

A photograph of three men on a concrete pier overlooking the ocean. The man in the foreground on the right is wearing a maroon Nike shirt with white polka dots, a maroon cap with a crest, and a white rosary. He is holding a grey bag. The man in the foreground on the left is wearing a blue cap and a purple long-sleeved shirt, sitting and looking towards the right. The man in the background is wearing an orange long-sleeved shirt and a white cap with an eye logo, standing with his arms crossed. The pier has yellow railings and a wooden log. In the foreground, there are white buckets and coiled ropes. The ocean is blue with several small boats in the distance under a clear sky.

Puro Maretazo

Resilience Stories from the Peruvian Far West



Dry sticky sand suspended in the air gets stuck between your teeth. The wind never stops. It comes from all directions and, without shelter, it can drive you mad. It carries with it an earthy aroma that only the sea can escape. For some, the village —surrounded by honey-colored dunes —offers an ethereal experience where desert and ocean meet. However, the incessant clanking of the ever-present pump-jacks extracting oil creates a torturous soundtrack for others.







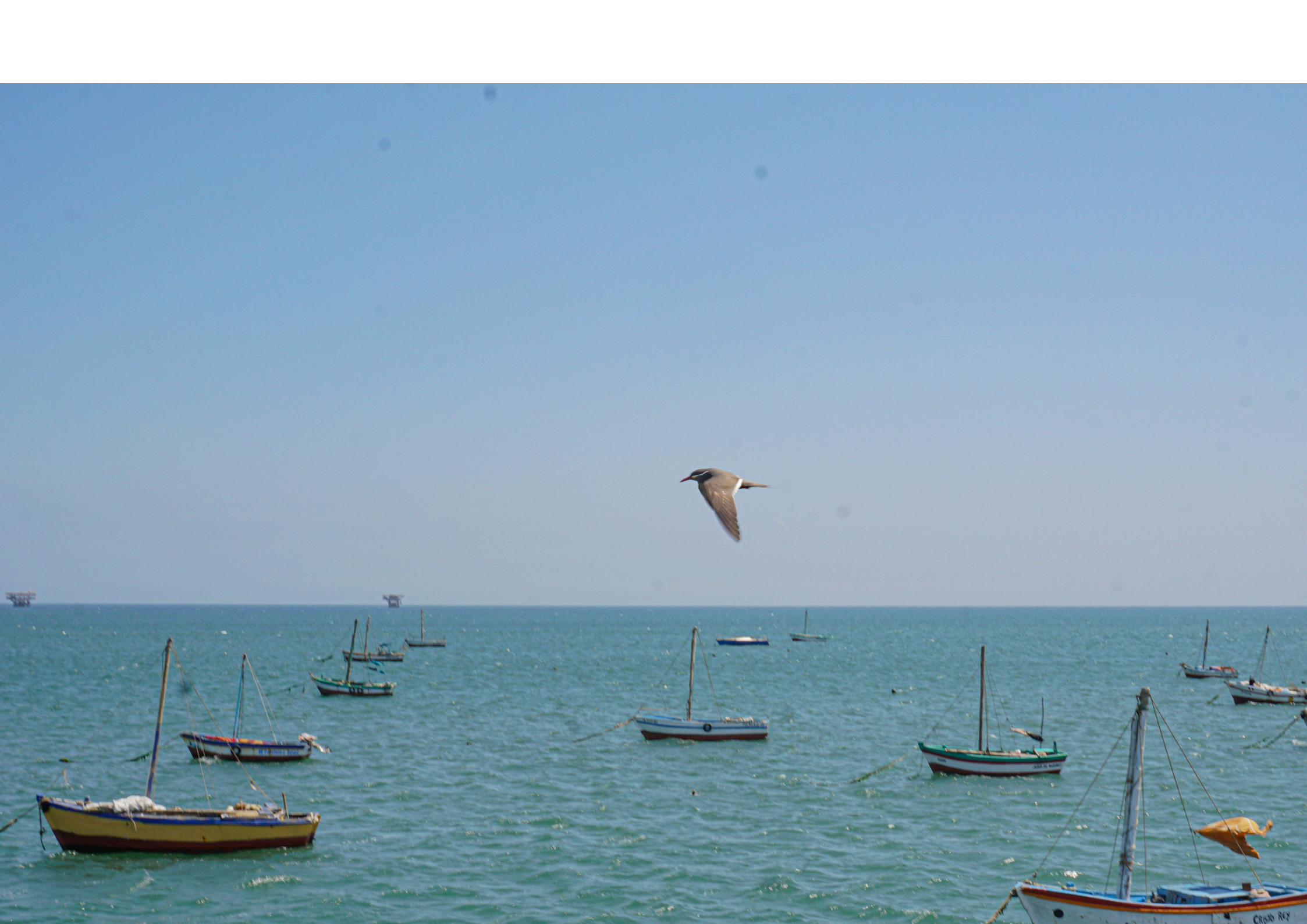
A century ago, English oil workers built wooden houses where, nowadays, military soldiers, oil workers, local fishermen, and surfers live. Today, ravaged by saltpetre and moths, they blend into the desert scrubland where foxes and wild horses roam and scorpions hide. At most, you might hear the occasional sound of vehicle engines, the greengrocer announcing the day's specials, and the tinkling of the shell wind chimes that decorate almost every house.



