that are quite difficult to recover. He remembers when hurricane Mitch—one of the most lethal and powerful tropical hurricanes—hit Belize in 1998. The climate event reported maximum sustained winds of 180 miles per hour.

“The hurricane destroyed 90% of the marine wildlife in Glover’s Reef and Half Moon Caye. After the hurricane, four or five small islands disappeared and were never formed back. Marine wildlife is slowly recovering. When I go to Glover’s Reef, I am glad to see that corals are thriving, like 20 years ago.

“The hurricane, and the knowledge I got from Udalberto, encouraged me to do something for my country, for my village, for the fisheries, and for the fishermen.”



*Adriana Navarro*

# Conserving the sea

Bildo knows Glover's Reef like the palm of his hand.

Glover's Reef is the breeding and feeding grounds for marine turtles, sharks, and rays, among other species. In 1993, the place was declared a marine reserve to protect the spiny lobster. In 1998, a control and surveillance program was launched in the area. According to the data of the Fisheries Department, after implementing the program for three years, lobsters in the reserve had tripled their population density and increased their size.

The Glover's Reef Marine Reserve encompasses approximately 86,653 acres of the coral atoll. It is divided into areas dedicated to conservation, fishing, tourism, and research. It is almost 40 miles in diameter and is considered the best biologically developed site. It holds the highest diversity of reefs, including 850 reef patches.

During that time, Bildo –as a good leader– was a member of the Advisory Committee of the Glover's Reef Marine Reserve and had a very wide knowledge of the

sustainable use of marine resources due to the training provided by the Fisheries Department.

As captain, Bildo noticed the abundance of lobsters from June to October, which brought many fishermen to the area to extract the product. But he was concerned that some fishermen were taking the small individuals, cutting short their reproduction process.

The Fisheries Department knew about the problem and established a base in Middle Caye, in 2011, within the Glover's Reef zone so that government rangers would watch the region and prevent these illegal activities, committed not only by Belizeans, but also by Guatemalans and Hondurans. Then, Bildo and his companions began to notify the incidents to the rangers so they would act against the illegalities.



The Fisheries Department received support from the Environmental Defense Fund (EDF), Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), and Toledo Institute for Development and Environment (TIDE), intending to raise awareness in fishing communities and civil organizations about the importance of caring for marine resources and improving the management on the use of the sea. Moreover, it paid attention to the fishermen's recommendations to involve them in the management and surveillance process of cross-border illegal fishing, one of the major causes of depletion of fishing resources.

[illegible]

Adriana Navarro Ramírez





Adriana Navarro

Despite the refusal and the confrontational attitude from many of the fellow fishermen, Bildo collaborated in the implementation of the Managed Access program (Figure 1) since the beginning. He would talk to his colleagues about the need to care for the resources.

“We all need to learn to love our ecosystems, to work appropriately, to care for the ocean, to protect it, and keep it productive. I have a smooth way to send the message across. I don’t sit with the fishermen to talk about it. I approach the subject casually at the right moment. For example, during the season of north winds, the harsh cold prevents us from fishing, and two or three boats gather in the open sea, and then I take the advantage of talking with my colleagues about sustainable fishing. I like volunteering because marine wildlife is invaluable and it exists by the grace and mercy of God. It is a gift and we should take care of it so that it keeps producing to our benefit,” reflects Bildo.

Through the years, the fishermen learned to accept the Managed Access program. Fishing permits were issued for two zones. If the weather prevented them from extracting fish from one zone, they had the option to move to the other, as long as they filled the capture logs with the number of extractions made.

Bildo explains, “The captain is responsible for providing the information to the Fisheries Department: how much was extracted per trip, how many trips were made, how much fuel was used, the number of people who came along, and the permit number.”

He says that some people continue to fish illegally, especially during closed seasons, or perhaps they need additional resources to feed their families, but most of the fishermen already understand why it is vital to respect the sea.

He considers that one of the most significant aspects of the Managed Access is that Belize already has collected data of the fishing resources produced in each area. Also, it has become evident that illegal fishing has decreased, while fish biomass has increased. He stresses that the program has contributed to counteract global threats – such as climate change or pollution - through the local care of marine diversity.



Adriana Navarro



# Fisherman of the year

The heart –like the sun– is the main source of life and the home of power, courage, and strength. Egyptians believed that the heart was a vessel in which memory and truth were stored, and acknowledged the importance of the pulse which they called “the voice of the heart.”

