

Celebrating Women in Caribbean Fisheries

The Caribbean Network of Fisherfolk Organisations works on the implementation of the SSF Guidelines with a special focus on gender

By **The Gender In Fisheries Team (GIFT)**
(maria.pena@cavehill.uwi.edu),
The University of the
West Indies (UWI)—
Centre for Resource
Management and
Environmental Studies
(CERMES), Barbados

The Caribbean Network of Fisherfolk Organisations (CNFO) is a regional network of national and local level fisherfolk organisations and individual fisherfolk leaders. It operates throughout the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) comprising mainly the English-speaking countries and territories. In 2006, the CNFO was informally established through fisherfolk capacity building and strategic planning, assisted by regional inter-governmental (Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism Secretariat), non-governmental (Caribbean Natural Resources Institute) and academic (University of the West Indies Centre for Resource Management and Environmental Studies) collaborating partners. In 2016, CNFO was legally established as a not-for-profit company.

The mission of the CNFO is to “improve the quality of life for fisherfolk and develop a sustainable and profitable industry in the Caribbean region through networking, representation and capacity building”. Without using the terms gender equity and gender equality, the CNFO has always sought to be gender aware in its three areas of

strategic focus—capacity building, policy advocacy and policy engagement. Currently at the helm of this network that recognises the importance of gender in fisheries is its female chair, Vernel Nicholls. Her seven-member executive, 17-member board of directors and general membership strive towards mainstreaming gender in fisheries.

According to Nicholls, “The CNFO considers gender, and in particular, the diverse roles of women in the fishing industry, to be integral to the continued development and sustainability of Caribbean fisheries. It seeks to promote the inclusion of gender equity (and equality) in discussions and policy through member participation (collective or individual) in activities, projects and forums at the national and regional levels, ensuring that women’s issues are addressed”. She further adds that, “in working towards achieving gender equality among its members, the CNFO has consistently tried to ensure that its members are treated fairly and receive justice according to their needs”.

Through its regional partners and international assistance (such as through the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the FAO), the CNFO and its member organisations have benefited from engaging in projects aimed at institutional strengthening, capacity building, improving governance, fisherfolk leadership, climate change adaptation, disaster risk management and, more recently, gender in fisheries. Recent activities illustrate how the CNFO is bringing women, gender equity and gender equality to the forefront in the implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (the SSF Guidelines).

The CNFO has been very supportive of global level and Caribbean engagement with the SSF Guidelines, having recognised the inadequacy of information for addressing gender in fisheries. Since March 2017, the CNFO has collaborated with its regional partners to incorporate the SSF Guidelines into the Caribbean Community Common Fisheries Policy. The partnership recognised the need for countries and fishing industries

MARIA PENA



Women processing white sea urchin roe for sale. The annual fishing season, locally known as sea eggs, is important socio-economically to hundreds of Barbadians

to focus more explicitly on gender equality and equity in Caribbean fisheries policies and management. The SSF Guidelines, having a human rights-based approach, strengthens this focus by making direct linkages to gender equality and equity. The CNFO and its partners led a regional participatory process with fisherfolk and fisheries officers to develop a protocol for incorporating the Guidelines into regional policy. The resulting draft protocol is in the final stages of review prior to submission for endorsement by the Caribbean Fisheries Forum, and Ministerial Council of the Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism. It has received support from senior fisheries officers, representatives of inter-governmental organisations and civil society organisations from across the insular Caribbean. A gender mainstreaming protocol to the fisheries policy can help to achieve gender equality and equity, by strengthening the roles of women in leadership. The SSF Guidelines also invoke international human rights standards and can be linked to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular SDG 5: achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

In 2016, one of CNFO's long-standing partners, the Centre for Resource Management and Environmental Studies, formed the Gender in Fisheries Team (GIFT at www.cavehill.uwi.edu/cermes/projects/gift/) to better understand and assist with policy and practice concerning gender in Caribbean small-scale fisheries. Within the SSF Guidelines, the focus of GIFT is on the section 'Responsible fisheries and sustainable development', sub-section 8 on 'Gender equality'. The scope of GIFT is limited to SSF fisheries value chains and governance arrangements at sub-regional, national and local levels, working primarily with members of the CNFO. The CNFO, currently represented by its Administrative Officer and Chair, is one of a dozen members that comprises the GIFT and actively contributes to its activities. Given the potential of fisherfolk organisations and cooperatives to represent the fishing industry, it is encouraging to have the CNFO and its supporting partner organisations playing active roles in the GIFT and exercising leadership in introducing gender mainstreaming in fishing. We are witnessing the creation of a community of practice.

Through its membership in the GIFT, the CNFO has participated in international

and regional conferences such as the Global Symposium on Gender in Aquaculture and Fisheries, and the Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute, among others, to share Caribbean perspectives on gender in fisheries with wider audiences. The CNFO assisted in collecting data on fisherfolk perspectives on the SSF Guidelines and gender in fisheries, the results of which fed into GIFT's preliminary 'Gender Scoping Study' supported by FAO. The summary findings from the study established a partial baseline from which to measure progress on the SSF Guidelines as well as incentivise more intensive and active engagements to ensure that efforts to achieve SDG 5 (Gender) and SDG 14 (Life Beneath Water) are at once complementary and mutually enabling.

In July 2017, CNFO was involved in the programme 'Small-scale Women in Fishery Learning Exchange', facilitated by CoopeSoliDar R.L., Costa Rica. The purpose of the learning exchange was to strengthen the capacities of women in fisheries from several Caribbean countries including their Costa Rican hosts and counterparts. The CNFO selected women from the fishery sectors in Barbados, St Kitts and Nevis, Grenada and Belize to participate in the exchange. The women learned and shared experiences from their fishing communities and from personal, economic and political/organisational empowerment perspectives. This exchange helped with strengthening bridges among islands of the Caribbean and Costa Rica, while contributing their knowledge on Caribbean artisanal fishery value chains.

A 2017 wall calendar titled 'Leading Ladies in Fisheries' was produced and distributed throughout the region by GIFT to raise public awareness of the importance of women in fisheries and their contribution to development. The CNFO played a pivotal part in the development of the calendar by recommending leading ladies to be featured. CNFO's Administrative Officer was one of those four special 'Leading Ladies' featured. CNFO will collaborate again this year with the GIFT to develop a 2019 Gender in Fisheries calendar.

The first ever Women in Fisheries Forum (WIFF) in Belize, jointly organised by the Belize Marine Conservation and Climate Adaptation Project and the Wildlife Conservation Society, has been a major step towards understanding the role of women in

The CNFO has always sought to be gender aware in its three areas of strategic focus —capacity building, policy advocacy and policy engagement

fisheries there. Geared towards promoting gender equality and equity in the allocation of resources, rights, status and responsibilities between women and men, the WIFF attracted female participants representing all aspects of the fisheries value chain—fisheries management, gear/equipment services, harvesting and marketing, and processing and distribution—with the main objective of developing a Gender Action Plan to mainstream gender in the daily activities of government departments, NGOs and projects in Belize. The CNFO assisted with the organisation and facilitation of this very special forum, and helped provide

participants with updated information on gender in the SSF Guidelines.

From the information highlighted here, we hope readers have gained an appreciation of the support the CNFO continues to provide to the implementation of the SSF Guidelines and its commitment to gender mainstreaming in Caribbean fisheries through its membership. As the Chair of the CNFO, Ms. Nicholls notes, “Concepts of gender equity and equality will become more prevalent in our discussions so as to bring more awareness and understanding of their importance to small -scale fisheries.”