

*Yemaya* Dossier

# Gender Focus

A collection of articles from *Yemaya*



---

**International Collective in Support of Fishworkers**  
27 College Road, Chennai 600 006, India



*Yemaya* Dossier

# Gender Focus

A collection of articles from *Yemaya*

---

**International Collective in Support of Fishworkers**  
27 College Road, Chennai 600 006, India

*Gender Focus*

A collection of articles from *Vemaya*

*Vemaya Dossier*

*Published by*

International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF)

27 College Road, Chennai 600 006, India

Tel: +91 44 2827 5303 Fax: +91 44 2825 4457 Email: [icsf@icsf.net](mailto:icsf@icsf.net)

Website: <http://www.icsf.net>

March 2007

Copyright © ICSF 2007

While ICSF reserves all rights for this publication, any portion of it may be freely copied and distributed, provided appropriate credit is given. Any commercial use of this material is prohibited without prior permission. ICSF would appreciate receiving a copy of any publication that uses this publication as a source.

The opinions and positions expressed in this publication are those of the authors concerned and do not necessarily represent the official views of ICSF.

## Contents

Preface.....	vii
Growing recognition.....	1
Count us in too .....	3
Uniting for health and safety.....	4
Proud to be a fishworker.....	5
Gender Focus .....	7
Migrating to survive .....	9
Who is a fishworker? .....	11
Women Weaving Networks .....	13
We don't wish to compete .....	15
Shared concerns.....	16
My life is the sea.....	19
Street of the Shrimp Ladies.....	21
Questioning invisibility.....	24
Unaccounted and undervalued .....	26
Long road ahead .....	28
A historic victory.....	30
Whose gain? .....	32
Supporting the struggle .....	34
Sea Martyrs of San Antonio.....	35
Networking to support .....	37
Women in the shellfishery .....	40
Low value or high value? .....	42
We, women, are out there, fishing.....	43
A crabby life.....	45
Women are human too.....	47
Cleaned Out .....	49
Closing the gap.....	51
Profits for a few .....	52
The invisible ones.....	55
And so we Meet Again.....	56
Fisherwomen as researchers.....	58

Skirting the ban .....	60
Not amusing .....	61
Whose problem?.....	62
Life and Debt .....	64
Harsh working conditions.....	66
Public Hearing.....	68
A bleak future.....	70
Coming together.....	72
Planning them out? .....	75
“Pay for it” .....	77
A feminist perspective.....	79
Not a rosy picture .....	81
Consult us first.....	84
Ready for the struggle .....	87
Development for whom? .....	90
Women as leaders .....	92
Fishing pioneers .....	94
I will pay you one day.....	95
Proud of their achievements.....	96
Talking shop .....	97
Support our Trade.....	99
The tireless one .....	101
Women are Capable.....	102
On the brink .....	104
Why Deny Us the Right to Live? .....	106
“If you strike a woman, you strike a rock” .....	107
What next?.....	110
A more central role .....	113
“Small fry” .....	115
Room to Manoeuvre .....	120
Hopes amidst the nightmare.....	122
What’s ‘fishing’?.....	124
A sea of options.....	125
A village built with fish.....	127
Information is Strength .....	129
Empowering Fishing Communities .....	131

Needed: A sea change .....	133
Our First Steps .....	135
Challenging stereotypes.....	137
A new world ? .....	139
I collected oil from beaches.....	142
Penalized for what? .....	143
Shaking up traditions .....	145
A winner of battles and hearts .....	148
Bouncing back .....	150
Women, men and fishing quotas .....	152
Wedded to the sea.....	154
Gender Focus .....	156
Right to decent work .....	159
Not broad enough.....	161
Changing Tides: Gender, Fisheries and Globalization.....	162





## PREFACE

Women of fishing communities across the world play vital roles in fisheries, and in sustaining their households, communities, social networks and cultures. While these roles are central to maintaining livelihoods and the very activity of fisheries, they often remain unacknowledged and undervalued.

*Yemaya*, the gender and fisheries newsletter from ICSF was initiated in 1999 to draw attention to women's roles and work in the fisheries and in fishing communities, as well as to initiatives being taken by them to organize and defend their interests and the interests of their communities. It was also to provide a meaningful forum for sharing of experiences, views and strategies.

This web dossier compiles selected articles from *Yemaya* by region—Asia, Africa, Latin America, Europe, Pacific Islands and North America. The articles, taken together, provide a broad overview of the key issues facing women in the fisheries sector in each region, as well as the local, national and regional initiatives being taken by women's groups to organize around their concerns.

The struggle for recognition is perhaps the most recurrent theme that runs across all the articles. Often, the way fishing is defined and fisheries understood, excludes women's work. Nor is women's work reflected in fisheries statistics. There are implications of this invisibility, among other things, for the access of women fishworkers to social security and policy support.

Another cross-cutting theme is the struggle for resources essential for the livelihoods of fishing communities. Fishing communities are faced with displacement from coastal lands, due to tourism and other developments on the coast, as well as with pollution and degradation of coastal and fisheries resources, with adverse implications for their livelihoods. Several articles describe the struggle of communities to retain access to fisheries resources. Of particular concern is the trend towards restricting access to fish resources—through quota-based systems or systems that limit the access of part-time/ seasonal workers—and the threats to livelihoods.

Several of the article focus on labour issues, such as the conditions of work in fish processing plants and the need for better working conditions, social security and fair wages. Another important theme, particularly from Africa, is related to fish trade—the need to support trade in artisanally processed fish products locally and regionally, the impact of fish exports on women's access to fish, etc.

There are, as well, profiles of women fishworkers and leaders, detailing their workday, their struggles and their lives. There are also articles about the kinds of economic alternatives that women and women's groups are exploring, within and outside the fisheries, to secure their livelihoods.

And finally, many articles are about women organizing and establishing solidarity networks to defend their interests and the interests of their communities. These come from all the regions, in the form of stories, reports and statements from workshops and conferences. What is as interesting is that these organizational initiatives are as much about longer-term issues of community and environmental sustainability, as about the interests of women as workers.

The articles in this dossier capture the range of issues facing fishing communities and particularly, women of these communities.



## FROM LATIN AMERICA/ Brazil

### Growing recognition

**Women fishworkers emerge as subjects in their own right in the province of Para**

**by Maria Cristina Maneschy, Professor at the Federal University of Para, Brazil and coordinator of the ICSF's Women in Fisheries (WIF) programme**

Fishermen and fisherwomen from six coastal municipalities in the province of Pará, Brazil, as well as members of unions and community-based associations, took part in a meeting organized by the Comissão Pastoral dos Pescadores (CPP), from 24 to 26 September this year. The objectives were to present to fishworkers and their organizations an overview of the present trends within the fisheries sector in the province and in the region, and to create opportunities for them to reflect on ways to improve the capacity of artisanal fishing communities to resist adverse developments.

Titled "Fishermen and Fisherwomen Looking for Citizenship in the New Times", the meeting was held in the village of Marudá, a fishing community about 180 km from Belém, the capital of the province of Pará. Sixty people—20 men and 40 women—took part in the meeting. CPP had invited five persons from each of the municipalities where it works directly, or where there are fishworkers organizations and groups, like the ones with which the ICSF-WIF project is working. But some groups sent more than five participants, as they had managed to raise funds themselves for the trip.