The frequency of Bildo’s heart rate was weak for a while and kept him from going out to sea. He gave up fishing and sailing. He reduced his participation in meetings that he organized as a founding member of the Fishermen Association of Sarteneja. The association gathers at least 160 fishermen of his village. He also spent less time in board meetings of the Sarteneja Alliance for Conservation and Development (SACD), of which he is a long-time member. Also, he took apart the pig nursery that he had built in his property, which meant an economic alternative when he wasn’t fishing because of close season or bad weather.

Fortunately, he started recovering his health and he has felt better in the past four years. His pulse went back

to normal and he is currently aware that the heart is the seat of all emotions.

He explains that he was able to overcome his condition thanks to the strength and affection of his family. His wife and six daughters have been, are, and will always be his inspiration to heal and follow through his ideas, his dreams, and his happiness. “My wife has always been by my side, she has supported my decisions, and has encouraged me to move on. When I was sick, she would go with me everywhere. My daughters are my pride. They are loving, they go to school and get good grades. They do what I always wanted to do: learn,” he recapitulates with a slight smile.

When Bildo felt stronger, he went back to the sea as captain of his sailboat called El Arca. He sails to the fishing sites with other seven sailors, mainly from his village, Sarteneja, and has continued to promote the respect for nature with SACD, the civil organization in which he participates. He also mentions that he will soon

be reactivating the pig nursery that he ran for six years because he has acquired resources and training from the project Community Management of Protected Areas Conservation Programme (COMPACT), an initiative of the United Nations Fund.

“I want to make to most of the remaining years the Lord may grant me and leave a legacy that proves that having will and conviction can make your goals possible and be part of the change that benefits all generations to come.”

Day after day, Bildo practices compassion and solidarity, qualities that are also signs of humbleness. With his example, he teaches other people to value the hidden greatness of each space in nature.

One day, when he was least expecting it, good luck knocked on his door. His fellow countrymen had acknowledged his values, and it was on a morning of 2017 when he got the news, while he was out in the sea, that he had been declared Belize’s Fisherman of the Year.

Joel Verde nominated him for the award. He works with Bildo in Sarteneja and is the director of SACD, the civil organization that monitors and is in charge of conserving approximately 178,000 acres of sea within the Corozal Bay Wildlife Sanctuary.

In June of that same year, WCS evaluated the candidates and revealed that “Bildo was recognized as the fisherman of the year for all that he has promoted regarding sustainable fisheries.” The news that he had been chosen as Fisherman of the Year spread like wildfire in Sarteneja. Neighbors, friends, and colleagues talked about the new winner of the award. Bildo asked his wife Regina to collect the trophy because he was out fishing in the Placencia area.

Regina recalls, “I felt proud and happy because he has worked very hard. I feel like we won the award together with him. Joel Verde of SACD told me that I should prepare a few words. I was very nervous. I was interviewed on TV.”

The celebration of WCS’s annual ceremony was broadcast on TV, to honor those men and women who contributed to fisheries, benefitting the Belizean population.

On June 29th, 2017, three fishermen were selected for their leadership, and among them was Leobihildo Tamai of Sarteneja, who was chosen Fisherman of the Year. The news was broadcast on Channel 5. The other two distinguished nominees were Eliodoro Martínez of Chunox and Dale Fairweather of Belize City.

WCS assistant, Ralna Lewis, said on TV, “These men share many qualities: they are leaders; they genuinely care about the sea and their peers; they take part in cooperatives and civil organizations, and ensure the sustainability of fisheries.” The images showed Regina smiling and receiving a sculpture of pink fishes mounted on wood.

“I was surprised,” Bildo said. “I never imagined that I could win an award like that. I felt encouraged, fortunate and privileged. It was a confirmation that the effort of caring for the sea was worthwhile. The award has inspired me to continue promoting sustainable fishing and to foster the idea that it is important to take care of our resources for our benefit. I will keep volunteering in civil organizations and governmental institutions to build a better future for our country and our planet.”



# Bildo in the eyes of others

Bildo lives in Sarteneja, a coastal village facing the clear Caribbean Sea, in the Corozal district north of Belize. Most of the Belizean fishermen live there. The Fisheries Department reports that 30% of the 2,525 of the country's fishermen live in that community. Days are very, very hot and you can see pelicans flying high up in the sky, looking for a cool wind.

