



Second MAR Leadership Program's Report September 2011

MAR Leadership is all about providing local individuals with the skills and expert support they need to get their coral reef conservation projects on the ground and running. We you would get a kick out of meeting one of our fellows from the 2011 Cohort: Ana Giro. Ana, along with the other members of the 2011 Cohort, has a project that will promote the establishment of Marine Protected Areas (MPA) and Sustainable Fisheries in the Mesoamerican Reef region. Why are MPAs and fisheries important to the reef? Because everything's connected under the sea!



Ana during a MAR Leadership workshop on public policy in Punta Allen, Mexico

Ana Giro (Anna He-ro)

Ana has a degree in Aquaculture and is currently studying her Master's in Science and Technology. She teaches classes on Oceanography and Untraditional Species Cultivation at the Center for Aquaculture and Oceanic Studies at the University of San Carlos in Guatemala City.

Your Age: 28
Born in: Guatemala City
Lives in: Guatemala City

Q. Tell us about your most memorable underwater experience?

A. My most memorable underwater experience was the first time I went diving. I remember entering the water and feeling like I could fly, feeling free. Getting near the reef for the first time was simply remarkable; the beautiful colors of the corals and fish were just the beginning of my adventure discovering the amazing world beneath the waves. I have been diving ever since and every dive is a whole new experience.

Q. Tell us briefly what your MAR Leaders project is all about?

A. Two other leaders from Guatemala and I are carrying out a joint project. Curiously, we all applied to the program separately. However, our individual projects had so much in common that we decided to unite our efforts and work together. Our project seeks to **identify priority ecosystems for the conservation and sustainable use of the Mesoamerican Reef System in the Guatemalan Caribbean**. We will achieve our goal by collecting biological, oceanographic and fishing data. This data will be compiled with the help of fishermen and local authorities. By directly collaborating with these actors, we will be able to secure their buy-in and will jointly locate important areas for conservation. Part of our project is promoting the creation of the first marine protected area in Guatemala as a no-take zone. Over the past couple of years, an official study was conducted on gaps in marine-coastal conservation in Guatemala. These studies, together with the creation of the National Marine-Coastal Policy and the Master Plan for *Punta Manabique*, have created an ideal environment for implementing this project.

Q. What was your goal when joining the MAR Leadership Program?

A. My main goal when coming into this program was to gain knowledge and skills for implementing my project in Guatemala.

Q. What will you do at the end of your participation in the MAR Leadership Program?

A. Use the knowledge and skills I've obtained to advance my professional career. I'll also be equipped with able partners such as leaders, experts and donors that are capable of helping me implement my project in Guatemala.

Q. What is the best place you've ever travelled to and why?



MAR LEADERSHIP
Mesoamerican Reef Leadership Program

A. Easy: the Belizean Keys. Belize has amazing reefs for diving. Every time you go you have a completely different experience—it's absolutely beautiful! During my last trip to the Keys, I had the opportunity to interact with local fishermen who shared their experience and artisanal fishing knowledge with me. I was also able to experience Belizean culture, which made the place even more incredible.

Q. What is your top ocean conservation tip?

A. Plastic debris in the ocean degrades marine habitats and contributes to the death of marine animals. Because floating plastic resembles food to many marine birds, sea turtles and marine mammals, they can choke or starve because their digestive systems get blocked when they eat it. Help prevent these unnecessary deaths by recycling, using reusable water bottles and cloth grocery bags.