A total of 12 groups were present. Most of them stressed that they were looking for alternative means of income generation as well as for means to improve their organization and to create a political voice. They mentioned the environmental problems facing their fisheries and the fact that they have few means to cope with these.

The absence of representatives from *colônias* was significant. Representatives from only three of the *colônias* were present. Only one *colônia* was represented by its president—the *colônia* of Maracanã municipality, whose president, a young woman, is doing a lot of interesting work, such as approaching local schools to teach children more about fishing culture.

*Colônias*—with their past history of military and government intervention—are still recognized as the professional association for fishermen in Brazil. The *colônia* card is accepted as evidence that a person is a fisherman. The presidents of *colônias* have considerable power, and are often propped up by political or economic interest groups. Most of the *colônias* are politically controlled and rarely work to enhance the social and political status of fishworkers. All fishermen are required to be members of *colônias* and to pay regular fees to it, though this is often not the case in practice.

Associations and independent groups develop initiatives that are not usually taken up by *colônias*—economic projects, for instance. But they also take on roles that should belong to the *colônias* or Federations (of *colônias*), such as representing the interests of fishworkers in governmental institutions dealing with credit programs.

At the meeting, it was interesting to observe the growing recognition of women within the fisheries and within the fishworker movement. The initiatives taken by four of the 12 organizations, directly working with women, are described below. It is significant that some of the themes raised by them are not commonly discussed at fisheries-related events.

- ◆ Women's Association, Cachoeira village: The president of this association spoke of the productive credit they have received from a governmental program, to support net weaving and crab processing activities. The group has received no support from the local *colônia*, making the work more difficult. They have problems in obtaining raw material and in accessing better markets.
- ◆ Women's Association, Baía do Sol: The group recalled its recent initiative in organizing a seminar on the social welfare system. The president of this group has herself learnt how to help fishworkers register with IBAMA—the government agency for the environment—a procedure obligatory for anyone in the country engaged in fish harvest.
- ◆ Group Erva Vida and Association of Women from the Fishing Area, Marudá: Both these groups are engaged in the production of traditional medicines. According to the president of the first group, through this work, women have gained self-esteem and autonomy, since domestic work—even if related to fish or to agriculture—does not have

social recognition. The second group shared its plans to support women's efforts to register in the *colônia*, as an initial step towards their greater recognition as fishworkers.

From the meeting, it was evident that women are emerging as political subjects in these communities and in the fishworker movements within the region. It was also evident that they face strong barriers in achieving their objectives—barriers ranging from a lack of recognition of their roles and identity, to their lack of access to education, to markets or to the means for reaching the markets.

Several challenges face the fishworker movements (MONAPE, MOPEPA etc.), and the NGOs that support them, researchers and activists, as well as policymakers: how best to support these individual group initiatives and to integrate them within a sustainable development programme for the coastal region, which is inclusive of men and women, and their communities.

**FROM LATIN AMERICA/ Brazil****Count us in too**

**Lourdinha Rodrigues has worked to give fishworker women a new self-identity**

**by Chandrika Sharma, Programme Associate, ICSE, Chennai**

In January this year, Cristina Maneschy, the coordinator of the ICSE- Women in Fisheries project in Brazil, and I, had the opportunity to meet with different groups working with artisanal and small-scale fishworkers in Brazil. In Recife, in the north-eastern state of Pernambuco, Nathanael Maranhao of the Centro Josue de Castro, took us to meet with Lourdinha Rodrigues, the secretary of the *colônia* of Ponte de Pedras Goiana for the past two years. It was a rich experience for us.

Lourdinha told us that she started her work in the *colônia* on a voluntary basis. Her earlier workplace was close to the *colônia* office and she had observed that there were no women who were part of it. Concerned about this, she had spoken to the president. She had convinced him that it was in the long-term interest of the *colônia* to have women members, and he gave her the freedom to work on this issue.

In 1995 she called a meeting, and 75 women from the community came for it. She discussed the importance of women's participation in the *colônia*, of having proper documents, of making regular contributions to the INSS (the social security agency in Brazil) and to the *colônia*. Women responded well to her initiative.

During her work, she observed that women lacked self-esteem and did not see themselves as individuals or as fishworkers. They saw the *colônia* as a male space. They came to the *colônia* only to make the payments and not for the meetings. She decided to call another meeting to discuss these issues, though she was still not paid a salary for her work. She also organized meetings to discuss other important issues, such as women's health.

Many more women began to participate in meetings of the *colônia*. This was quite an achievement, since women had to overcome the resistance from their husbands or fathers, and even the resistance from other women. Their level of confidence increased. Women

who went fishing, mended nets, or processed fish (salted and dried) subsequently asked to become members of the *colônia*. At present, of the 649 members in this *colônia*, 200 are women. About 100 women make payments to the INSS. Earlier, the officials at the INSS were not even aware that a woman could be considered a fishworker. Today women feel that the *colônia* is their space too. They participate in weekly meetings, formulate their own agenda, and take notes.

The process has, however, been long. The women were mostly illiterate and Lourdinha worked to teach them how to write their names, keep accounts, etc. They were supported in this work by the Centro Josue de Castro, an institution based in Recife.

Earlier, even the women did not consider themselves as fishworkers. Lourdinha worked on their own reality, and women began to become aware of the role they play in the fishery and in the family and community. They realized that though they work, they are not recognized as workers. Lourdinha worked with images to help them discover their identity. This helped women move from domestic to public spaces. Issues of citizenship, sexual relations and familial problems were also discussed. It became clear that being active in the public domain does not mean that the other roles women play within the family and community are compromised.

Also, as a result of these efforts, payments to the *colônia*, especially from the women, have become more regular, and its income has gone up. The number of *colônia* members receiving unemployment insurance and other forms of social security from the INSS has also increased. Lourdinha's own work has become better recognized. While her earlier efforts were voluntary, she later began to be paid a salary of R60 (about US\$35) per month, which has subsequently been increased to R130.

Meanwhile, the women in the *colônia* have begun to work together to increase their income and employment opportunities. In 1997, 20 women formed a group for fish processing, and undertook a two-week course on this. This has helped improve the utilisation of fish and reduce wastage. Women make small burgers of fish, sausages, etc., and supply to snack bars in Recife. They are being supported by the *colônia* in this work, even though at every stage this has been so only after a struggle.

## From Latin America/ Chile

### Uniting for health and safety

*Unions in fish processing plants in Chile need to take up issues of health and safety as a priority*

by Estrella Díaz Andrade, a sociologist and researcher based in Santiago, Chile

The Xth Region of our country, Chile, is one of the most important fishing zones, both in terms of volumes of fish produced (particularly farmed salmon) and in the variety of shellfish (molluscs and crustaceans) processed for human consumption—fresh, frozen and canned. Production is mainly export-oriented, destined for markets in USA, Japan and Europe.

