

TURNING POINTS

A Decade of Change for Women in Fisheries

Q&A

YEMAYA Supplement

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A Decade of Change
for Women in
Fisheries

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Front Cover: Mollusk gatherers, South of Costa Rica, Terraba-Sierpe wetland. Photo credit: CoopeSolidar R.L.
Back Cover: A fisherwoman from the Eastern Cape coast of South Africa. Photo credit: Jackie Sunde.

Shellfish gatherers on foot. Cambados, Galicia, Spain.
Photo credit: Virginie de Rocquigny.

This Yemaya supplement focuses on a change that has happened over a decade: a truthful appreciation of women's role in fisheries. Their involvement in the sector follows a similar arc the world over, despite wide differences in society, culture, politics and economics. This supplement is an effort to understand and identify the main factors affecting this over the past decade—causes that have shaped their role, both positively and negatively.

1. Can we say that our discourse explicitly recognises women's human rights, labour rights (including occupational safety and health), environmental rights (participation in resource management, climate change coping mechanisms, differential impact of disasters on women) and social impacts (the role played in community and in ownership rights in near shore fisheries)?

2. Are women Organized better now? How many Organizations are there and how attentive are they at the national or international levels to gender and women's issues?

3. What are the effects of increasing mobility and participation in multiple activities as fisher, trader and wage labourer in processing industry; as farmers in aqua farms; as migrant workers; as women employed in seafood industry; and as caregivers, among others?

4. What is the major change in developing coping mechanisms in your country or in the fisheries you are familiar with? Is there a marked change at the occupational level?

5. What are the legislative or policy supports at the national or international levels? Are there data available about women's employment and participation in fisheries?

6. Empowerment and agency of women are important for community development. What is the nature of progress made? What are the major factors of negative impacts? What are the major factors of positive impacts? What is the resistance to these changes? Where does it come from?





Women, Fisheries & Empowerment

This article is an introductory note to a questionnaire survey that brought experts from across the world together to reflect on key issues in gender and fisheries

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Women make up half the workforce in fisheries. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), almost 70 per cent of workers in aquaculture and almost 90 per cent in the seafood processing sector are women. In Asia and Africa, women account for nearly 60 per cent of fish sellers. The past few decades have seen increasing levels of engagement of policy and programmes with women's issues. The terms Gender Equity and Equality now find at least a reference in several policy instruments.

Gender as a category of inquiry is just about beginning to be accepted and there is still a long way to go. It is yet to be mainstreamed in the larger global arena and until this is done, gender concerns will remain in the footnotes of policy. The recognition must come from within and without, that women are central to change; they are as much the affected as they are the potential prime movers of the system. The World Bank's well-known 'Hidden Harvests' report, for example, had brought to fore the significant contributions that women made to the harvesting of fish, which till then was considered almost exclusively a male preserve.



Shoedhoni fishers, Andhra Pradesh, India. Photo credit: Prasad (ICM).

Thus, in the last few decades, the diverse roles and significant contributions of women to the fishing and aquaculture sector have been revealed much more clearly. At the same time, we need to take stock of their status in contemporary fisheries, globally. For this issue, therefore, Yemaya asked several well-known gender experts in fisheries and aquaculture to reflect on the decadal changes that they feel have taken place both in their countries and globally. The key questions asked included whether the discourse now explicitly recognises women's human and labour rights; whether women are better organized now than before; whether there has been any change in roles and expectations concerning women; what coping mechanisms women have recourse to in developed and developing countries; what kind of policy support exists; and whether, in their opinion, women's empowerment and agency are important

for community development, and what progress, if any, has been made in this regard. A common discussion schedule was sent to experts from across the world who then shared the perspectives from the country or region they represented. The experts included the following:

From India: Nalini Nayak, Trustee, ICSF Trust, and Member, Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA), India; Shilpa Nandy, Assistant Professor at the Khudiram Bose Central College, Kolkata, India; Jharna Acharya, a member of the women's wing of a fisher's union, the Dakshinbanga Matsyajibi Forum, West Bengal, India; and Sonia George, General Secretary, Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA), Kerala, India.

From Brazil: Beatriz Mesquita, Member, ICSF.

From the Caribbean: Maria Pena from the University of the West

Indies (UWI)—Centre for Resource Management and Environmental Studies (CERMES), Barbados and Peter A. Murray from the Secretariat of the Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism, Belize City, Belize. Both Maria Pena and Peter Murray are members of the UWI-CERMES led Gender in Fisheries Team (GIFT).

From Nigeria: Kafayat Fakoya, Senior Lecturer, Department of Fisheries, Faculty of Science, Lagos State University, Nigeria.

From the European Union: Katia Frangouides, Researcher, University of Brest, UMR AMURE, France; Alicia Said (alicia.said87@gmail.com).

From Norway: Siri Gerrard, Centre for Women and Gender Research, UiT – The Arctic University of Norway.



Women seaweed collector, Gulf of Mannar, Tamil Nadu, India. Photo Credit: Shilpi Sharma, ICSF.

women have had to deal with loss of access to their traditional resources and livelihood options. Commercial interests and large investors have taken away fish selling and marketing opportunities from women. At the environmental level, strategies for climate change do not adequately address gender concerns and skew the playing field against women.

The responses from all the experts testify to the fact that women in fisheries all over the world are getting better organized. An example is that of the European network, AKTEA – an umbrella of fisherwomen organizations in Europe, established in 2006 by women organizations from different countries – which has successfully spearheaded activities promoting women’s claims and rights, and defended the fisheries and fisheries communities. Some respondents felt that today men and women enjoy the same legal protection for their employment and working conditions; that there are more cases today of women heading fishers’ organizations and being in leadership roles. However, it also seems to be the case that in most parts of the world, organizational skills and resources are lacking in fisherwomen’s organizations.

The discussants concur that legal instruments and policies are often gender blind. For women, the struggle is usually at the fundamental level for basic recognition as fishers. Further steps leading to greater integration are dependent on this basic recognition. Even if policies recognise gender, they require frameworks for implementation of gender agendas. Another disabling factor is lack of reliable gendered data in the sector that can support policy formulation.



From France: Marie Christine Montford, Treasurer, Executive Committee, The International Organization for Women in the Seafood Industry (WSI).

From Australia: Meryl J Williams, Chair and Coordinator, Gender in Aquaculture and Fisheries Section (GAFS) of the Asian Fisheries Society, Australia, who gave a global overview on the questions posed.

Many of the experts speak of the limited opportunities that women have for economic and social mobility in their lives. Such opportunities seem to depend on the type of activity women are engaged in. Increased mobility may end up adding responsibilities, primarily in the form of unpaid labour, though in some countries, women in fisheries may also have the opportunity of entering large scale trading or auctioning of fish or becoming boat owners. Change affects various levels in society – social, economic and environmental. When opportunities open up at one level, at another level, they may shrink. Thus,



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What is the place of women in fisheries? I think in every country, women have a place in fisheries. The fishers’ way of life includes women’s labour and the involvement of the community. Fisheries is not an individual activity. It should be understood not only as an economic activity but also as an activity that motivates and enables political thinking and action. However, the place and engagement of women in fisheries tends to go unnoticed by men and ignored in public policies.

I live and work in Brazil’s Northeast region, from where I speak. This tropical region produces most of the marine small-scale fisheries in the country. Coastal reef and mangrove ecosystems enable women’s fisheries.

In Brazil, women participate in fisheries activities from the net to the plate. They participate directly in coastal and estuarine shellfish and other types of fisheries; they prepare gear for offshore, mainly male, fisheries; they work in seafood post-harvesting activities, both in artisanal and industrial plants; and in commercial activities. Moreover, women are involved in political fishers’ representation and movements across the country. Within traditional fisheries communities, women have historically played important roles, being

responsible for the continuation of traditional social practices. On the other hand, political representation outside of community life has been more recent, growing from the 1990s till present times.

Women’s work in artisanal fishing is still considered invisible and seen as a marginal activity without prestige in terms of household income and time spent. Women in fisheries, like in other occupations, have a double burden, with housework and child care perceived as women’s responsibility, whereas the role of men is culturally linked to the productive sector alone.

In Brazil there is a complex legal framework that was made to protect women in the fisheries. However, the country faces many political and cultural challenges, which deter the adoption of these human rights within public policies.

