

Leading by example

By electing a woman, Nadine Nembhard, to lead it, the World Forum of Fisher Peoples is sending the right message to fishing communities

By **Vivienne Solis Rivera**
(vsolis@coopesolidar.org), Member,
ICSF, and Director,
CoopeSolidar R.L.,
Costa Rica

For many years, *Yemaya* has been carrying articles related to the World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP), a mass based association of small-scale fisher people from across the world, founded in 1997 by a number of mass based organisations from the Global South. WFFP was established in response to the increasing pressure being placed on small-scale fisheries, including habitat destruction, anthropogenic pollution, encroachment on small-scale fishing territories by large-scale fishing fleets, illegal fishing and overfishing, and more recently, climate change.

Twenty-nine member organisations from 23 countries representing over ten million fisher people make up the WFFP. As it supports its members to strengthen their organisational capacities and advocates for the rights of fisher people, the WFFP is led by a woman as its General Secretary – Nadine Nembhard.

Nadine Nembhard is a fisherwoman from Belize, a Caribbean country in the northeastern coast of Central America.

Belize has around 3000 fisher people, including artisanal fishers, fishing for lobster and conch, exported mainly to the US. There are also finfish fishers, who sell at the local fishing market. Many fishers are members of fisheries cooperatives, who support them with market access and other benefits.

Nadine is 37 years old, and has been working in the sector for the past 15 years. She spent nine years working with the Belize Fishermen Cooperative Association (BFCA), the umbrella organization for the fishing industry in Belize. The BFCA helped with capacity building, lobbying with the government on policy and legislation, and finding opportunities on how fishers can improve on their livelihoods. In Belize, cooperatives were first formed in the 1960s, for ordinary fishers to fight against the private sector in fisheries. BFCA has existed since seventies. Nadine's work at the BFCA came to an end six years ago. The fisheries cooperatives sustaining BFCA were themselves in financial trouble because of recession, and BFCA was forced to downsize. However Nadine continued to be associated with the fisheries sector, and is

now the first female General Secretary of the World Forum of Fisher Peoples.

According to Nadine, the life of a fisherwoman is full of hardships. It is a struggle for survival, with challenges from many quarters – the weather, policy conditions, coast guards out to disturb fishers. Fishers are never sure of having everything in order given the many restrictions obstructing them from carrying on with their work freely. In addition there is the ever-present competition from the private sector, threatening their livelihoods.

Nadine's message to fisherwomen of the world is to be optimistic even though there are so many hardships to be faced. She believes that the sector has strong leaders at every level, whether national, regional or global. In the case of the Caribbean countries, there are organisations like the Caribbean Network of Fisherfolk Organisations (CNFO) at the regional and the WFFP at the global level, all of them fighting for the rights of all fisher people. In Nadine's opinion, there is now a special interest in women, stemming from the 2014 endorsement of the SSF Guidelines. This development brought about greater awareness regarding, and increased documentation of, the struggles of women along the fish value chain, together with an interest in improving the conditions of women in the fishing industry. The SSF Guidelines, in particular, Section 8 on Gender Equality, are in Nadine's view a good starting point for going forward.

When asked about the role as the first woman General Secretary of the WFFP, Nadine says that the WFFP never had a woman or a young person as its General Secretary ever before. If fishworkers' organizations across the world are to be vibrant and inclusive, in particular attracting larger participation from the young and from women members, it was important for the WFFP to lead by example. She hoped that her position at the helm would send a strong, positive message regarding women's capacity for leadership across to the membership.

Nadine is married to a fisherman, and is the mother of two children, a son aged 17 years and a daughter aged two years. Her son is hoping to get a fisherman's licence even as he is trying to make a decision on his life choices. **✎**

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