In this region, there are around 150 processing units varying in size and investment profile—transnational, national, foreign and joint-venture. A significant number of them—about 100—employ women in labour-intensive jobs, in handling, cleaning and packing. Recently, we undertook a study of 23 fish plants, to draw attention to health and hygiene conditions of the work done by women. We found that workers are exposed to a range of hazards—the constant exposure to cold and dampness, having to stand for the entire working day of eight and more hours, the manual handling of loads (trays of raw material), repetitive and monotonous production line work—that need to be addressed if negative impacts on the health of workers are to be avoided. These conditions, essentially inherent in the performance of these jobs, frequently cause different complaints and ailments (lumbago, tendonitis, chronic colds, etc.).

The presence of workers aware of these issues is a key factor in hazard management. But in the entire region we could only find 40 unions in 150 plants. 20 of these are part of a union called the Federation of Fishing Industry Workers of the Xth Region, the President of which is a woman. This organisation has demanded that the employment authorities formulate a safety policy to address the lack of information about health and safety as well as all the other working conditions that act as aggravating factors.

The position of unions in the region is complex. The overall rate of unionisation is over one per cent lower than the national level—14.86 per cent, as against

16.19 per cent—and those affiliated to unions (33,181 workers) represent only five per cent of the unionised workers nationally (613,123). Legally, committees for health and safety, and joint committees for risk prevention are required in every establishment employing more than 25 workers. However, even where they have been formally set up they do not always work in practice or in a satisfactory manner, for various reasons. That is to say, they merely comply with the functions required by law: supervision, training, checking, etc.

It is possible that the preponderance of women workers in processing plants is the reason why there are low levels of organisation and why only moderate pressure is applied for compliance with the norms for preventive measures. Different studies have shown that women tend to be more absent from the proactive processes of prevention, often due to their particular situations, such as their dual responsibilities (for domestic work, childcare, etc.), which makes their involvement impossible. But it is also true that both women and men workers are made to feel that the issues of health and safety are too technical, and that to understand them requires expertise. What is certain is that despite the need for training, those with the appropriate technical capacity are hardly aware of the impact of the work on the health of women.

It would appear that there is a considerable challenge for unions to take up the issues of health and safety as a priority (at times hampered by earnings and job stability) and to involve the workers and their concerns about health and safety as a matter of union procedure, and in the joint committees. Both of these areas require coordinated action. The Federation has proposed such an initiative, which must develop concrete and proven measures, if the quality of life and work of the fishery workers is to be improved.

## FROM LATIN AMERICA/ Brazil

**Proud to be a fishworker**

*Women should keep their heads high and not let go of their struggle*

**Excerpts from an interview with Joana Rodrigues Mousinho, President of the fishermen's *colonia* of Itapissuma in Pernambuco, Brazil, by M. G. Indu of ICSF's Documentation Centre at Chennai**

I was born in the city of Itapissuma. I belong to a family of fishermen and I started fishing at the age of eight. The women's group I work with began in 1975 with the help of the church. This group started very small, but we all realized we had to defend our rights as fishworkers.

We did not have licenses to fish like the men and that was basically our main issue. Today we women fishworkers have licenses. This was the first place in the whole of Brazil where women were given fishing licenses and recognized as fishworkers, just like the men.

I was elected as President of the *colonia*. In the beginning it was very difficult because most of the men believed that the position of a woman was behind the stove or behind the sink washing clothes. Now I am very happy with my work in the *colonia* of fishermen, I am well accepted and many people support me. I fish shrimps, oysters, different types of shellfish and I am very proud to be a fishworker.

I do what I can to defend the rights of the fishworkers and the shellfish gatherers. The *colonia* now has about 2,225 members—1000 men and 1225 women. They are registered in the national welfare system. Today we have 810 women fishworkers who have retired and receive retirement benefits. Women fishworkers also get maternity allowance and an unemployment allowance during the off-season for shrimp. We also have social security in case of accident or death and I believe that us women have great advantages in the fisheries sector.

And it is mostly the women who pay the *colonia* dues for themselves and also for their husbands who often do not give their payments on time.

It is not easy to administrate this *colonia* with more than 2000 registered fishworkers, and also other fishermen who are not registered but still have the same problems. It has not been easy administering this group, and to also be a fishworker, a mother and grandmother.

I was earlier the President of the Federation of Fishermen of the state of Pernambuco. I was elected but I did not like it. I was the first woman to be elected to this position. It was very complicated. All the presidents of *colonias* were only men. They were even upset with me when I went to a meeting in Brasilia with the Ministry of Environment. They thought that I was not supposed to go and that I wouldn't be capable of doing the job.

At the present there are at least three women Presidents of *colonias* in Pernambuco. There are also women who hold positions such as Secretary and Treasurer so that is an advancement for women. So in this sense women have taken a very big step towards improving their rights and that of fishermen in general in the movement.

Women fishworkers collect crabs, mussels and other shellfish and take these to the beach to sell. They also make and repair fishing nets, and sometimes help to repair boats. They participate in the meetings of the community, besides the ones of the *colonia*, and they also take care of the house, the children and the fishermen, besides doing the other chores of the house like cooking, cleaning, gathering firewood and washing the clothes. They may also wash the clothes for other people to get extra income.

Sometimes women bring in more income than their fishermen husbands. The women actually go out and capture the fish and they themselves are the ones who go and sell it. On the contrary the men go to fish on boats which are not theirs using tools which are not theirs and they have to then share with the owner of the boat and the net. They then take very little home. This is not in all the cases, just in some. But in theory, if every fisherman had his own boat and his own net, he will bring in more income.

Women do not do any fishing in the open sea. Our area is the estuarine mangrove area. We mostly work inside the estuary and the problem we have is the

destruction of the mangrove habitat, as a result of shrimp aquaculture projects.

Since most of the women are single mothers and get their daily meals from the mangroves, this destruction is affecting directly the women. So the women know that they have to struggle and go after these issues because that is what their livelihood depends on.

Another big problem that we have is the use of explosives for fishing where all the fish are blown up inside the water, eliminating every single species in our area. Today we do not have as many fish as we used to probably due to this pollution and the use of explosives.

Another threat that we are confronting is that our small community of about 20,000 inhabitants has been trampled by tourism. We have the Santa Monica channel which is so beautiful and there are many mangroves. This attracts many tourists who come in jetskis and high speed boats. These often get entangled in our nets and destroy them. We had an accident where one of these high speed boats hit a fisherman and killed both him and his 14-year old son, except that the owner of this boat was not prosecuted because he is a very rich and powerful man. So the case has been unresolved.

However, because of this we do not hang our heads low and not fight for our rights. On the contrary now we have the help of other persons who enforce our struggle for fishermen's rights in this area.

I have a grand child who is five years old. Before coming here the TV network "Rela Global" interviewed me about the mangroves and my grandchild told me that he had seen me on TV. He was very excited. I told him he should not be excited about being on a TV because this is a struggle and you only achieve things when you struggle for them and you have to start when you are little to fight for things that you will achieve later.

What I would like to tell the other women is that they should keep their heads high, they should not let go of their struggle and should be strong and fight for their rights that they have as fishworkers, just like any fisherman!



## 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*

by Chandrika Sharma, Programme Associate at ICSF's Chennai Office

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.