Deserted, conflictive and hostile, this isn't a Wild West film, but a resilient gem on the North Coast of Peru called Lobitos. There may be no cowboys, bank robberies, or duels at dawn, but there is a hamlet in the desert that was once a boomtown. With a cinema and casino, where European princes once strolled and whose extractive legacy persists as a 'black gold' rush, it is now increasingly unstable due to climate change.



Paradoxically, Lobitos, in the middle of the desert, is one of the most marine biodiverse areas in the world. The Guayaquil warm currents from the north converge here with the cold Humboldt Current, allowing visitors to see humpback whales, bottlenose dolphins, sea lions, and turtles. “My grandfather used to sail to Ecuador to trade salted fish for wood for the rafts,” says Ever. This trip was not just about bartering; he took with him knowledge of the tides, winds, and reefs that were then abundant.





Peruvian pompano fish has been on the menu of local families for generations. Under normal conditions, fishermen know how to interpret the cycles of the sea to find it. However, Tullio, a local fisherman with half a century of daily sailing experience, has noticed:

"The pompano, which used to be only in summer, also appeared in winter. With El Niño, the water warms up, fishing changes, and artisanal fishing is put at risk."




Climate change is shifting these currents, and, along with them, local biodiversity and knowledge are under threat. Tullio acknowledges: "What used to be predictable is now uncertain; the climate is turning crazy, and so is the sea." His son, Ever, now 20, grew up between memories of abundance and a different reality: "From the age of five, we used to go fishing with my dad, but we stopped going when the fish got smaller."



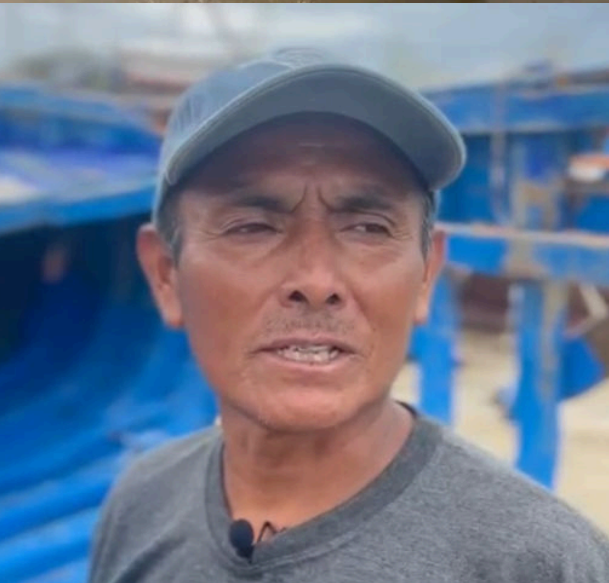
This local imbalance, which causes stress and less fishing for Ever's family, reflects something bigger. Lobitos stands in a delicate balance. Like a bored child rocking on a chair until it is balanced on two legs, any slight blow can send it crashing to the floor.

At the end of 2024, this balance was put to the test. First, an oil spill from an offshore platform contaminated the bay with 143 liters of crude oil. For the first time, the general manager of Petro-Peru appeared in person to open a dialogue with local fishermen about reparations. Unbelievably, at the same time, severe storms exacerbated by global warming generated abnormal waves in Lobitos. Eighty ports were closed, and the fishermen of Lobitos, who were in the negotiations, were unable to rescue their boats in time.

Several were left ruined.

A photograph of a fishing boat deck. In the foreground, a blue plastic crate is filled with dark fish. To its right is a white bucket and a digital scale with a blue display and a keypad. Further right is a large black wheel with a silver hubcap. In the background, there are more blue crates and a rusty metal post. The water is visible in the upper left.