The adventures in this village begin in front of these turquoise waters worth the risk and sacrifice involved in fishing. Stories of magnificent-colored fish and coral become fixed in the memory of children, most of which, like their parents, will sail in the sea.

Across the sandy streets of Sarteneja, people greet amiably. Several of the residents are relatives among them. It is perceived as a tight community, and more so, as a result of the job made by Joel Verde, the 35-year old leader who runs SACD. Joel and his team have spent years bringing villagers together to teach them how to care for marine and land ecosystems, on which the Sarteneja families depend.

Even though villagers generally call each other by their name, some people have made and maintained stronger friendships, just like Emilio Rivero and Bildo (Photo 1).



Adriana Navarro

Photo 1. Bildo and his friend Emilio Rivero.

Bildo, who now remains on land without the need to sail in the open sea, walks through the village and arrives at Emilio's home. A mature, shy, quiet man with the skin tanned by the Belizean sun appears in the doorway. He is 57 and was born on May 22nd, 1962. A Gemini. He speaks little, but he says that he met Bildo as a boy because their families lived close.

"We have always been very close. We began working in the sea, in the same fishing area. Now, I work with him, on his boat named El Arca. We go to church. We don't have any vices. We share good friendship. I highly respect him because he is a good captain."

Bildo tells him goodbye and carries on with his stroll. Under the shade of some trees, children play and laugh. They climb up the branches. Other kids, under the hot sun, run after a ball and celebrate when they score a goal.



*Photo 2. Bildo and his brother Angel.*

When he arrives at his brother Angel's home, Bildo opens the gate (Photo 2). From the door, several boisterous kids run out to greet their uncle and call their father to come out.

Ángel is a thin, yet strong man of 49. He mentions that his family has a very humble past and all nine siblings had to go out to work at a very young age. "I began going out to sea when I was 10. At 12, I became an independent fisherman. I have never complained about the ocean. I have managed to raise my children in good conditions. The sea is rich. It is a gold mine thanks to the Lord who is in heaven. Early on, I used to collect pearls, lobsters, and clams, which I sold in the market for a good price. However, through time and because the number of fishermen has increased, the product has become scarce."

Ángel comments that the Managed Access program that his brother has promoted works because it regulates the number of marine extractions and establishes fishing zones.

"The program is good because it has raised awareness about the need to care for the area where we work, although it is still necessary to stop illegal fishing by people who still don't care if marine products disappear. If God allows me, I will take care of the sea and the fishing industry so that our Belizean brothers of future generations can also have a food source," Ángel explains.

"I had a heart attack not long ago, but before suffering from heart disease, I used to free dive almost 70 feet deep to catch lobsters. I even went into caves. The key to diving so deep is to control the breathing and the mind. Right, little brother?" he says looking at Bildo. The two brothers hug and say goodbye. They exchange some words about coming family meetings.

Bildo walks to his parent's house, located away from the village. You must walk through forest paths to find a house surrounded by a garden with flowers and big trees. Margarita and Carlos have been together for most of their lives.

“He is a very good son (Photo 3). He is always watching over us. He is a good man. As a child, he would accompany and help me. He would helpfully run errands for his grandma. He was very handsome and obedient,” his mother says, who needs to be talked loudly since her hearing is not so good.



Adriana Navarro

*Photo 3. Bildo and his parents.*

Bildo’s father, Carlos Tamai, was born in 1937, in Río Hondo. He discovered Sarteneja because he used to buy cattle there. During one of his stays, he met and fell in love with his wife, who has lived there since she was a little girl. During the fifties, Sarteneja’s population was low and had few houses, surrounded by hills.

“There was no road. In order to get out of the village, we needed to row on a cayuco or canoe because back then there were no engines for boats. There was no electricity. We used kerosene lamps. There were neither health centers nor mills nor bakeries.

“My children have always worked at an early age on the sea. They were always obedient. They have always helped us and they still do. We came to live here –away from the village–, without the noise, only peace and quiet. My wife became ill, so we are better off living out here. Nobody bothers us. We are very close to God.

“Bildo has been a very loving son to us. He loves us very much, and we do too. He comes over almost every day,” says the very thin farmer as he hugs his wife.

Mother, father and son hug goodbye. Bildo walks on the side of a vegetable garden of sweet potatoes and plantains that his father has just harvested, closes the wooden gate and waves goodbye.