## From Latin America/ Mexico

### Migrating to survive

*Women crabmeat processors from the Mexican state of Tabasco opt to migrate to the US, despite the difficulties they face*

**Excerpted from a case study prepared by Laura Vidal, Co-ordinator of the St. Thomas Ecological Association of Women, Mexico, for the 'Workshop on Gender and Coastal Fishing Communities in Latin America' organized in June 2000 in Brazil**

The migration of Mexican men and women to the US has been documented since the end of the last century, but not for those who come from the Mexican southeast, specifically from the coastal areas of the state of Tabasco. The majority of Tabascan women, who initiated the migration to North Carolina, come from the municipalities of Paraíso and Jalapa de Méndez.

The migration process is linked to the establishment of the company *Mariscos Boca de México* in the Chiltepec municipality of Paraíso. This was set up in 1986 with the objective of exporting fresh and natural crabmeat to the US.

According to the migrant crabmeat processors, the majority of the employees of this company come from Jalpa de Méndez because the women of Chiltepec no longer want to work for the company after it became *gringo*-owned. The people of the Chiltepec community like neither the company nor its owner and they make fun of the women who work there. They call them stinky because of the strong odour of crab that they give off at the end of the workday.

The migration process was initiated in 1989 when 24 female crabmeat processors, who used to work for *Mariscos Boca de México*, decided to go to work in North Carolina, USA. Under authority of the owner of the company, a US agent initiated the process of contracting crabmeat processors to work in American plants.

The first women migrants were highly criticized in the Chiltepec community and people would comment that the women certainly went there to become prostitutes and that they would never return to their

homes. When the migrants returned after the first season and brought money with them, more confidence was generated for the migration in the second year.

From November to March women work in the Chiltepec plant and then migrate to North Carolina for the April to November season. There are five companies in North Carolina that contract the Tabascan women for crabmeat processing—the biggest one contracting up to 150 women. It is estimated that since 1989 some 1,000 Tabascan women have made the journey to work in the crabmeat processing plants of North Carolina. In the US, other crabmeat processing plants, not related to the company, *Boca de México*, exist, where the work environment is less stressful than in the plants where the Tabascan women work.

The hiring process depends upon the requirements of each company. The selection of employees is based on their workplace capability—according to the contract they must be able to process at least 24 pounds daily. At the same time, the person must be able to meet the legal requirements such as birth certificate, passport, and money for the visa. Potential employees must also have the resources to pay the expenses of their travel and stay (food, lodging, and uniform) and must have the recommendation of someone recognized by *Mariscos Boca de México*. Finally, they must promise to be 'well behaved'. The companies commonly provide medical insurance to the crabmeat processors, but they do not take care of the medical or visa expenses, nor do they cover air travel to and from North Carolina.

The majority of women crabmeat processors are married with children. Their schooling barely consists of a few grades of primary education. The women assert that the main reasons that lead them to migrate are: to complement the resources of the family unit, to avoid having their children quit school, economic necessity, and to improve their housing.

Married women comment that the principal problems that arise, given their absence from the home, are: their husband's anger over the abandonment of his children, his infidelity and an increase in his consumption of alcohol. "I don't travel any more because of my children and because my husband, Antonio, doesn't want me to. He would tell me off because his son was arriving

from high school in Aquiles Serdán at 1 am in the morning. In the first year he told me that he wanted me to go, but when I was there he told me that this would be the last year... (Aurelia)". Or "When I returned, my husband was worse because he was always drinking. He would drink for a month and they'd put him in jail... (Antonia)".

Living conditions in North Carolina, vary depending on the employing plant. The conditions of housing and services provided are inadequate and so must be shared collectively, in some cases among large groups. Some migrants rent rooms, but the majority are housed in trailers with rooms where eight to 10 people live. They eat in collective dining rooms where they must stand in long lines to get the food. Their recreation consists of going out in groups supervised by the company. There are also companies that do not let their workers go beyond certain boundaries. "...Up there it's like a prison. You have to line up. There are 140 people waiting to eat. There were only four televisions to watch...(Francisca)". Or "...We would go out on Sunday. They would take us in groups of 15 to 20 people to go shopping... (Virginia)".

It is interesting to note that these conditions simultaneously foster attitudes of solidarity and mutual support as well as of competition and conflict. Frequently, groups are organized in order to alternate tasks like cooking, cleaning of rooms, being around in cases of illness or depression. The usual motives for conflict are related to difficult living conditions—fights over use of bathrooms, cleaning of areas—and the competition related to the different levels of output in piece-work.

Migrant women note that the workdays that go on for so long, as much in the Chiltepec, Tabasco plant as in North Carolina, are exhausting. However, the economic reward is significantly different. In North Carolina the pay is by piece-work and varies between US\$1.28 and US\$1.60 per pound of crabmeat. Some say that they can do up to 60 pounds a day and earn an average of US\$1,000 every two weeks. In Mexico they are paid a monthly salary of 800 pesos, that is to say the equivalent of US\$80. Of course, it must be remembered that working outside one's country requires one to shell out sizeable sums in rent and food (approximately US\$40 and US\$21 a week respectively), cover health expenses, and pay the costs of travel and the accompanying paperwork.

In spite of the difficult working conditions, the majority of migrant women express a preference for working in the US. The economic reasons for this preference are very important, but they are not the only reasons. Women also experience a heightened sense of self-esteem. "...My husband wouldn't take me into consideration. Now, I told him that if he doesn't shape up he can leave, but I'm staying in the US. I achieved my goal in spite of what my husband says... (Chuncha)."

*(Laura Vidal can be contacted through [das@laneta.apc.org](mailto:das@laneta.apc.org))*

## From Latin America/ Brazil

### Who is a fishworker?

*A discussion group on gender and fisheries at a recent seminar in Brazil, debated the situation of women of fishing communities*

**By Maria Cristina Maneschy, a professor at the Federal University of Para in Belem, Brazil, and a member of ICSF**

During the General Assembly of the *Conselho Pastoral dos Pescadores* (CPP), held in Lagoa Seca, Paraíba State, Brazil from 17 to 19 November 2000, one of the themes was 'Gender Relations in Fisheries'. A discussion group was formed with 29 participants, most of them women from different fishing communities. There were also support people from NGOs, as well as community and union leaders. This represented a rare opportunity to understand the various ways in which women participate in the fisheries and in fishworker organizations, the difficulties they face in being recognized and valued, as well as to discuss the progress that has been made. Some of the debates are described below.

One of the participants, Mrs. Roquelina Almeida, introduced herself as follows: "fisherwoman, poetess, writer, director of the *colônia* (professional organization of fishermen) of fishermen from Maragogipe, Bahia State, and director of the local association of residents." She said that she had begun fishing since she was a child, but that in her time, "a woman could only be a *marisqueira* (seafood collector). Today, thank God I got the right of being a *pescadora* (fisherwoman)."

A shared view among the participants was that women often do not consider themselves as fishers. According to Mrs. Petrúcia, president of the co-operative of Ponto da Barra, Maceió, Alagoas: "women are quiet; they are fisherwomen, but they don't like to participate. However, the men are worse than the women, they participate even less." She emphasized the fragility of the organization of fishermen, an opinion shared by many of those present.