Legal instruments for fisheries in Brazil in general lack consideration for gender issues. The National Legal Framework is centered in Law 11.959 (2009), which, in spite of adopting a broad definition of artisanal fishing that includes repairing fishing gear and boats, and post-harvest activities, does not consider the role of gender in other matters. In 2019, Congress approved other legislative gender considerations in addition to this

law. Very recently, fisherwomen had to resist changes in the law that would have stopped recognising them as fishers, unless they had a fisher family.

An important policy for women is the National Policy on the Sustainable Development of Traditional Peoples and Communities (Federal Decree No. 6040/2007). It recognises women fishers, strengthening and guaranteeing their rights to their identity, and to their organizations and institutions. There was a commission to implement this policy, but it has been withdrawn by the current government.

Women in fisheries, as do men, have sector-specific social security benefits: retirement at 55 years of age, which is five years less than other categories of work, and less payment per month towards the pension fund than other professionals, a fee based on the produce sold. Other benefits are similar to those of other categories of work: assistance when incapable of working and maternity leave.

The recognition of occupational health of fisher women is a demand that has been implemented in the public health system, albeit very slowly in some states, after enormous pressure from social movements.

Fisher women movements used to participate in councils. However, the current government ended all the federal public administration's participatory management councils, established by decree, such as the National Council of the Traditional Peoples and Communities.

This deficient mandate of fisheries management institutions at the federal level has been a problem in the country, causing instability in the public structures governing fisheries. None of the recent official institutions have paid attention to gender in fisheries and many are now defunct (see Table 1). Until 2012, fisheries data production was not disaggregated by gender, there were many projects underway across the country that testified to

women's importance in the fisheries. Today, things have come to such a pass that Brazil does not know what, how and by whom its seafood is being produced. The last figures in the Registry of Fishing Activity demonstrated that women were 50 per cent of the registered fishers.

Historical changes in fisheries management structures in the Brazilian Federal Government.

Fisheries management structure	Period
Ministry of Agriculture	1933–1962
Superintendence for the Development of Fisheries	1962–1989
Ministry of the Environment	1989–1998
Ministry of Agriculture	1998–2003
Special Secretary of Aquaculture and Fisheries	2003–2009
Ministry of Fisheries and Aquaculture	2009–2016
Ministry of Agriculture	2016–2017
Ministry of Industry, Foreign Trade and Services	2017–2018
Ministry of Agriculture	2018- until now

In the last 20 years, fishers in Brazil have been better organized and women have followed this movement. The first movement to discuss gender in fisheries began with the Catholic Church in the 1970s, in the Northeast region in the state of Pernambuco. In the 80s, fisherwomen began to be recognised by the state and came to be called shellfish gatherers, a denomination used until present times in most narratives: political, in the community, in management and in research. The women fisheries social movements have been discussing and challenging this denomination since the term fisherwoman would place women more readily on a similar level as men.

In 1989, Joana Mousinho was became the first fisherwoman in Brazil to be elected president of a fisher colony in Itapissuma, Pernambuco. The colonies are representative institutions created by the navy since 1919. At that time, fishermen were obliged to affiliate to their territory colony in order to be allowed to fish. Only after 1988, with the last Brazilian federal constitution, did these

entities become comparable to trade unions and fishers' colonies were designated as labour unions, with social benefits. Presently, in the Northeast region, women are the majority in every colony management group, changing in the last 20 years the character of fisher representation in the region.

This change was possible after the democratisation of Brazil, when civil society and government institutions developed projects, and introduced capacity building and participation



Fisherwomen engaged in post-harvest fisheries, Brazil. Photo credit: Naina Pierri.

policies. In 2004, the first National Fishing Conference brought the majority of the national fisher representatives together in the Brazilian capital to construct public policies for the fisheries. There, women claimed their place and demanded an exclusive meeting. As a result, the Articulation of National Fisheries (ANP) was founded. Today there is one more women's movement: the Fisherwomen Network. Women enhance men's fishery discussion and demands, from production to community life, occupational safety and health, environment, education and human rights. It became possible for many women to acquire a professional fishers' licence as a result of the organizing efforts of women fishers, and started to work on policy formulation.

Despite all this hard work and investment, challenges have significantly increased with the

repression of progressive fisheries policies and actions in the country since the political changes of 2017, with the new right-wing government disregarding artisanal fishing policies. Today, there is no participation of women (or fishermen) in the formulation of fishery policies and the Ministry of Fisheries has been done away with. Also, the registration of new fishers has been stopped since 2013 and no fishing statistics have been published since 2012. Civil society is however fighting back to protect and regain their hard-won rights.

In addition to the political challenge, fisherwomen suffer from a series of urgent problems, such as lack of equipment and boats, health problems, double work hours and problems due to environmental degradation. Some of the causes for these problems are the harmful practices of large enterprises, such as oil and gas platforms, territory disputes with companies and rural producers, pollution, and the consequences of illegal fishing such as overfishing by industrial boats.

Last year, in 2019, Brazil fishers suffered from impacts of the collapse of the Brumadinho Dam and the oil spill along a large part of the Brazilian coast, which were both major environmental crimes.

Currently, the country is immersed in the current coronavirus pandemic. All these events have ushered negative effects into women's lives with no effective responses forthcoming from the Brazilian government.

It is of utmost importance that policy makers recognise the diverse roles and perspectives of women in fisheries in order to achieve equitable outcomes and sustainable livelihood goals.



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International discourse explicitly recognises women's human and labour rights. Some countries also have policies affirming these rights for women. However, the major challenge lies with the level of preparedness to 'walking the talk', to implement the policies and regulations. Also, women need to understand the importance and power of their rights, and defend them in the face of overbearing customary and social norms which push them into positions subordinate to those of men in their community. The process of this understanding is transformational. Men too need to undergo the same transformative process to understand and embrace the need to respect women's rights. They must not perceive women's rights as a threat to their masculinity or to extant customs.

Women today are better organized at the international and national levels to represent their rights. However, the question remains: are the women representatives actually representing all women or just a segment of the women? Even among women, there are economic and social inequalities which tend to discriminate or segregate them. Women representatives often do not connect with rural women or women of lower educational and income status. Gender and women issues at the grassroots levels are best projected by women familiar with the issues of those affected. I would

describe women as better organized if and when they truly represent all strata or classes of women.

In today's context women are much more mobile, playing multiple roles as fishers, fish farmers, traders, wage labourers and so on. Increased mobility and participation in multiple activities however have not resulted in increased wages and incomes or gender equality. Further, women forced into multiple roles are also vulnerable to physical exhaustion and occupational hazards. The multiple roles are often not a matter of choice, but of compulsion, brought about by decline in artisanal fisheries.

The small-scale fisheries sector is faced with resource decline, resulting in poverty and food insecurity in fishing communities. There are many causes for this resource decline. They include: changes in the dynamics of resource use and productivity with modern fishing; illegal fishing and fishing practices; widespread and competing uses within and outside the aquatic environment; impacts of international and national macro-economic policies; and the occurrences of natural disasters induced by climatic changes. The underlying cause for this is weak governance structures, characterised by poor stakeholder participation, poor monitoring and enforcement capabilities, and weak institutional norms.

The advent of western-styled and centralised fisheries management has weakened governance of the small-scale fisheries sector. For instance, many traditional fisheries operate open-access regimes mediated by age-old customary norms and communal ownership. However, the influence of traditional management systems has been on a decline. Conflicting lifestyles, investment drives in fishing, and divergent interests of fishers threaten collective social capital and social norms in many communities. This induces passivity among fishers towards sustainability and stewardship of the exploited fish stock. The outcome is a spiraling state of decline in fisheries resources, forcing communities into adaptive strategies.

The adaptive strategies are shaped by the circumstances people find themselves in and the options or resources available to them. They differ among and within communities, based on education, income, gender, economic and social status. Therefore, gender and context informed analyses are important in unravelling coping mechanisms of women and men along the value chains. Some fishers adapt to migrate with the fishery resources, albeit at a higher cost using large canoes and outboard engines to travel long distances to productive fishing grounds. Other fishers who cannot mobilise productive assets embrace changes in time commitment to short fishing trips and diversification into non-fishing livelihoods.

Climate change impacts put further strain on limited resources and settlements and threaten the livelihoods of people living in low-lying coastal zones. Many fishing households exhibit low awareness of adaptation strategies with climate change and variability which affects their livelihoods. The low adaptive capacity of the people is due to lack of household wealth and low access to credit, social networks, education and technology. Women and children are most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Women in fishing communities depend almost entirely on fish to support themselves and their family's basic needs. Adaptive strategies to climate change vulnerabilities are often gendered. Majority of women have fewer options than men, and

experience a double burden in their absence. Migration to neighbouring communities is often a preferred adaptive option, with fishers engaging in multiple activities, including hiring as farm labour, fishing in new areas, engaging in palm fruit harvesting, firewood marketing, and delivering fresh water with their boats to distant fishing communities. Compared to men, women are forced to engage in multiple income-generating activities. Some women even engage in sex-for-fish for preferential access to fish supplies.

