



34 Years in Support of
Small-scale Fishworkers

Yemaya

ICSF'S NEWSLETTER ON GENDER AND FISHERIES

From the Editor

The global pandemic accompanies us into a new year that is witnessing the emergence both of aggressive variants of the virus and vaccines to combat it. As the global economy reels under the impact of lockdowns and restrictions, the fishing sector has been particularly hard hit. Fishing activities across the sector dipped with demand drops and labour shortage. For women in the fisheries, the year was extremely challenging.


According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), women, who make up nearly half the labour force in fishing and aquaculture, were particularly affected, on the one hand by reduced landings and the closure or reduction of processing and marketing activities, and on the other by an increased risk of infection as their activities necessitate contact with others at all stages of the value chain. Additionally, their concentration in the informal sector deprives women of any sort of work protection, while, at the same time, exposing them to greater levels of stress and exhaustion as working hours are intensified.

The multiple crises facing fishing communities are also being compounded in some cases by tardy governmental response. As the article from Mexico reports, despite repeated requests by small-scale fishing communities for COVID safety protocols applicable to the fish value chain, no such guidance it was issued. Amidst the chaos, illegal fishing has witnessed a spike, adding to livelihood difficulties and leading the authors to observe that COVID-19's impacts have exacerbated challenges in all the three dimensions of sustainability: social, economic, and environmental.

The articles from Bangladesh and Myanmar bear testimony to the fact that women in fishing communities in many parts of the world are among the poorest and most vulnerable sections of their societies. Economic dependence, social invisibility and lack of bargaining power keep them tied to exploitative work and abusive life conditions. The lack of data on women in fisheries leads policy makers to ignore their existence; in turn, the absence of policy reinforces the invisibility of women's lives and the continued exploitation of their labour.

Kate Bevitt's conversation with Danika Kleiber and Meryl Williams, who are steering a collaborative global assessment of the contribution of small-scale fisheries to sustainable development, highlights the many problems pertaining to data on women in the fisheries. Women in harvesting are often not registered as fishers while women in processing and marketing, though disproportionately present in these post-harvesting activities, are left out by fisheries agencies. A major effort is needed to redress what the researchers call the "data sexism".

It was only after decades of organized struggle by women in fishing communities that policy makers began to acknowledge and address the reality of gender inequity and inequality in international guidelines and national policy frameworks governing the fishing sector. However, the present pandemic-induced chaos threatens to destabilize the small but significant gains that women in fishing have made. As the year begins, it is important to remember that the current crisis is also an opportunity to double down on the demand for the promotion of small-scale fishing towards promoting environmental sustainability, jobs and livelihoods, and social, particularly gender, equity. It is an opportunity to reach out to women in fishing communities who are facing unprecedented challenges, and to take all steps necessary to improve the lives and livelihood conditions of small-scale fishing communities, especially women and other vulnerable sections.

Yemaya wishes all our readers a meaningful new year! 



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