
FROM EUROPE

A first step on the road to Damascus

Participation in ACFA can be an opportunity to get information about EU policies and practices

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The European Union has a system of consultative committees on sectorial policies, like fisheries. The EU Consultative Committee on Fisheries and Aquaculture (ACFA) is a grouping of mainly big fishing industry interests in the EU.

However, two months ago, following negotiations with EU Development and Environment NGOs—amongst which are ICSF, WWF, Eurostep, Seas at Risk, Greenpeace and CFFA—a representative of small-scale communities is also sitting at the table. And, to the amusement of most of that essentially exclusive male preserve, it is a woman: Danièle Le Sauce, a fisherman's wife from a French small-scale fishing community.

Being part of such an industry-dominated committee is not really a way to influence, in the short term, the EU fishing policy. But it is an opportunity to get important information about EU policies and practices that usually do not reach European or Southern fishing communities, but which affects their livelihood. It is also a way to make a different noise in the harmonious concerto conducted by the EU fishing industry in this Consultative Committee. Expressing public concern about the detrimental impact of the current EU fishing policies on fishing communities of the South and the North is breaking the self-image that EU is promoting *urbi et orbi* of 'an entity fishing in a responsible way'.

The main item on the agenda for Danièle is the promotion of the concept of 'small-scale fishing communities'. This concept is not recognized by EU fishing policy, legislation or administration, which prefers to classify (and divide) people from fishing communities between producer organizations, co-operatives, fishermen, etc., marginalizing women in the process.

At the end of June, the EU Commission (i.e. the administration) organized a meeting with the EU Parliament and the Fisheries Consultative Committee on 'Sustainable Fisheries Management'. Danièle's input related to the role of women from small-scale fishing communities in fisheries resources management. The reaction of the EU Commission was to say: "Please, Madam, stay within the subject". But it did raise some supportive voices from parliamentarians and led to a short debate. Since then, we have learned that a study will be done by the EU on 'the role of women in fisheries'. So, it seems a first step is being taken for changing people's behaviour and mentality. But all our gender indicators are showing that it will be a long, hard and rocky road.