Many countries still lack enabling policy and legislative frameworks inclusive of fishers, fish workers and fishing communities. At the global level, small-scale fisheries are supported by the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines) and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. The SDGs also have a gender equity focus. Unfortunately, SDG14.b, which specifically deals with small-scale fishers' access to productive resources, services and markets, lacks a gender component. Further, with SDG 14.b, implementation levels remain low in many countries.

In Africa, a Policy Framework and Reform Strategy for Fisheries and Aquaculture was developed in 2014 with the objective to improve and strengthen the contribution of small-scale fisheries to poverty alleviation, food, and nutrition security and socio-economic growth, especially for the fishing communities. The framework has a gender component that supports promotion of women in fisheries trade, and measures benefits accruing to women as a performance indicator in the implementation of a 10-year Action Plan at the regional and national levels. The Pan Fisheries and Aquaculture Policy Framework and Reform Strategy: Gender and Youth in Fisheries and Aquaculture recommends: effective participation of women and youth in decision making processes; gendered value-chain analysis to define support mechanisms required to improve productivity and working conditions for women; mainstreaming of gender and youth into policy; laws and development plans based on collection and analysis of disaggregated gender data; long-term



Fishing provides direct and indirect employment to over six million people in Nigeria.
Photo credit: B. B. Solarin.

commitment of funding to improve empowerment in the post-harvest sector and women's equal participation in planning and managing of 'mainstream' fisheries activities; the promotion of inter-sectorial approaches and partnerships focusing on formal and non-formal education and improving access to finance and health services; and the prevention of gender based violence, and design and implement policy responsive to the underlying causes.

However, many national fisheries policies are still gender-blind. Interventions targeting women's empowerment in small-scale fisheries have focused on supporting women through post-harvest and household activities. These are aligned with the perception that women's needs arise from their roles as fish processors and caregivers. The understanding is that women should remain in the socially acceptable female domain of the household and in the perceived traditional roles. Actions to strengthen gender equity and enable women to participate in fisheries decision processes

are seldom included. In sub-Saharan Africa, for instance, women are underrepresented on fisheries management committees. This makes it difficult to ensure that women have equal access to fisheries, which, in turn, impacts the health and welfare of all community members.

A lot of uncertainty surrounds employment data of women in small-scale fisheries and their activities in the value-chains. At global and national levels, only guess estimates of women's employment are available due to the scarcity or absence of gender-disaggregated data. In many small-scale fisheries, catch statistics are not gender-disaggregated. The many roles that women undertake in the value-chains are underrated and their economic contribution trivialized, with negative consequences for fisheries policy and management as well as for the national economy. In this context, an FAO project funded by the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD), and focusing on women from Ghana, Malawi, Tanzania, Sierra Leone, and Uganda involved in

the small-scale fisheries, is of interest. The project proposes to develop guidance on best practices for the future. Mapping and gender analysis within the value chain will recommend the best ways for women to be empowered, including help in decision making and leadership, joining or establishing organizations, networks, and platforms relevant to their needs and their work.

Tracking the progress of the impact of women on community development is not a straight or clear-cut process. Rather, the extent of progress attained is context specific, variable, and shaped by prevailing gendered social and cultural norms, the technology used or the extent of commercialisation of the fish product. These limit the empowerment of women and their degree of participation. Cultural settings in most fishing communities promote patriarchy at household level and restrictive gendered norms in fishing. Improved fishing technology and industrial fisheries in near-shore waters competes with small-scale fisheries for declining fish stocks and render less fish available for women fishers and their communities.

Low availability and access to fish within communities implies that the economic base of the women is gradually eroding and only those who were established early, before industrialisation, will continue to thrive by leveraging the social capital they have built over the years. Unfortunately, such women are few and often elderly, while younger women with no strong financial base or family support, struggle to make ends meet.

In Africa, women predominate the post-harvest sector but have differential access to economic and social capital. At the hierarchy of the female-centric supply chains are a relatively small group of entrepreneurial women known as 'fish mummies'. By virtue of their successes individually and collectively in their gender-defined roles as large-scale fish processors, wholesalers and distributors of fresh/dried fish, fish mummies have carved a niche for themselves as wealthy and influential elites in the socio-economic and political spheres often beyond their communities. Their control of the fish trade, through rights to huge parts of the catch from fishing expeditions they finance or as canoe owners, empowers them with

some influence and potential leverage in the traditionally androcentric domain of fisheries management.

Along the coast of West Africa, women have stood out tall in the small-scale fishing sector. Many lead vibrant women's organizations and represent the voices of their communities. From Senegal, The Gambia to Liberia and Ghana women such as Maimouna Sabaly and Fatou Samba are at the frontline mobilising other women to fight for access to food security, livelihood, a healthy sea, and basic human rights. In Senegal, women are agitating for the Government to put an end to the expansion of giant fishmeal and fish oil industry that is decimating local fish stocks and putting in jeopardy over 40 million people who depend on these resources.

The story of women oyster harvesters in The Gambia is particularly inspiring. Generally, the gleaning of shellfish in coastal wetlands is predominantly done by women who decide how to harvest, process, and market the product. Under the auspices of TRY Oyster Women's Association, some 500 women clustered into cooperatives participated in local mangroves reforestation and educational outreach to the local population on the benefits of environmentally responsible resource management. Their activities were instrumental to the approval of a Cockle and Oyster Co-Management Plan for the Tanbi-Wetlands National Park. This is the first time ever in Sub-Saharan Africa that a women's group has been granted exclusive rights to use and manage fisheries. Such success stories can sow the seeds for other experiments of cooperative women's enterprises in fisheries.



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The European Union (EU) legal framework recognises women's contribution in fisheries in various directives and regulations. For example, the EU regulation No. 508/2014 on the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) recognises the importance of women's contribution to the local communities and provides, for example, the opportunity for women to access EU subsidies to develop new activities. In practice, these provisions are decided at Member State level, and thus, their implementation is determined by the priorities of each EU Member State. Spain seems to be at the forefront of promoting gender equality in fisheries, dedicating a large proportion of EMFF funding to women's economic agency. Thanks to EMFF or EFF, Spanish women in fisheries have been able to develop entrepreneurship and find new jobs such as shellfish gathering or net mending.

In all Member States, employment and working conditions for men and women working onboard

fishing vessels, and gathering shellfish and seaweed on foot, enjoy the same legal recognition. Some of the women in these sub-sectors occupy lead roles in fishers' organizations and are engaged in fisheries management and decision making. However, compared to their male counterparts, very few are in top roles, probably since they have multiple tasks to deal with, which prevents them from taking leading positions in organizations.

In the past ten years, more women engaged in small-scale fisheries family enterprises became the

managers of these enterprises with some participating in seasonal fish harvesting with their partners. Some of the women earn a salary while others do not, and such realities remain under the radar of national and European authorities responsible for work and employment affairs.

In 2019, the European Union produced the first sex-disaggregated statistics on fisheries employment. According to this data, women represent 3.78 per cent of the total employment in fisheries harvesting. However, these figures are unrealistic and incomplete as they don't include shore based activities such as shellfish and seaweed gathering.

Although women involved in fish harvesting onboard fishing vessels have access to the same rights as men, it is not the same case for women assisting their husbands, fathers and brothers in the family enterprise or providing a helping hand part-time in high-season fish harvesting onboard fishing vessels. The 2010/41/EU Directive recognises the unpaid contributions of women only for assisting spouses or partners, and provides women retirement pension and maternity leave. This directive is mandatory and legally binding; however, very few countries have applied it in their national legislations. France, Croatia and Slovenia are a few of the countries where this directive is effectively implemented even though it is fully transposed by all Member States. Women's unpaid contribution is not included in the EU employment statistics. Moreover, women's share in fish harvesting estimated at 3.78 per cent, as mentioned earlier, does not reflect this contribution but only represents fishermen or fisherwomen working on small-scale fisheries vessels that don't employ crew. In the context, forthcoming discussions in 2020 will focus on trying to get data pertaining to spouses or partners assisting the family enterprise included in the next round of data collection on EU-level employment data in 2021.