In her turn, a fisherwoman named Lídia, director of the *colônia* of Aranaín in the municipal district of Cachoeira, Pará state, said that in her community progress had been notable. Four of the five directors

in Fortim are presently women (all except for the President).

Mrs. Dolores, sociologist from Instituto Terramar, Ceará state, pointed to the lack of data in governmental bodies, in universities, and in organizations, on the work women do in fisheries. In the municipality of Fortim, for example, women collect seafood and they fish. As a result of the work of the current President of the *colônia*, a woman, there are today about 80 women registered in the *colônia*. In other places in Ceará, some women collect algae and, sometimes, they fish with nets on the shore. The algae has a good market for the cosmetics industry, but the collectors sell this at very low prices. At times this income is the only one for maintaining the family.

Dolores emphasized that many women in fishing communities combine fishing with handicraft and other activities. This makes their official recognition as fishers by the technicians from the welfare institute, difficult. While investigating cases in villages, they have to decide whether the woman applying for retirement or other benefits is a housewife, an embroiderer or a fisher.

The characteristic *machismo* of the *colônia* was described by Francisca Ester of Parajiru, Ceará, President of the local community association. "The only woman who goes to the *colônia* there, is me. You don't see a woman there. I ask the fishermen, please, bring your wives for the *colônia* meetings so they can get informed!" According to Francisca, almost all of the villagers in Parajiru take crabs in the swamps, as well as oysters and *sururus* (small mussels).

Mrs. Cárita Chagas, president of the women's association in the village of Cachoeira, Pará, emphasized the points common to the situation of women across several states. She emphasized that the Mayor of her town and the management of the *colônia* have not showed any interest in complying with the demands of the fishers, men or women, especially of the women. With the support of outsiders, women in her municipality have formed two associations. These women took an active role during the last elections of the *colônia*. "Last year we removed the former President of the *colônia*. The current one is committed and the women have more space inside it. ...The *colônia* of the municipal district was founded 70 years ago. However, it was opened to women only a year

ago. Unfortunately in many cases the barrier is cultural. It is the history of submission that is reproduced.”

(*Maria Cristina Maneschy can be contacted at [crismane@terra.com.br](mailto:crismane@terra.com.br)*)

The subject, *who is fisherman or fisherwoman*, raised heated discussions. One of the issues discussed was the status of the women who weave nets, salt fish, take care of the fishing equipment and other related tasks. Who are they? Do they have to be recognized as fishworkers? In fact, they are not considered legally as fishworkers.

In this context it was noted that in this discussion group on gender, there were hardly a few men. This was seen as indicative of the fact that within the category of fishermen, the discussion on such issues still interests only the women and is not seen as a priority.

The participants of this mini-seminar presented their ‘histories’. In spite of the progress that has been made, their testimonies showed that while women work, and have always worked, their work remains largely invisible.

The seminar pointed to the urgent need to produce data concerning women’s work in the fisheries, and the links between fishing and other related work. If the statistics on fisheries are poor, on the work of women in the fisheries, they are absent. The traditional approach that regards women’s works as ‘complementary’ reinforces this invisibility.

The testimonies at the seminar made it clear that women in fishing communities undertake different activities, unlike the fishermen, who tend to be specialized (net fishermen, fixed-trap fishermen, lobster fishermen etc). Women:

- fish in several ways (the *marisqueira* also fishes)
- collect algae
- weave and repair fishing nets
- take up other activities through the year (embroidery, craft, agriculture...)
- participate in community work (like for instance, in the residents’ associations in Ceará they have taken up the fight against land speculation).

It was clear that the barriers remain. Many participants referred to the weight of the ‘cultural issue’. And, in Brazil, several social benefits are linked to the status of a person as a worker. The need to change this situation was stressed, because it is source of social exclusion.

## Latin America/ Chile

### Women Weaving Networks

#### *Women fishworkers in Chile meet to discuss issues of common concern*

**By Jéssica Alfaro Alvarez, Co-ordinator of the CONAPACH Project on 'Women Weaving Networks'**

The First Meeting of Women in Artisanal Fisheries: Northern Zone was held in Antofagasta, Northern Chile from 27 to 29 June 2001. Thirty seven participants from 14 women's groups belonging to all three zones of Chile—northern, central and southern—engaged in fishing, aquaculture, baiting hooks, processing and marketing fish, participated in this meeting. Nine of these groups were from the northern region. The event was organized by women members of the *Sindicato de Buzos Mariscadores* (Syndicate of Shellfish Divers) of the *caleta* Constitución—Isla Santa Maria, a part of the National Network of Women in Artisanal Fisheries of the National Confederation of Artisanal Fishers of Chile (CONAPACH).

Various public service organizations of Region II as well as officials from the central level participated in this meeting. This included officials from Sernapesca, Dirección de Obras Portuarias, (Port Works Management) Sercotec, Sernam and the UECPS (Unidad Coordinadora del Ministerio de Obras Públicas or the Co-ordination Unit of the Ministry of Public Works). They expressed their support towards the ideas put forth at the meeting.

This meeting was part of the project "Women weaving networks for the sustainable future of our *caletas*", being executed by CONAPACH with financial support from the *Fondo de las Américas*. Earlier this year, in January, women from the artisanal fisheries sector in Chile had organized themselves into a National Network and selected co-ordinators for each zone. The members of the Network have since been meeting regularly, every two months, to discuss strategies to strengthen, broaden and consolidate this movement. They have worked out zonal plans to identify new women's groups, deepen ties with those already in contact with the network, disseminate information on work being carried out by the network as well as identify sources to fund the initiatives of the movement and grassroot groups.

This meeting in Antofagasta was a product of these zonal-level projects. It was the largest event that the National Network of Women has ever organized and marks a milestone for the co-ordinators of the northern zone and for the CONAPACH Women's Network. It was an important step towards valorizing the role of women in artisanal fisheries.

Women discussed their expectations from the workshop and how these could be integrated into the work plan of the network. They elaborated on the concept of 'sustainable development' and formulated guidelines for 'community, economic and environmental development'.

They gave practical suggestions for achieving concrete results in their respective *caletas*. They suggested creating permanent channels of communication between their organizations. There was a strong sentiment in favour of holding more such meetings in future as a concrete step towards increasing communication between groups, leading to a strengthening of the movement. They stressed the significance of the Network of Women, the need to strengthen it and to elect more representatives to ensure better co-ordination.

Gender issues were approached within the context of legitimizing *caletas*, and recognizing that these comprised groups of both men and women. The need for women to develop their self-potential and power was stressed, and to ensure this it was proposed that new opportunities for sharing and analyzing experiences and learning from the experiences of others, be created.

The women also drew the attention of authorities to illegal fishing by the industrial sector in the 5-mile zone reserved for artisanal fishing. It was evident that even if women from the northern zone, in general, are not closely integrated into the activities of *sindicatos*, they are well informed about at least two major issues: the 5-mile zone and the fisheries law. Their interest in protecting resources, in respecting the closed seasons and in getting better prices, demonstrated their appreciation of problems arising from overexploitation of marine resources.

