

## FROM LATIN AMERICA/ Brazil

### Gender Focus

*Participants at a recent workshop in Brazil discussed the need to valorize the work of women within the fisheries sector*

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A six-day workshop on *Gender and Coastal Fishing Communities in Latin America* was organized recently, in June 2000, in the coastal fishing village of Prainha do Canto Verde, in the state of Ceara, Brazil. The workshop was organized by the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF) as part of its Women in Fisheries (WIF) programme.

The objectives were as follows:

- To develop an understanding of trends in fisheries development and their implications for coastal fishing communities in the Latin American context;
- To make visible women's roles in fisheries and in fishing communities in Latin America and to reflect on strategies to strengthen their meaningful participation;
- To facilitate greater networking between organizations representing, and working with, artisanal fishworkers in the Latin American context.

The group of 36 persons that came together was diverse and rich in experience. There were participants from five countries in the Latin American region, i.e. Chile, Peru, Brazil, Ecuador and Mexico, and from India, France and Belgium.

The group included representatives from the Confederacion Nacional de Pescadores Artesanales de Chile (CONAPACH), Federacion de Integracion Y Unificacion de Pescadores (FIUPAP) of Peru, Movimento Nacional dos Pescadores (MONAPE) of Brazil and the Federaci3n Nacional de Cooperativas Pesqueras del Ecuador (FENACOPEC), the national fishworker organizations from Chile, Peru, Brazil and Ecuador respectively. It also included representatives from NGOs, research institutes and organizations supporting fishworkers from Brazil, Chile, Peru and Mexico.

Participants included both men and women. This was a conscious decision, since gender was seen as an issue which both men and women of fishworker organizations, NGOs etc. engage with. It is equally significant that all the country delegations felt similarly, and both the male and female leadership of the organizations invited participated in the workshop.

During the workshop it was clear that in all of the countries represented at the workshop, the pressure on coastal fishing communities and on their livelihoods is increasing. This is also a consequence of globalization and of the neo-liberal policies being adopted by states in the region.

The picture that emerged about the work of women within the fisheries and within fishing communities was revealing. It was clear, of course, that this differs by culture and region and between rural and urban areas, and that, it is not possible to generalize. The common factor, however, is that the work of women is rarely seen as 'productive'. It has low social value and is normally seen as an extension of the 'domestic' space. Little value is attached to the domestic and community tasks performed by women.

This despite the enormous diversity of tasks performed by women, both within the fisheries (in harvest and in pre- and post harvest activities), and within the family and community.

Why then does the work of women continue to be invisible? It was in this context that the workshop saw several interesting and thought-provoking discussions on gender issues. There were many debates on what the concept of gender actually was/meant, and how this conceptual understanding could be translated into practical initiatives. There were, as can be expected, several different positions.

The discussion was certainly not conclusive. However, overall the following broad consensus emerged:

- The work and roles of women within the fisheries and within fishing communities has historically been, and continues to be, important, though often invisible and undervalued;
- There is a need to valorize the work and labour of women, and to recognize this as an important part of the productive chain within family enterprises. This may involve redefining what is seen as fisheries;

- However, these efforts need to take place within an overall context of strengthening and affirming the way of life and cultural identity of coastal communities, and on fostering mutual respect between men and women. There is a need to be wary of triggering a divisive conflict within the community;
- Women's participation in fishworker organizations should not only be seen to support issues important to men. There are issues that are specific to women that need to be addressed. The role of women should not be seen as complementary but as an issue in its own right.

In general, there was a commitment and receptiveness among the participants of the need to be sensitive to gender issues within their own contexts and organizations.

However, as one of the participants pointed out with some bitterness, the issue may remain a merely verbal concern, with little actual implementation. According to her, some colleagues talk of gender, but when they come to power, they do not create the space for women fishworkers within the organization. The projects they pursue have nothing to do with women. Practice, not talk, is important, she stressed.

In the same vein, another participant stressed that increasing the participation of women should also mean creating the spaces within organizations to discuss issues that are of concern to women, in which women are the subjects. Women should not be seen merely as agents supporting the agenda of their men.

Participants agreed to work together on gender issues. A set of proposals for follow-up actions within a definite time-frame was finalized. They also proposed the creation of a group, with representatives from each of the countries present, to see through the implementation of the proposals.