Regarding the inclusion of women's rights in the dominant discourse, we can learn from the experience of AKTEA. The European network



Catherine Gueho, A seaweed harvester, France.
Photo credit: Franka Macovac.

AKTEA, which is an umbrella of fisherwomen's organizations in Europe, was established in 2006 by women's Organizations from different countries with the aim of promoting women's claims and rights and defending fisheries and fishing communities. AKTEA lobbied at the EU level for the revision of the EU directive related to the recognition of spouses and partners who assisted in the fishing enterprise, which was then incorporated in the Directive 2010/41/ UE. The network also lobbied to include gender indicators in the EMFF post evaluation, for a better picture of the percentage of the fisheries funds dedicated to gender equality.

Further, gender-related claims, such as participation in the advisory councils, were made in the past five years in events of the European Commission and Parliament at the EU-level at various levels – by the General Fisheries Committee of Mediterranean/FAO (GFCM) at the regional level, through speeches advocating for women rights, and through AKTEA-produced



lobbying material. These proved to be extremely effective modes of intervention. For example, the speech given in Malta during a round table organized by the EU Commissionaire of fisheries resulted in a study in 2019 on the role women in fisheries in Mediterranean and Black Sea. A speech by AKTEA on 8 March 2018, at DG MARE, resulted in the commissioning of a technical report ‘FLAG Support to Women in Fisheries and Aquaculture’.

AKTEA also participated in different events organized by national authorities and women’s organizations such as the International Conference of Women in Fisheries organized by the Spanish government, and a meeting organized in Conil, Spain, in October 2019 by the Andalusian women in fisheries association to foster new connections with Moroccan and Senegalese women in fisheries.

During the same period and despite the presence of AKTEA at the international level, the network faced internal difficulties. These difficulties were similar to those faced by national women Organizations, which were the pillars of the network. One of the difficulties was that existing members were getting older and new membership among youth was not forthcoming. The problem was compounded by the fact that women were increasingly taking up other jobs outside fisheries that further reduced their time availability.

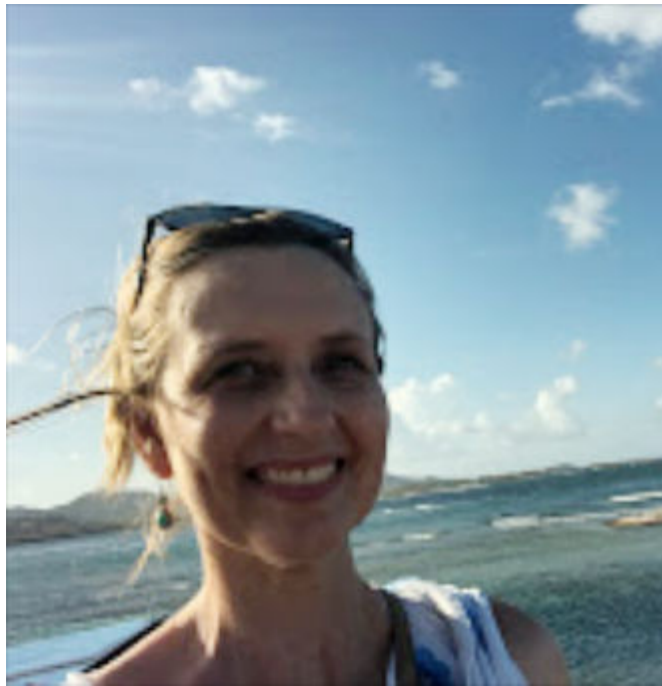
The second and equally worrying issue concerns the lack of finances. Women’s organizations don’t have the same support as professional male organizations do and many of them are run on volunteer basis. This is not enough to maintain a Europe-wide women’s organization. Language fluency is an added difficulty, as AKTEA members hailing from different countries are not always able to speak each other’s languages, and thus direct exchanges are difficult without the support of bilingual or multilingual speakers. Despite these

challenges and the fact that AKTEA’s activity has been dwindling in the last years, 2020 was perceived as an opportune year to revive the network again for a new decade (see the article ‘Revive, Renew and Re-launch!’ in this issue of Yemaya).

Regarding new opportunities for mobility and empowerment available to women in fisheries today, the support given by EMFF to the development of fisheries communities (Fisheries Local Action Groups) offered possibilities for women to initiate new economic activities. Through this funding, women are being able to develop activities related to various domains, including fish processing, fish retail, recycling and upscaling fishing material, such as nets, to produce bags or jewellery. Through novel ideas, these funds are giving women the opportunity to develop new skills which are not necessarily linked to their spouses’ businesses. There are many different examples of women-run enterprises in tourism, food and fisheries throughout Europe. These are creating new job opportunities within fishing communities, and provide an extra income to fisheries households. Such diversification boosts women’s roles and well-being. They would provide exciting opportunities to facilitate the exchange of local practices across EU countries and beyond. However, it remains difficult for AKTEA to provide this platform due to financial and human capacity constraints.

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Facing page:
Eufemia Faruggia preparing fillets for Malta festival.
Photo credit: Alicia Said.



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Addressing the FAO Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines) requires understanding gender and the different roles and rights of women and men in small-scale fisheries, seeking to achieve responsible fisheries and sustainable development through a gender lens, and ensuring an enabling environment for gender equality with supportive implementation. The Caribbean Community (CARICOM) which comprises 15 countries, The Member States of the inter-governmental regional fisheries organization, the Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism (CRFM) recognises that an essential component of institutional enhancement is comprehensive

mainstreaming of gender and decent work by including vulnerable groups and gender considerations in the plans, programmes, projects, and administration of the fisheries and aquaculture sector. Gender (which includes men and masculinity) is included in understanding fisherfolk knowledge and practices. Consistent with international obligations, CRFM Member States infuse decent work into policy frameworks and instruments. Due to the cross-cutting nature of these issues, and the implications for the human rights of women, men, boys and girls in the Caribbean Community, they are linked in varying degrees to regional treaties including the Caribbean Community Common Fisheries Policy (CCCFP).



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. Photo credit: Maria Pena.

With stalwart developmental policies and investments across the Caribbean Community during the past half-century, the region is thought to be well ahead in attaining gender equity and equality in fisheries and aquaculture as, within CRFM Member States, women and men generally have equal access to work and other opportunities. Yet, there is still inequality contributed to by gender-based violence; and labour force participation is sometimes not commensurate with women's educational attainment, which tends to be higher than men's in many Caribbean states.

To answer the question of whether women are better organized now as compared to earlier times, in the Caribbean there is no time series of sex-disaggregated data to definitively answer if collective action among women has improved.

Women are involved in fisherfolk associations, groups and cooperatives. Anecdotal information suggests there are now more women in leadership positions, fully accepted as leaders, and more attentive to the fishing industry at the national and international levels. However, the extent to which they are shaping fisheries policies to respond to women's issues in the fishing industry and mobilising communities to participate in fisheries planning and management in the region, is largely unknown but now being investigated. Some women from the fishing industry in the region, holding influential positions regionally and internationally, are strategically positioned to ensure that women and men in fisheries can be involved in and can influence decision making. Vernel Nicholls from Barbados as Chairperson of the Caribbean Network of Fisherfolk



Fisherwomen boning and filleting flying fish, Bridgetown, Barbados. Photo credit: Maria Pena.

which sex-disaggregated data on leaders are recorded, 45 are led by men and only three by women. The latter include the Barbados National Union of Fisherfolk Organizations (BARNUFO), the St. Kitts Nevis National Fisherfolk Organization and the Fish Vendors Cooperative, St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Generally, representation of women on fisherfolk organizations or cooperative boards is surpassed by men six times over – 236 male board members versus 40 female board members for 44 of the organizations across the same 12 countries for which sex-disaggregated data are recorded. In some countries in the region, for example Guyana and Belize, there are no women holding board positions.

In general, women in fisheries in the region are being more attentive to regional and international fisheries issues and have keen interest to participate in local forums, learning exchanges and international meetings and conferences about fisheries. Read more about the Caribbean ‘fisherwoman’ field trip learning

exchange between women from Caribbean countries and Costa Rica; the Belize Women in Fisheries Forum; and the Women in Fisheries Forum in Barbados.