In the field of community development they highlighted the need for better organization into groups and for establishing alliances with other community-based as well as environmental organizations. They also proposed efforts towards influencing public opinion about problems faced by their communities, through the the media.

Women stressed the need to address various problems they faced in their *caletas*. These included: poor accessibility of *caletas*; lack of transport, affecting especially school-going children who need to travel to their schools; lack of proper sewage and drinking water facilities; and poor access to health services. They stressed the necessity for providing decompression chambers for divers exposed to pressure-related problems and a high accident rate. They also stressed that in *caletas* where there are no medical facilities, men and women need to be trained to provide first-aid to victims of accidents. The women expressed concern about the significant number of children who drop out of school or repeat academic years and highlighted the need for nursery and other schools.

Women proposed two broad areas for environmental action. First, they stressed the importance of promoting citizen's participation through the efforts of neighbourhood groups, schools and unions, and with the involvement of CONAPACH, Servicio País, and the authorities, towards finding solutions to their problems. They emphasized the need to keep the community informed through the use of various media.

They also proposed other alternatives for environmental improvement including recycling of organic and inorganic waste, developing green belts, controlling pollution (waste water, heavy metals, dregs etc), effectively enforcing the closed season and protecting resources (size and quality), and promoting environmental awareness.

In conclusion, this meeting of women in artisanal fisheries in the northern zone was perhaps a landmark in developing new perspectives in the artisanal fisheries sector, in general, and in efforts towards increasing the visibility of women, in particular. Through our efforts all over the country it has been possible to observe the situation of women in the sector. Although it is a fact

that women are the most marginalized in terms of direct participation in artisanal fisheries in the northern zone, what is noteworthy is that they do understand the role they play in the development of the sector. This assures us that it is possible for development initiatives for women in the sector to succeed.

We think it important to support women through strengthening their incipient organizations and supporting their plans for socio-economic development. This must be done based on an integrated plan. In the past, although the intention has always been there on the part of the authorities to elevate the role of the female 'actor', the efforts have, for the most part, been disjointed and based on isolated activities rather than on an integrated approach to development. The women from the northern sector of the country require support in their activities, along with their partners—husbands, fathers, companions etc.

It is clear to women that the issue of their integration into the sector is generally glossed over by the predominantly male organizations. We believe that we are now at a juncture where there is a strong possibility for success on an issue which is highly complex. During this meeting women suggested several development projects, directed towards *sindicatos* and the various public services of Region II. We are inviting these bodies to form a working platform that could help us in defining strategies and concrete opportunities for the integration of women.

*Jéssica Alfaro Alvarez can be contacted at pescart@unete.cl*



## Latin America/ Peru

### We don't wish to compete ...

*Based on a report prepared by Ms. Cecilia Vidal Baldera and Mr. Jose Cachique Diaz. Cecilia Vidal is National Secretary of Women, FIUPAP and President of the Women's Committee of caleta Huarmey-Ancash and Jose Cachique Diaz is Executive Director of the FIUPAP newsletter El Mundo de la Pesca Artesanal and the FIUPAP Coordinator for Amazonía.*

In Peru there has been gradual but firm progress—women are now included in the social organizations of artisanal fishworkers. At the V<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Federación de Integración y Unificación de los Pescadores Artesanales del Perú (FIUPAP) held at Talara in May this year, Cecilia Vidal Baldera was elected as National Secretary of Women. The re-elected General Secretary of FIUPAP, Claudio Nizama Silva, expressed his conviction that women must actively participate in all activities, be they related to fishing, trade or organization.

At this meeting, Cecilia Vidal stressed that women in *caletas* tend to be perceived as passive objects rather than as social actors in development programmes initiated by the Government. Their participation in local and regional spaces is minimal, if not completely lacking.

She highlighted the following aspects:

- Artisanal fisheries are culturally diverse and the relationship between men and women also show the same diversity. Therefore, it is not possible to make generalizations. Gender is a cultural construct and must be approached with the specific characteristics of artisanal fishing communities in mind.
- It is important to recognize that women have had to fight harder to make their interests more visible, socially, politically and economically.
- The family is the nucleus of artisanal fishing communities. It is necessary to recognize that the men have, on occasions, used and abused their power over women. It is necessary to arrive at an analysis that permits a better understanding of gender relations.

- Women have always been a part of artisanal fisheries, but that does not necessarily mean that their role is recognized. They play multiple roles and carry out diverse activities: they collect shellfish, culture species, market the yield, process fish, besides taking care of the children and other household chores.
- Women have participated occasionally in capture activities alongside the men, spurred by economic necessity, a result of depleting fish resources.
- Within the fisheries sector, women also play managerial and decision-making roles and have a presence in public spaces.
- Women's participation in fisheries must be viewed in a wider perspective: not only in terms of their right to work but also in terms of a greater social recognition of their participation in domestic work, and their right to health and education services. It is particularly important to address the issue of children's education, especially during times of economic crisis.
- When we talk of changing certain aspects to improve gender relations, we are actually talking of a new type of society where respect is a very important value.

In conclusion, Cecilia stressed that:

*We don't wish to compete with males; what we do want is to work alongside our men, supporting them, for the welfare of our families, our communities and our country as a whole.*

*We, as women, have the difficult task ahead of organizing ourselves. We believe that we must take on shared and complementary responsibilities. Liberty for us lies in the strong familial bond that leads us to seek the best for our children and to share our daily lives with happiness and understanding.*

*Cecilia Vidal can be contacted at [fiupap@yahoo.es](mailto:fiupap@yahoo.es)*

## Latin America/ Chile

### Shared concerns

#### *Notes from a trip to Chile*

**By Maria Cristina Maneschy, working at the Federal University of Pará, Belem, Brazil, and a member of ICSF**

In October 2001 I had the privilege of spending two days in Valparaíso, Chile, with the National Confederation of Artisanal Fishermen from Chile (CONAPACH), the fishworker organization of Chile. I was well received by Kim Cooperrider and Jéssica Alfaro, professionals working for the project "Women weaving networks to promote the sustainable future of our communities (*caletas pesqueras*)". Though my visit was very brief, I would like to share some of my impressions as well as the information I collected about this project being undertaken by a national fishermen's union.

Having been engaged with ICSF's Women in Fisheries Programme in Brazil for some years, I sought to learn about the Chilean experience in promoting gender issues in fisheries. I also sought to explore the possibility of establishing regular contacts between Chilean and Brazilian groups and organizations sensitive to such issues. My purpose was also to invite CONAPACH to collaborate in a new participatory newsletter project on women in fisheries initiated by several organizations in north and northeastern Brazil.

CONAPACH congregates about 400 unions and has approximately 40,000 members. In 1998 CONAPACH instituted its Women's Department, which has sought to promote and support women's groups and their economic initiatives in fishing *caletas* around the country. Luisa Pineda, a fisherwoman from the South of the country, is the director of the Women's Department. Luisa had earlier visited Brazil, in June 2000, as a member of the CONAPACH delegation that participated in a meeting organized by ICSF in the state of Ceará on *Gender and Coastal Fishing Communities in Latin America*.