It is at least a ten-minute stroll to get to his house, which is flanked by a huge tree. His daughter’s bicycles are resting against the banister. Regina and the girls come out of the shade made by their house’s roof and walk to the shade under the trees. The family members sit on plastic chairs and gather as if waiting for a photograph to be taken .

Graciely, Silvi and Silvani, the youngest girls, between jokes and laughter, mention that they are good swimmers. They love to go on a picnic to the seashore and go into the water with their parents to watch the fish.

“Despite my parents scolding me sometimes, I am grateful because they have taken care of me,” says Bildo’s youngest daughter smiling shyly. Her name is Graciely Suleika, age 8. “My mom sings with me and loves me a lot. When my dad returns from the sea, he hugs us and kisses us.”

Silvi Neri, age 11, takes her sister by the hand and points out, "She is a very good mother. She likes to dance and sing with us. My dad is an excellent father because he takes care of the whole family."



*Photo 4. Bildo and his family*

*Adriana Navarro*

Furthermore, Silvani Regina, age 12, thinks that her parents have made sacrifices to feed them. "I notice that sometimes my mom doesn't eat so that we can. They take care of us so we don't lack anything. They are very loving people."

Ahtsiri, age 17, was born on an October 12th and has bright eyes, like those in profound people. "I am a high school student taking advanced courses in biology and chemistry. My mom gives the best of her. She is caring and loving. She is always vigilant. My dad is a wise man. When we have problems, he gives us good advice. He has worked hard for our well-being, despite the hardships and illnesses. Economically speaking, he has tried to provide for everything. I am what I am thanks to my dad. I want him to feel proud of me. I love him very much. I am

in school thanks to them. My dad wanted me to become a marine biologist, but lately, I have been thinking of becoming a heart surgeon," concludes looking at his father's chest, where his heart beats.

Princess, age 20, is like a whirlwind. She has an overwhelming and sparkling personality. Her happiness overflows. Between giggles, she says, "I love the way my mom is, her charisma. She is the lady of her house, a homemaker who has taught us everything and takes care of us. She is both mom and dad when my dad is out in the sea. My dad has been a responsible man. He fights the waves and winds to put food on the table."

Bildo's wife says that her firstborn, Alexis, is the only one missing. She is in Belize City working in the hotel sector. Regina adds that she wishes to be by her husband's side until the end of her days (Photo 4).

"It hasn't been easy to get used to Bildo going away for many days. I get worried. We were just married when he went through the wreck and I was expecting my eldest daughter. I was terrified, but the prayers always bring him back. Bildo is a brave man, who is devoted to his passion. I admire him because even with bad weather, cold or sick, he always goes out to sea to bring food for his family. For me, the biggest success is that he returns fine."



# The ocean as a home

“Being at sea is nice. I love my job. I like being my own boss and be the captain because I can make my own decisions. I choose the days when I go out to the sea and the days that I stay on the mainland.

“The time I most enjoy is being together with my family. I like Holy Week because there is a sailboat race, a traditional sport in Sarteneja. It takes place every year and there are different categories.

“In 1991, my dad raced and won first place. Years later, I participated and also won first place with a previous sailboat called Princess. I continued to have good outcomes in the following races: first and second place. Those three years filled me with much happiness because I was the owner of the champion boat of the village.

“I equally enjoy volunteering and providing information to raise awareness on how to care for the ecosystems that are the heritage of our fishing community and the country. I am happy for having supported the Managed Access program because it means preparing the road for future generations.

“I know that without my family’s support this would have not been possible. I want the people I love to feel proud of me and understand why it is important to think as a community and look after each other.

“I understand the life of fishermen and their hardships. It is challenging to be in the ocean and deal with hurricanes, wrecks, theft, and piracy. That is why I am grateful to those people and the organizations who thought big and developed a program like Managed Access. I am grateful to the Fisheries Department; Joel Verde, SACD’s director; the directors of civil organizations such as Celia Mahung, of TIDE, and María José González, of Mesoamerican Reef Fund (MAR Fund), because they all believed in the fishermen and their mission is to protect the marine life.”

The words of Bildo light up his eyes, where the sea dwells. So, as the sunset transforms into a night sky, Bildo bids farewell and enters his house because tomorrow he will be sailing out on the high seas again at four in the morning.







Ximena Flamenco



# The Sea in Bildo's eyes

A story for the fisheries  
of Belize



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Ximena Flamenco