Caribbean women typically seem to feel and be less constrained by matters such as education, culture, and finance than women in many other parts of the world in terms of participating and being accepted in various activities in the fishing industry. While there is gendered division of labour along the fisheries value chain, it is mostly by free choice due to economic rationale. For example, in Barbados, differences in occupations by gender along the fisheries value chain are not seen as inequalities. Fixes for the Barbados fisheries sector, are not viewed as being gender related but rather are more institutional and operational in nature

Organizations (CNFO) and Nadine Nembhard from Belize, Co-chair World Forum on Fisher Peoples, are two such examples.

Situations differ by country. Most fisherfolk organizations are dominated by male boat owners and fishermen. In many cases women in the industry are unwelcome, not because of gender per se, but because they are fish vendors with whom the harvest sector often has fish price conflicts. Male dominance in fisherfolk organizations is confirmed by CNFO database records. The CNFO database records 131 fisherfolk organizations across 16 countries. Of 48 organizations across twelve countries (Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Montserrat, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and Suriname) for

for both sexes and include improved working standards.

Trends in gendered divisions of labour are changing. Women, for example, in the Barbados and Belize fishing sectors, are now more interested in entering non-traditional roles. This growing trend has been attributed to women observing their mothers and female relatives assuming non-traditional gendered roles as well as motivation from parents for their children to try new roles. Such pursuit, however, comes at a social cost for women. Women fishers in Barbados are often ridiculed, particularly by other women, for what is seen to be delinquency in caregiving responsibilities to pursue a role in the harvest sector that may take a woman away from her family for up to two weeks at a time per month during the fishing season.

The periodic massive sargassum seaweed influxes that have impacted the eastern Caribbean illustrate how women in the fishing industry cope with marine environmental hazards. The post-harvest sector responds in the short-term to decreased fishing effort, decreased fish catch, alternative species, changes in seasonality, increased abundance of juvenile fishes, increased prices due to fish scarcity and changes in consumer buying patterns due to massive influxes of sargassum. The fishery sector has mainly employed short-term coping mechanisms, rather than long-term adaptive ones. Fisherfolk have typically sustained their livelihoods by diversification. For example, women small-scale fish processors in Barbados may supplement their income during the fishing off-season with part-time jobs as receptionists, cleaners, security guards etc., or sell fish that had been stored during the fishing season.

An estimated 160,000 persons, particularly women, are employed indirectly in small-scale fisheries and aquaculture in the CARICOM region in fish processing, marketing and distribution or selling of fish and fish products, ancillary (support) services such as ice production and supply, research, development and management. Within the region, women’s participation in fisheries has been rated as ‘high’ for marketing and processing,

‘medium’ for investing and ‘low’ for fishing. Despite the limited data on women’s work in the fisheries sector, their contribution to the blue economy may be significant.

These factors as well as regional gender indicators on labour force participation, employment rates, and gender segregation of occupations, have led the Ministerial Council of the CRFM to: adopt a Protocol on Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries for Caribbean Community fisherfolk and societies under the Caribbean Community Common Fisheries Policy (the Protocol incorporates the SSF Guidelines into the Policy, and by extension Chapter 8 of the guidelines, on gender equality) and agreement that it should enter into force immediately; endorse a Protocol on Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Risk Management in Fisheries and Aquaculture under the Caribbean Community Common Fisheries Policy that addresses disaster risks and climate change as presented in Section 9 of the SSF Guidelines; and issued an overarching statement on gender, youth and decent work, to wit: “The Council accepted that international and national norms regarding issues pertaining to gender, youth, and decent work be adhered to, and be incorporated into all CRFM policies, protocols, programmes, and plans.”

These decisions show a clear regional recognition of the need to consider gendered human rights, labour rights, environmental and social impacts in managing the fisheries of the Caribbean Community.



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I will reply to Yemaya's questions with a focus on France, the country I know the best.

My observations about France are that there are only a handful of local associations of women in the fishing industry and none in aquaculture, to my knowledge. At one time, these associations were in most cases run by fishermen's wives and focused on their husbands' rights as fishers and on their own rights as fishers' spouses.

Today, these associations have nearly all disappeared. Run as voluntary efforts, these organizations had neither the financial nor the human means to pursue their fight.

A few years ago, when the European Union was introducing its latest fishing plan, they wanted to meet and engage women's associations. They did not find any!

In France, the careful inventory of quantitative data disaggregated by sex has shown that quality data does exist, at least for the main sectors. The problem is not so much the lack of data as their fragmented and dispersed nature. Dedicated resources for processing and analysing existing data would make it possible to standardise information and discussion on the sensitive subject of gender equality, improve stakeholders' understanding, and reduce resistance to the idea of gender equality. Public statistics reveal a high wage gap between women and men in certain sectors, more than 20 per cent in the case of both fish wholesalers and retailers.

The inequalities that the data point to are still unknown, poorly accepted, or even denied.



Facing page: A woman selling smoked fish at Lorient market.
Photo credit: Alain Le Sann



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Our discourse does not explicitly recognise women's human rights and labour rights. Until the global apex body discussing fisheries and aquaculture, the FAO Committee on Fisheries and Aquaculture (COFI), puts these issues firmly on its agenda, we cannot say that the discourse recognises these issues. Some say the impetus for putting women's rights on the agenda of COFI has to come from the countries, but in fact this matter can be suggested and reasoned also from the FAO and external partners. In COFI, in the early 2000s, the small-scale fisheries discourse began encouraged by the then Advisory Committee on Fisheries Research (ACFR), supported by internal FAO work and encouraged by grassroots movements, such as ICSF. We don't have, unfortunately, a parallel with gender equality. ACFR no longer meets, FAO's capacity on gender and fisheries is low, and women's grassroots movements are very small, new and under resourced. National agencies give the gender elements of the SSF Guidelines little attention.

Women are becoming better Organized and more women's Organizations are being created. Many, however, are small and still struggle to gain traction. Creating and maintaining a formal Organization requires leadership, resources, persistence, purpose and vision, the ability of

membership and leadership to articulate their cause, and reach to the policy and decision makers. Women's and gender equality groups are weak in all these areas. Nalini Nayak and Cornelia Quist and ICSF colleagues described this well when they said that the gender equality movements in small scale fisheries were a "struggle within a struggle". Other national and international Organizations are not attentive, or they need constant reminding that they promised to attend to gender equality when they signed onto key agreements such as the Sustainable Development Goals.

What are the effects on women of increased mobility and labour participation? For each woman, the effects will depend on who she is, where she is and what she does. Is she mobile and participating because she has migrated in-country or across a border for the work? If so, she may find the work physically arduous and poorly paid, but it may be a ticket to becoming more independent, and even escaping the strictures and limitations of life in, for example, a poor rural farming area. If she is a fish trader in the market, she may relish the position but still fear that she and her fellow traders will be squeezed out when the city privatises the market and lets new leases on the stalls to bigger operators with more capital. If she has developed skills and contacts in a burgeoning node such as fish farming or selling in a new site, she may be on her way to become an entrepreneur,



Fishlanding centre, Cote D' Ivoire.
Photo credit: Jackie Sunde.

maybe working with her husband, helping educate their children as they support their aging extended family.

Are major changes taking place in the development of coping mechanisms in fisheries? No, major change is not happening, but, in certain fisheries, gradual change is. However, I am more concerned that positive change is being far outweighed by negative change for women. The fish value-chains, at least until the coronavirus pandemic, were increasingly stretched, focused on exports, products with large volumes (e.g. pangasius catfish) and/or high values (e.g. shrimp) under the control of bigger and bigger corporations and marketing authorities, often aided by government agencies providing trade, marketing, biosecurity and research support. Intensification, aggregation and trade have been trends that have disadvantaged women already working in small- and medium-scale fisheries and trade operations and, in return, created only low paying labour for women in processing. Since most countries are gender-blind in their fisheries approaches, most of the changes that disadvantage women go unnoticed, unless women speak up. A good example of this has been the recent efforts in Senegal and Ghana where women have protested the loss of fish they currently process and sell to

companies under foreign fishing agreements.

Even during the change due to the coronavirus emergency, women are likely to be big losers. Factory workers are losing their jobs, and women in intermediary work are less likely to receive government support than the "frontline" licensed fishers and the factory owners.

In terms of legislative, policy and data support, gender-blindness in fisheries is accompanied

by generally poor data on women's work. Fisheries agencies from the local to national and international keep reasonable records of the number of workers in fishing. Although most countries do not record the numbers of women in the workforce, from many small studies we know approximately what these numbers might be. What we lack, however, are any statistics and time trends on workers, especially women workers, in the other nodes of the value chain. The responsibility for collecting these data rests in other ministries and international agencies that rarely record numbers from fisheries, except in aggregate with other sectors, such as agriculture and forestry.