In November 2000 the women's department began the implementation of the above-mentioned project, being financed by the *Fondo de las Americas* agency. According to Kim and Jéssica, the project's aim is to create a network of women who will act as environmental educators in fishing communities and unions. In fact, for several years Chile has been facing

serious problems due to the high pressure on fisheries resources as well as related environmental and economic problems. This led the Government to institute new policies to manage fisheries resources. The introduction of individual fishing quotas has raised serious controversies within the artisanal sector and between workers on industrial fishing fleets.

In concrete terms, explained Kim, the project seeks to educate women who are "concerned about the future of the small-scale fishing industry and the survival of fishing communities". According to CONAPACH leaders, the integration of women is a natural step, especially given the present context of Chilean fisheries. The participation of women promises to strengthen the organization while boosting its political power.

In addition to local efforts to develop organizational skills and knowledge about environmental issues associated with the artisanal fishing industry, the project has, over the last year, begun to facilitate the formation of a national women's network. In a national meeting held in January 2001 in Valparaíso, the participants decided to elect zonal coordinators. This network is expected to contribute to the recognition of the women's traditionally invisible roles in the small-scale fishing industry. Subsequently, it might contribute to consolidating the organizational, political, social and economic force of the artisanal fisheries sector.

According to a brochure of the project: "At present, artisanal fishermen in Chile are defending their cultural and productive patrimony. The destruction of the coastal environment may lead to the disappearance of artisanal fisheries. Therefore, the participation, integration, and organization of men and women is crucial."

Some results of the women's meetings held through the project:

- Growing knowledge about women's roles in production and in sustaining fishing communities, within the local and regional contexts;
- Preparation of projects on organization and economic support;
- Identification of women's interests and needs and the development of methodologies for the project to work with their organizations;
- Identification of health and educational problems

that fishing communities face.

As in other countries, there are no available statistics that reflect women's actual contribution in the fisheries. According to an estimate by CONAPACH, women constitute about 10 per cent of the workforce in the fisheries sector in Chile. They work as *encarnadoras* (baiters), fish processors, seaweed collectors and as sellers of fish products.

Local labour and organizational conditions vary along the long Chilean coast. According to Kim and Jéssica, the project intends to facilitate the integration of women in existing fishermen's unions and organizations, in accordance with CONAPACH guidelines. In the event that there is no organization of fishermen, women may consider forming an organization of their own. That was the case in San Antonio, a town about two hours from Valparaíso, where a women's union of *encarnadoras* was formed with CONAPACH support earlier this year. CONAPACH, through the project, has continued to support this initiative. CONAPACH leaders estimate that more than 800 *encarnadoras* live in San Antonio.

I had the opportunity to visit a community near Valparaíso—*caleta* El Membrillo—a lively fishing port where the 'Union of Independent Workers and Fishermen of *caleta* El Membrillo', founded in 1936, is located. According to the President, the union has 200 members, of which only 10 are women. The President is presently engaged in integrating women into the union.

In fact, the *encarnadoras* play a very active role in the fisheries, given that the use of hooks is common in the artisanal fisheries of Chile. Longlines, with hundreds of hooks, have to be baited before each fishing trip. In general, every crew engages an *encarnadora* or *encarnador* to prepare the hooks. Most of the *encarnadores* are women. On the day of my visit some young men were working among the women. As the workers are paid only after the fishermen get back to shore, they also share in the risks involved in fish capture and sale.

I spoke with a 55-year old woman who has been an *encarnadora* baiting hooks for 36 years. Engraved on her hands were signs of the constant handling of knives, hooks, lines, in ever humid and cold conditions. The

work of the baiters involves standing in front of a kind of table where the lines are laid out so they can bait each hook.

*Encarnadoras* are independent workers whose daily earnings depend on the orders they receive and their ability to accomplish the job. Depending on the volume of landings, they can work from a few hours to half a day at the port. Many are single mothers. In El Membrillo port about 30 people work as baiters. They pay a tax to the port administration in order to work there. If they unionize they are supposed to pay the monthly fee of the union. Efforts to organize them are still in the initial stages. Organizing these women, who often find themselves without work due to the "closing of the quota" after the quota for the catch has been reached, and who, as housewives and single mothers do not have much time to participate in meetings and events, remains a challenge.



The professionals engaged in the project are enthusiastic. They are very concerned about the future achievements of the project, and hope that it remains a priority for the CONAPACH. They raise concerns that are shared by others engaged with gender issues in fisheries, such as: How to create legitimate spaces for women, alongside men, within fishermen's organizations? How to create strong organizations, able to sustain themselves? How to respond to the existing urgent economic demands of women?

The methodology of this project and the experiences of CONAPACH's Women's Department, merits attention and reflection, especially by leaders of fishermen's organizations and women's groups from other countries in Latin America. It is necessary to increase networking and sharing of interesting experiences of citizenship in the fisheries sector.

*Maria Cristina Maneschy can be contacted at [crismane@terra.com.br](mailto:crismane@terra.com.br)*

## South America/ Chile

### My life is the sea

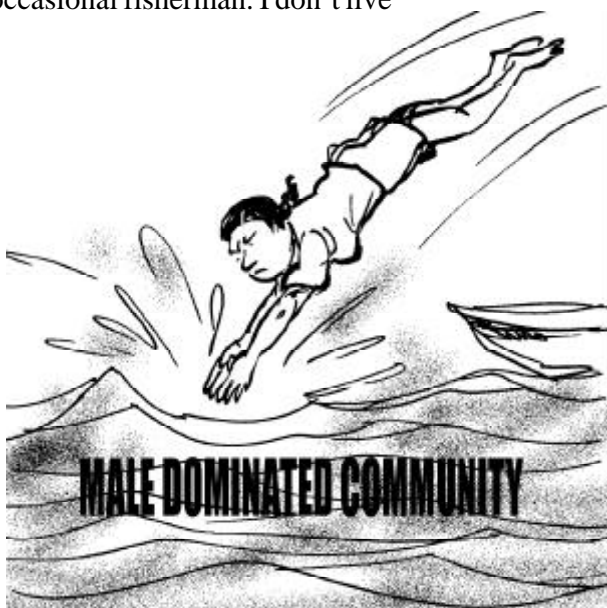
*This brief profile of a fisherwoman from Chile is taken from the book 'Mujeres de la Pesca Artesanal, relatos e imágenes de mujeres de la V región' (Women and artisanal fishing: stories and pictures of women from Region V).*

**by Francesca Mariana, an anthropologist who works with CEDIPAC, an NGO associated with CONAPACH, the national fishworker organization in Chile.**

There are five children in my family, four girls and one boy. My father wanted two boys to go fishing with, but the second one never came. So of the four girls, he selected one to be trained to fish—and that was me. And I'm certainly not complaining about that.

I've been going to sea since I was six, but actively since the age of 12. When I was a child, the three of us—my brother, my father and I—would always work together. When my mother found out that I had chosen this profession, she cried, saying that having three family members to worry about was a lot.

I am 38 years old and have a son of 14. He is doing his first year at secondary school (*primero medio*). I don't want him to become a fisherman, not because I don't respect the work a fisherman does, but because there are many sacrifices to make, and there are good times and bad times. I am not married, I never got married. The father of my son lives in Loncura. He is an occasional fisherman. I don't live



with him.