*"Losing the ship was a huge blow to the family... my dad had bought it on credit, and it was hard to pay it off with fishing, which sometimes brings in money and sometimes doesn't."
—Ever.*







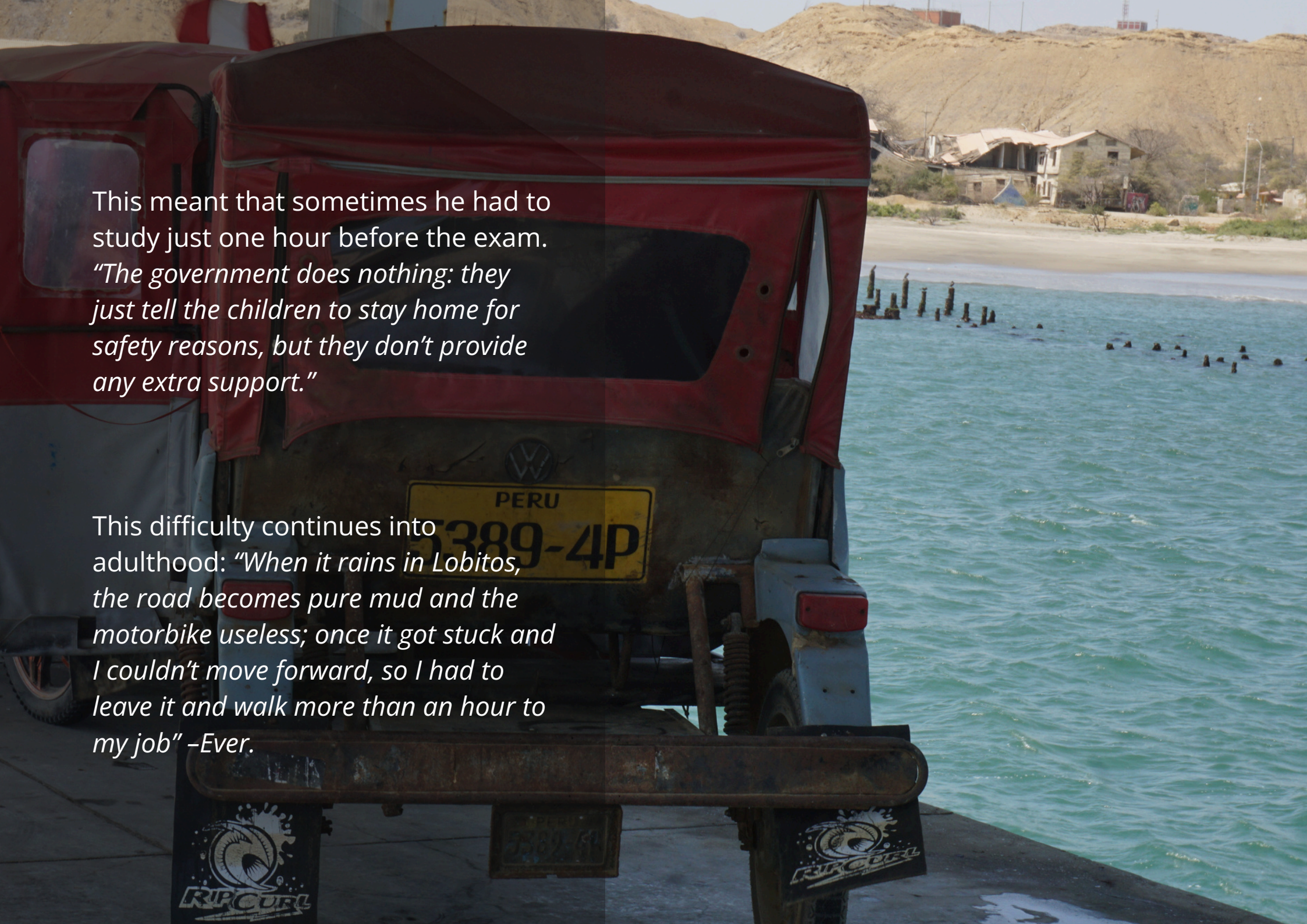
For a whole week, the family ate only bread with rice and eggs to save money for the boat.

Tullio could no longer go fishing or offer touristic experiences, but his reaction was truly inspiring: "There's no point in dwelling on the negative; the important thing is to move forward and take action." This same attitude is reflected by Ever, who has learned not to depend on a single job.



"I do all kinds of work: security, fishing, tourism, construction, whatever comes up. I know welding, electricity, and how to operate machinery. Every job teaches me something new."
—Ever.





This meant that sometimes he had to study just one hour before the exam.
"The government does nothing: they just tell the children to stay home for safety reasons, but they don't provide any extra support."

This difficulty continues into adulthood: *"When it rains in Lobitos, the road becomes pure mud and the motorbike useless; once it got stuck and I couldn't move forward, so I had to leave it and walk more than an hour to my job" –Ever.*

"When it rained, the school closed. There was no signal, and I couldn't communicate with my classmates in Talara." —Ever.



In Lobitos, local knowledge of fishing is no longer the main legacy passed down from generation to generation; resilience is. Parents lived through military operations and oil spills; today's children and youth face an unpredictable sea and rebellious climate.

So far, they have managed to adapt by reinventing themselves and showing resilience, teaching us to look to the future with the best attitude. However, to date, this story hasn't even been framed as a climate issue.

Children, who have contributed the least to this crisis, should not be left alone to carry the burden.

A story collected by Slavia Salinas.

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