Policy progress remains slow. When mentioned, women are often referred to in policies for welfare assistance, immediately assigning them to lesser and marginal activities. Internationally, the 1995 Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries celebrates its 25th anniversary this year. While a much-loved and admirable instrument that has spawned many important streams of fisheries legislation and action, the Code remains resolutely gender-blind. The Small-Scale Fisheries (SSF) Guidelines does incorporate gender equality principles but implementation of the gender elements are struggling for recognition and

resources within the overall struggle for SSF attention.

What progress has been made in terms of empowerment and agency of women? Empowerment, agency and resistance are all interlinked. Treating them separately can risk thinking that women alone can change their own circumstances, and that changes in their agency or power will not potentially provoke a backlash at critical points.



Women fishsmokers, Guinea Konakry. Photo credit: Beatrice Gorez, CFFA.

Backlash seems more prevalent than in the past, possibly reflecting that some progress is being made and being noticed, hence it is generating resistance in some quarters. In society at large, the United Nations Development Programme recently reported that, in recent years, the gender inequality index, which had been declining, has plateaued. Underlying this performance measure, their surveys found that 91 per cent of men and 86 per cent of women displayed one or more biases against gender equality in politics, economics, education, intimate partner violence and women's reproductive rights.

Infusing fisheries education with the concepts of gender equality may help, but achieving this is not easy. Tertiary educators at our GAF7 Conference in

late 2018 reported that, in India, Japan, Philippines and Thailand, efforts to mainstream gender in fisheries education had met with passive, active, and hidden resistance from colleagues and/or administration.

I believe it is necessary now to think ahead on how to address backlash before it becomes more severe. One suggestion comes from research institutions experimenting with gender transformative approaches. They found that backlash to innovations to help women could be reduced if the women and men were engaged together in the change process.

Finally, I would like to share a reflection based on being engaged for 25 years in women/gender in fisheries and aquaculture research. This is that my colleagues and I tended to go through several stages in our journey. We started with noticing that the default assumption is made that fisheries is only for men. We then sought to correct this by researching where women are active, and what they contribute. We then broadened the discussion by looking at gender norms and relations, recognising the

complexities of different women in different fisheries, roles and levels of income. We tried to make the case to decision makers for why gender matters. Finally, we are expanding our horizons by finding the critical links to the major sectoral issues, such as modernisation, scaling up of corporations and trade, environmental degradation and climate change, many of which effectively remove women from their places in fisheries, or offer them exploitative new roles of little power. I suspect that a similar journey still needs to be made by the mainstream decision makers in fisheries, but we still lack the key motivations that would get them to take their first steps.



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In India, women are certainly much better organized in some coastal states. There is no data on the actual number of organizations around the country. The nature of organizations also varies—there are some registered trade unions, some

associations, and a number of SHGs (self-help groups) in the inland sector. Most of these organizations take up issues only up to the state level. Indian states are very large, and languages across states differ; so it is difficult to develop dialogues between states and at the national level.

Women doing fish drying, Gujarat, India. Photo credit: ICSF



As far as the discourse on gender and fisheries is concerned, here again there are considerable differences among Organizations depending on the state under consideration. For instance, in some Indian states like Gujarat, Maharashtra and Goa, the general standard of living of the coastal communities is high and the infrastructure of health and education is good and accessible to the majority – although there will always be pockets of more disadvantaged communities. Hence these issues are not very significant.

However these are issues of concern further south on the west coast and all the way up the east coast. There have not been specific attempts by women fisher organizations to address such issues per se. Individual organizations in some areas sometimes take up issues affecting health – like water and sanitation problems, and sometimes preschool programmes – on their advocacy agendas but as far as I know, there is no concerted focus of the larger movement on these subjects.

Access to land for drying fish is one area where women's organizations take up struggles as they are constantly being displaced. Fisheries management issues are less addressed. Rights of women fishworkers in the fish markets and sometimes at landing centres are issues that are taken up, but generally women fishers' Organizations are out of mainstream labour movements.

Mobility has always been a reality for fish vendors, but now they travel further and for longer periods than before as they use various means of transport. Participation has given women vendors greater visibility as a labour sector although they are still not included in the labour rights discourse or recognised as workers by the labour department.

The gradual breaking down of the village community and joint family also means that the social reproduction burden of women increases.

To cope with the changing times, I see women vendors increasingly putting their children in boarding schools as they give value to education while they struggle to earn the money. There is a growing level of indebtedness as women try to meet modern demands of society and their

children. Increasing numbers of vendors buy fish from the wholesale markets where fish is landed at the big landing centres, sometimes a few days journey away from them. Hence the struggle between those who sell good fresh fish and poor frozen fish has become visible.

In terms of legislative and policy support, since a few years, scientists from the technical institutions of government fisheries have been reaching out to women and assisting them to increase income through better practices and value addition. This also has to do with scientists becoming more aware of gender issues. There is improved aggregated data on women in fisheries but data is not available at local levels. There is no specific legislative or policy support for women's employment although there are some fund allocations for women's development.

Moving from empowerment to agency is an important step forward. Not all empowerment leads to agency – if we understand agency as the interest and ability of women to advance their strategic interests. While empowerment certainly helps and has helped women advance their practical interests, on the whole there are only a few women's groups/movements that have been able to advance their strategic interests. Advancing strategic interests is more a collective process, a process of Organizing and advocacy. For instance, there are only a few women's organizations that advocate for reservation of market spaces, for tenure of land for drying fish, for the proper functioning of the Local Complaints Committees to take up issues of sexual harassment at the workplace, etc. This is also because the leadership given from outside the organization membership is also way behind in such conceptualisation and hence the mobilisation does not focus on such issues.

The other factor is that women are still not taken very seriously in the fishworker Organizations and when in their midst the so called 'broader issue' gets the focus.

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Fisherwomen vendors, Gujarat, India.
Photo credit: Neena Koshy

Nakkapalle dryfish market, Andhra Pradesh, India.
Photo credit: Dharmesh Shah



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India's 2017 National Policy on Marine Fisheries (NPMF) and the 2018 Draft National Policy on Inland Fisheries and Aquaculture (NIFAP), both provide guidance for mainstreaming gender equity in inland and marine fisheries and aquaculture value chains. In policies and drafts, women's contribution in the fisheries sector in India is being recognised as crucial. However gender mainstreaming fails when the question of implementation and execution comes in.

In 2019, national- and state-level workshops were conducted by the ICSF in collaboration with different fishworkers organizations, NGOs and government departments. Fishworkers from Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra and West Bengal actively participated in these workshops, where the issues of women fishworkers were discussed at length in the context of several key issues. The context included, first, the issue of human rights, including the right to life with dignity and

recognition of their identity, as well as the different problems of fishers and the engagement of fishers with their respective state governments in fulfilling their demands. Second, it included the question of labour rights – the right to tenure, right to work in better conditions and with proper infrastructure in the marketplace, equal wages, occupational safety, and the provision for health schemes and policies. Third was the question of environmental sustainability, particularly the fact that women's participation should be ensured and supported in resource management and in the sustainability of the sector. Besides, it was felt that



Contai Fish market, East Midnapore, West Bengal, India.
Photo credit: Shilpa Nandy.

women should also be helped to adapt to climate changes, including especially the aftermath of natural disasters like tsunamis and cyclones like Fani, as climate change has serious ramifications upon income, livelihood, health and food security. Finally, the context of the discussions included the social impact. It was pointed out that within communities, the members of fishworkers organizations are actively involved in mobilising the women fishworkers and fishers around their tenure rights, labour rights and women rights. But there are lots of challenges and a lack of straightforward mechanisms to enforce human rights entitlements, and also practical difficulties such as the lack of resources to support and sustain women's struggles.

To answer the question of whether women are better organized today than they were in the past, yes, women are slowly but surely getting organized

all over India. In 2016, a women fishworkers' organization was created in West Bengal and it was named as Dakshinbanga Matsyajibi Forum Women's Wing, which has 11 executive members. This is trying to mobilise women fishers and fishworkers by forming committees at the local, block and district level. It is doing so by holding several meetings, deputations and workshops, organizing the women and making them aware about their rights, and raising their demands with the State Fisheries Minister, Fisheries Department and District Magistrates, and locally, with the village level governance structures – the panchayats. The executive members have represented the forum in different workshops and conferences at national and state levels and expressed their views on gender and women issues.

