



## PROFILE

### **Amplifying women's voices: Margaret Nakato's important work in organising women in small-scale fisheries in Uganda has received international recognition**

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**M**argaret Nakato, Executive Director of the Katosi Women Development Trust (KWDT), Uganda, was awarded the prestigious Margarita Lizárraga Medal for the biennium 2020-2021, at the launch event of the International Year of Artisanal Fisheries and Aquaculture in November 2019. This medal is the latest among the many accolades she has received in recognition of her efforts in organising women in fishing communities. See the article 'A well-deserved award' in this issue of *Yemaya* for the full text of Margaret Nakato's acceptance speech.

Margaret began to associate with the cause of women in fisheries after witnessing the catastrophic socio-economic changes brought about by the increased catch and export of Nile perch to Europe from Katosi landing site, Uganda, in the mid-1990s. Soaring export rates and sharp declines in access to fisheries resources for the local fish vendors, especially women, resulted in the loss of their jobs. Margaret watched in helplessness as many of the powerful, proud and financially independent women in her family and community faced livelihood loss and fell into the trap of poverty. Looking for alternate sources that would bring income into the lives of these women, Margaret began to realise that their strength lay in organising themselves to sustain their living and to secure their rights to engage in fisheries.

Thus, in 1996, in collaboration with a group of women, Margaret formed Katosi Women

Fishing Group, which subsequently became Katosi Women Development Trust, to coordinate the increasing organisation of women's groups in the community. The Trust supports women, especially from isolated fishing communities, to strengthen engagement in fisheries and other economic activities through access to productive resources, knowledge and skills to improve on their lives.

Right from its inception, KWDT has been involved in multidimensional aspects of development, increasing access to basic social needs such as water and sanitation, knowledge and skill empowerment of women to make informed choices and secure livelihood, and tenure rights. Margaret has been collaborating with governments at local and national levels and with international agencies like the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in formulating and implementing gender-just and sustainable policies influencing the lives of men and women in small-scale fisheries. Margaret believes that there is still a dearth of recognition of women's needs – access to basic amenities, governance of natural resources and risk aversion mechanisms that would help them avoid cycles of deprivation.

Margaret calls for direct investment and collaboration in support of women fishworkers on a broad spectrum of development issues to secure their roles in the sector. She believes that the way for inclusive development is through organised structures at national and international coalitions, and urges women to make their voices heard and fight for their space in the policy making sphere.

Margaret holds a Master of Science degree in development management funded through the Commonwealth Foundation scholarship. She lives in Kampala with her family, including four children, and continues to champion the cause of small-scale fisheries. **M**