The participation of women in artisanal fisheries varies from country to country, and takes different



Fish landing centre, Dadanpatrobar, East Midnapore, West Bengal, India. Photo credit: Shilpa Nandy.



Contai Fish market, East Midnapore, West Bengal, India. Photo credit: Shilpa Nandy.

forms. Women participate directly in fishing, and take care of the fishing equipment and other inputs that male fishers use. They participate in many ways in the financing of fishing activities. Women workers in the seafood processing industry are perceived to be trustworthy, meticulous, quality-minded and willing to work for lower wages than men. They are also more vulnerable than men. They are marginalised in planning and policy making, and suffer inequalities and discrimination. However, due to their increased participation and mobilisation, women fishers are making their voices heard. The government is also recognising their identities and focusing on the questions of gender equity and gender mainstreaming.

Traditional skills and techniques used by the fisherfolk are at risk of being replaced by modern unsustainable technologies that damage riverine ecosystems. The success of efforts directed at

restoring inland water resources depends on understanding and recognising the important role that fisherfolk and their traditional knowledge systems can play in coping with the environmental damage.

Attempts are being made to include fisherfolk in inland fisheries restoration activities; document the traditional techniques and skills they practice; restrict the use of modern unsustainable technologies for fishing; encourage the use of traditional methods, incorporating traditional skills and knowledge in current knowledge systems; and address poverty and livelihood issues of fisherfolk.

There are some noteworthy policies and legislations drafted in the fisheries sector at national and international levels, like the SSF Guidelines. The welfare schemes available in India

for the fisherfolk community are various savings cum relief schemes. In the state of West Bengal, no data is available on women's employment and participation in fisheries.

As a result of the Dakshinbanga Matsyajibi Forum's interventions, the state- and district-level authorities extended help to seven women fish vendors in the form of special support which included fish-carrying bicycles and weighing machines. The Fisheries Minister has promised to take into account the priorities of women fishworkers while providing government support to fishing communities.

The progress in organizing has been slow. However, we have spread some awareness among the women fishworkers within the Forum on the need to organize separately. We have still not been able to mobilise women to take part in mass

agitation. It is difficult to develop women leaders from the fishing community due to several factors: women do not have family support because of social taboos and patriarchal views prevailing in the community; women are too poor to engage in activities beyond their own livelihood efforts; most fisherwomen lack education and even basic literacy; and finally, there is a lack of interest in empowering these women among the local panchayats and government officials.



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According to the Norwegian Fishery Register, Fiskeremantallet, Norway, today has about 311 full-time and 61 registered part-time women fishers, and 8,777 full-time and 1,342 part-time men fishers – a heavy reduction in numbers compared to the 1970s and late 1980s. The reduction continued past 1989 with the cod moratorium and the introduction of the quota system in 1990 for coastal fishers north of 62 degrees latitude.

In 2013, according to a research report from Norwegian Institute of Food, Fisheries and Aquaculture Research (NOFIMA), there were 6,253 men and 3,604 women who constituted the workforce in the country's fish plants. Among these, 5,700 workers lived in Norway, 396 workers came from western EU-countries, 2,961 from eastern EU-countries and 800 from the rest of the world. Researchers also report that there are probably more men and foreign workers in 2020 compared to 2013. In this article, I will focus on the fishers and the plant workers in spite of the fact that today there are many fishery related jobs onshore in Norway.

In response to Yemaya's queries, I will talk about political participation, policies, legislative conditions and agreements relevant for Norway as a welfare state that have impacts on fisheries'



labour rights, ownership rights as well as participation in resource management.

Even though laws and policies at the national level can and do constitute an important and supportive framework in fisheries, what happens at the regional and national levels may be different, leading to different gender practices locally. This will be described through some examples. Thereafter, I will focus on certain organizational aspects, especially in relation to the labour union, the owners' associations as well as women's actions and voluntary associations. The latter may represent women's empowerment and agency. I conclude by summarising some aspects of women's situations applying a gender equality perspective.

The Norwegian fishing fleet is regulated by the Ship Safety Act and its onshore processing industry by the Working Environment Act. Norway also has legislation strengthening the position of human rights in Norwegian law (the Human Rights Act) that came into force in 1999. In 2007, Norway ratified the ILO Convention 188 on working conditions in fishery. Since 1994, Norway has signed the EEA agreement following the EU

standard. Thus, the Norwegian fisheries operate within the context of national and international acts and policies. Since late 1970, Norway has also had an Equality Act and, from 2018, an Equality and Anti-Discrimination Act with impacts on some of the sectors and policies. This does not mean that gender equality always exists. Norway has a long coast with many boats, vessels and fish plants. As a result, there are many actors and varied organizational patterns. Given such an industrial structure, the practices vary, sometimes with different results for women and men.

In addition to the acts and regulations mentioned, there is a quota system involving a closed and an open quota. Closed quotas were, in 1990, given free of charge to active fishers fishing north of 62 degrees latitude. Since 2004, a political decision was taken allowing closed group quotas to be bought and sold, leading to an enormous increase in the value of these quotas. The open group quotas are smaller in terms of tons compared to the closed group quotas, and are distributed to active fishers by the Directorate of Fisheries, but returned when a fisher quits fishing. Most of the women coastal fishers have a quota in the the open group. This also results in differences in income. In 2017, men fishers earned at the average NOK 881,000 (ca USD 83,000 USD) a year compared to women who earned NOK 510,000 (ca USD 48,000). The Equality and Anti-Discrimination Act does not prevent gendered work and wages. Having a closed or an open quota seems to have larger effects than the Equality Act.

The hourly wages for women and men were equalised in the 1970s with employers following agreements between labour unions and employers' associations. Where piecework with different pay rates continued, wage differences also continued. As my research in the 1980s discovered, such differences were, among others, connected to men's stronger bargaining power. Today the gender difference is explained by the types of work and working conditions that women and men have. Many fish plants have more men with permanent contracts based on fixed wages compared to women with seasonal contracts.

Practices at fish plants, employed in periods of fishery crises, often weakened the regulations defined by legislation and formal agreements. One example from the 1980s and 1990s is the reduction in the number of days of notice given to workers before and after an employment break. Since it was linked to unemployment benefits, the reduction, which was triggered by the scarcity of fish, hit women harder than men since men were often called in for maintenance work.

Depending on the working conditions in fish factories, the type of work done – for example, filleting – and the number of years that the women have worked, they reported earlier chronic muscular ailments such as problems of the arm and shoulder. This often results in sick leave with sick payment from the factory (up to 14 days) and from the government (up to one year). Even though women and men have equal rights, women appear to be more vulnerable to such issues, especially when it comes to routine and monotonous work, for example continuous filleting.

Legally, foreign workers have the same rights as Norwegian workers. However, well-educated workers report that they earn more in the Norwegian fish processing industry than they would in an administrative job demanding a master's degree in their home countries. Just as there are variations in Norwegian workers contracts, there are also variations in the contracts of foreign workers. Some residents from abroad may have permanent contracts while others have seasonal contracts. As per the Working Environment Act, seasonal contracts offer fewer welfare rights than do permanent contracts, since the employers having responsibilities only as long as the contract lasts.

In spite of contractual employment, there are examples that foreign workers lack information about rules and regulations and their entitlements with respect to, for example, working and housing conditions and payment for overtime. Thus, their employment conditions may be insecure. Recently, there have been examples of Lithuanian workers – some of them well-educated – going to court to get



the same rights as Norwegian workers, and winning, at least at the district court level.

Since the 1980s, the Directorate of Fisheries has started recording the number of men and women in fishing, their age and place of residence. Statistics for boats and vessels as well as for quotas are also being recorded. Data with respect to gender may be difficult to find but can be requested for. For workers, Statistics Norway also has an employment register. However, their open municipal registers include many different industries and it is difficult for people without local knowledge to ascertain whether the workers are related to fishery or not. There is an absence of easily accessible quantitative data. All these examples illustrate that gender equality is still to be reached in fishing and fish work in Norway in spite of The Equality and Anti-Discrimination Act. Nationality also seems to play an important role and leads to differences among workers.

The workers' union in Norway has had active women as members. This is also the case with the seagoing owners' section of The Fishermen's Association. Women have participated at meetings and in committees where resource management is

discussed. In 2019, Fiskarlaget Nord, the provincial association for the northernmost fishers in The Fishermen's Association, for the first time, elected a woman as a board member. In this way, women in the fisher-related associations still represent a significant minority.

The last 10 – 15 years Norway has also given fishers younger than 30 years who fulfill some criteria given by the Directorate of Fishery, quotas in the closed group, called recruitment quotas. One of the local associations has earlier proposed to the regional board of The Fishermen's association, Fiskarlaget Nord, that women should have 50 per cent of the 10 – 15 of these quotas. The provincial association on the upper level, Fiskerlaget Nord, made a decision that supported women, but added a sentence that men should not be discriminated against. When the Directorate made the final decision, only men were favoured according to the criteria used. So far, only one woman out of more than 120 has received such a quota free of charge. While new political signals from the Norwegian Parliament are awaited, it seems no such quotas will be given free of charge in 2020.

Facing page: Jørgen Lindkvist, fisherman and his fishing craft 'Jan Egil', Norway. Photo Credit: Siri Gerrard.
Below: Skarsvåg Village, Finnmark, the northern-most province of Norway. Photo Credit: Rune Seppola.



The policies of the recruitment quotas are also in line with the politics in most official white papers. They seldom problematise the condition of women fishers. I have even heard male members of The Fishermen's Associations comment that women's interests are taken care of since women have access to the open group quotas. In this way, women in fishing remain, to use Simone de Beauvoir's term, the second sex.

One of the changes the Directorate of Fisheries has made is in relation to the regulation for pregnant women and mothers with children under three years of age. They can continue to be registered even though they are not active fishers in this period. This change is the result of advocacy by fishing couples and women fishers' actions. However, most women fishers in the open group have their own boats and thus expenses to pay loans and maintenance. There is no or little support for them. Nevertheless, these examples show that women can use their power in organizing and effecting change in the professional unions and associations.

Women in the coast have always worked to improve the social, cultural and material conditions of their villages through voluntary associations and actions. An example is Norges Fiskarkvinnelag (Norwegian Fisherwomen's Association), an association which does not exist any longer on the national level, but was originally connected to The Fishermen's Association. Another example is the Norwegian Women and Family Association in coastal areas, which works to improve the situation of women and families in Norway and in other countries. Some of the members of these associations as well as other women often from fishery districts, became important members of political parties and have provided support to a more women-friendly fishery politics.

In some villages, gender-mixed community associations (bygdslag) have replaced women's voluntary associations to work for the improvement of the village and seeking representation with the municipality. The members are inhabitants, residents from foreign countries as

well as out-migrants. Women are active both as regular members and office bearers. These associations have sometimes played an important role and led to women's empowerment, encouraging competence, better practices and courage among members.

The Norwegian examples show that women still represent a large minority among fishers and a smaller though still significant minority among workers. Even though women in recent years have served as board members in coastal fishing associations and even as ministers of fisheries, they still face many barriers in their efforts to change fishery politics in a more women-friendly direction.

Women have always been active in community work, in women's actions and associations, and now increasingly, also in community associations. The Fishermen's Associations have passed a few political demands supporting women, for example, to get recruitment quotas. While until now mostly men received these recruitment quotas, the Directorate of Fisheries have put in place special regulations for pregnant women and mothers with small children. Despite these small successes, official fishery policies as articulated in the government's white papers still pay little attention to women and gender. As a result, an imbalanced gender fishery structure persists. Although, fortunately, there are women and some men who refuse to give in and continue to fight, the road to gender equality in Norway's fisheries is still slippery and long.

Note: Great thanks to Edgar Henriksen who supplied me with the NOFIMA reports, Jahn Petter Johnsen who gave me information about foreign fishers and last, but not least, to the Yemaya editorial team which improved my English.



Facing page: Skarsvåg Small boat fishing, Norway.
Photo credit: Siri Gerrard.



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Women in the fisheries sector are active members of the Self Employed Women's Association Union (SEWA-Union) in the state of Kerala in southern India. Most of the women are involved in selling fish and in fish processing activities. In Kerala, such workers are considered to be allied workers. Their role in sustaining small-scale fishing, amidst the challenges posed by deep-sea and other corporate types of fishing, is well recognized by society. In the history of Kerala, the initial experiences of collectivization of the fisher community were through the formation of cooperatives; now fishers are also part of other political formations, including trade unions.

SEWA's involvement with fisher women in Kerala started in 2008 when it registered as a state level women's trade union in the informal sector. This registration followed the recognition of SEWA as a national trade union in India. SEWA organizes various sections of informal women workers, including domestic workers, fish workers, reed workers, tailors, home-based workers and other traditional workers.

In Kerala, women are active in the small-scale fisheries mainly in the districts of Trivandrum, Kollam and Kasergod. The changes in small scale fishing in the last two decades have changed the nature of engagement of women in the sector. Initially, women were involved in pre-harvest activities, such as making and mending fishing nets. They lost this role as machine-made nets came into

the sector in the mid-1970s. In the post-harvest activity, women collect fish from the landing centers and take it either to the market to sell or for drying fish. They do these activities as self-employed workers. In some places where fish landings are large, women also engage in wage labour, drying or sorting the fish at large centres. With mechanization of boats and increasing size of nets, fishery has got more centralized. This has altered women's access to fish. They have to travel longer distances to the landing centers, compete with male merchants and pay ready cash for the fish.

Most women find their vending space in state-run or privately-owned retail markets. Many are also engaged in door to door vending of fish. It was not an easy task to organize these women. Never in the mainstream of economic activity, and considering themselves dependent on their husbands, they were not ready to get organized. It took constant interactions in the markets and meetings in the villages to prepare them to organize on their own. In the beginning, the meetings ended in big clashes with interference from men in fish trade. This stopped only when women took on the leadership and marginalized those women who were unwilling to organize independent of their men folk.

Women in fish vending face numerous problems in Kerala. No infrastructure for preservation and

storage of fish at the landing centres or in fish markets have been provided. Such facilities would help women purchase in bulk and not force them to engage in distress sales. Facilities for resting at harbours are non-existent for women. This lack of basic sanitation facilities in marketplaces was one of the common issues that the union took up in many areas, and as a result of the struggle, in many markets, facilities have improved. Other issues include the male domination of market places in all the districts; unjust tax collecting systems; and the domination of male head load unions in the district of Trivandrum, which prevents women from handling their own fish stocks.

Tax collection is contracted to the highest bidder - often the main wholesale fish merchant - who then becomes the authority in the market. The bidder exercises his own right to collect any amount of tax. Inside the markets, the unionized head loaders determine the unloading rates which are exorbitant. SEWA has taken up this issue with the headload workers board at district and state levels, leading to some agreements being worked out on headload charges and market taxes. The women leaders are involved in all the discussions and negotiations related to their markets with the authorities. They have realized the strength of collective action.

SEWA Union has a trade committee for the fisheries sector where fifteen of the local leaders are members. This committee meets frequently to update and discuss issues pertaining to their own areas and markets. Over the years, this trade group has grown into a strong committee with independent leadership capabilities. Women are aware of the potentially adverse impact of the current development paradigm on the coast and the community. The trade committee organized against the Vizhinjam Industrial harbor after realizing the environmental consequences of a large port on fishing communities in the region. During the cyclone Ockhi and the devastating floods, many SEWA members lost their husbands and their means of livelihood. These experiences have helped the Union develop a strong understanding and position on environmental issues.

Data published by the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI) shows an increase in the number of women engaged in fisheries-related activities in recent years. Our own experience also reveals that many women who have crossed their child-rearing age are ready to work in the sector. Despite the large numbers of female workers in the sector, and also, despite the fact that SEWA is a recognized union of fisher women, it was hardly ever invited to the discussions between trade unions in the fisheries sector and the government. However, today, as a result of the persistent struggles of women fish workers, the union is invited by the government for all joint discussions. Through this process, SEWA is now involved in important discussions on the marine fisheries bill and other policy matters in Kerala.

Sustaining unity among women in the union is a continuous process. They have to face up to strong male presence in the markets. Women have no direct access to fish in the harbours and are cheated by the male merchants who control the fish auction. Most of them have huge debts contracted from building houses and from payments towards education, marriages and other responsibilities. Since the women are out on all the days except Sundays, they cannot play a role in local state-run fisheries organizations and cooperatives like the MatsyaFed Cooperative Society or the Kudumbasree Cooperative.

Workplace rights and the right to social security are emerging as important issues within the union. Discussions around the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines) have created a certain level of understanding of women's key role in sustaining small scale fisheries among the membership. However, there is still a long way to go.



Pages 42 – 43:
Women removing the shell from mangrove mudshells
in Malaita, Solomon Islands. Photo credit: Wade Fairley.





TURNING POINTS

A Decade of Change for Women in Fisheries