When my son was six months old, a tiny tot, I took him me whilst we were away, but my mother told me, "No, because you are breastfeeding, you can't go". So I went for two or three months without going to sea. Later I used to leave the milk under the pillow in a bottle wrapped in a cloth, and my mother would feed my son whenever he demanded milk.

I'm also a sandwich maker in the *Fuente de Soda* (soda fountain) that belongs to my aunt, where I work every day in the summer, starting five years ago. I get up almost every day between two and three, change my clothes, wait for my brother to get up and together we go fishing. After returning from the sea, we sell our fish and when I get home, I sleep for a while, from 11 am till 4 in the afternoon, and return to the *Fuente de Soda*. In summer, when I have both jobs, I have the most work.

There are some fishermen who think that a woman in a boat brings bad luck. But I am personally known in the fishing villages of Cartagena, La Salina de Puhaiy, Papudo and Los Molles, having worked with my father for many years. We would camp for three months in Las Salinas de Puhaiy and for five months in Cartagena.

Apart from collecting razor clams and fishing, I also dive, though I don't have a licence. I have not been diving much recently after having nearly punctured my ears. I also suffer from painful menstrual periods, and have to take to bed often. I don't dive around here any more, but it's fantastic under the water and when I go diving, time flies and you'll have to come and search for me...

When the water is turbid, you don't see very much, but when it is clear, it's beautiful. Everything that is on land you find under the water; there are little bushes, coloured green, blue and purple, which disappear when you go to pick them. I used to play around a lot with these plants when I first started to dive, which was when I was 15 years old. My father taught me to dive in Las Salinas de Puhaiy. I used to dive wearing only shorts and a t-shirt, with a plastic cap on my head because when the water is freezing, it really hurts your head. Once I took up the challenge of a local fisherman, who said, "I bet you won't go diving in mid-winter." He was wearing a diving suit and I only had my usual clothes. I plunged in, but he didn't.

Until a few years ago, I was the only woman fisher

with a licence, but it cost me dearly to get it. The local harbour master at the time provided a letter requesting that I be given an artisanal fishing licence so that I could go out to work without any problems. The first application was rejected, since it came from a woman. Following that, the harbour master and I went to talk personally to the navy captain. He told me that it was not possible to grant a licence. When I asked why, he said, "Because you are a woman". That made me really angry. "So being a woman is an impediment to working?" I asked furiously and told him off for discriminating against women. He finally gave me a licence. But later we failed to get it renewed.

My mother always told me, "Fish only until you are 40 or 45, at the latest, no more, because afterwards you will have problems with your bones, due to the cold." But the truth is that I hardly know how to do anything else. I have a licence to handle foodstuff, to get which I had to do a course. It was my aunt who asked me to do it so as to have an alternative source of livelihood, for when it is no longer possible to work at sea. But the truth is that my life is the sea.

I also like to experience new fisheries and new challenges. I have even been after albacore, out in the deep sea. I respect the sea, but I am terrified of fog. Once a ship nearly hit us, right here, inside the bay. Another time, the fog made us nearly capsize on the rocks. That's why I am really scared of the fog.

I'm also scared of the wind, but not so much, because inshore, the sea is different. You know that if you capsize, you can swim for a while to reach shore. But you know that if you capsize offshore, you will go on swimming until you get hypothermia. There are many fishermen, workmates, who have died at sea, leaving behind just an urn, clothes and a photo for their families to remember. I wouldn't want that to happen to my son.

Once, in Quintero, a fisherman went missing for three years. His boat capsized and some fishermen in a boat found his body three years later. They recognized him because his identification documents were intact in a nylon purse. There was a second funeral and the family had to experience grief all over again. In such cases, until the body is actually found, there is always hope that the person is alive somewhere, that he could have gone north or south, that he could have been picked up by a boat...A thousand possibilities are

offered, but rarely do people immediately believe that the lost person is at the bottom of the sea.

We believe that the sea is female, so when things are going well for us we say to it: "OK, Maria, don't give us too much fish because later you'll make us pay for it, and you'll probably abandon us out here, so that's enough..."

This excerpt is from the book *Mujeres de la Pesca Artesanal, relatos e imágenes de mujeres de la V región* that was published in Chile in 2001 thanks to support from the Art and Culture Development Fund of the Ministry of Education.

*Francesca Mariana can be contacted at [fyfchile@chilesat.net](mailto:fyfchile@chilesat.net)*

## Latin America/ Mexico

### Street of the Shrimp Ladies

*Women shrimp traders in northwestern Mexico have organized to defend their interests, though problems persist*

**By Maria L. Cruz-Torres, Department of Anthropology, University of California**

When one looks at travel brochures or web pages highlighting the tourist attractions of the Mexican port city of Mazatlán, located in the state of Sinaloa (in Mexico's northwest coast), one hears about ecotourism, gift shops, restaurants, nightlife and hotels. One also finds women shrimp traders included among these "attractions." At any time of year—but especially during the coolest months, December through May—tour buses packed with Canadian or American tourists stop by the Street of the Shrimp Ladies so they can look at the shrimp and talk to the women, even though few of these tourists speak Spanish.

Women shrimp traders are such a lively part of the local culture that a play depicting their work and their social life was staged at the Mazatlán Cultural Institute. Working people all over Mazatlán and nearby towns and rural communities are aware of their contribution to the fishing sector and the local economy. Yet for local fishing authorities and the government, they are nearly invisible.



When I started my research, I found an almost complete lack of statistics or written information about them. Besides scattered and limited information, there was no other documentation of the lives lived or jobs

performed by these women. Much of the information that I am presenting here, therefore, comes from first-hand observation, oral interviews and a questionnaire that I designed and administered while conducting anthropological field research during the summer of 2004 in Mazatlán.

Here I will discuss the preliminary information elicited by the questionnaire and by oral interviews. The questionnaire's primary goal was to collect basic sociodemographic information that would allow me to draw a more detailed and accurate portrait of women shrimp traders. The questionnaire asked women their age, marital status, number of children, years working as a shrimp trader, and what immediate problems they face. Over a one-month period, I was able to orally administer the questionnaire to 22 out of the 40 women working in the Mazatlán marketplace.

After the completion of questionnaires, I conducted semi-structured oral interviews with the same women who answered the questionnaire. The purpose of these interviews was to collect information on the history and settlement of the fish market, economic and social networks, and household and family relations. The results obtained from the questionnaires and interviews follow.

The average age of the women I questioned is 41, the youngest being 18 and the oldest, 70. Most of the women begin selling shrimp when very young, usually while accompanying their mother or another female family member. Once they learn the trade, they usually start their own shrimp business, either at once or when they get married and start a family of their own.

Forty-five per cent of the women are married and 32 per cent are single mothers. Many of the married women said that they often feel like single mothers because their husbands refuse to help them sell shrimp, take care of the children, and perform domestic chores. Others said that they work not only to support themselves and their children but also their husbands. The lives of both single and married women are permeated by constant work, since when they finish at the marketplace they need to rush home to make dinner, do the laundry, and help their children with school homework.

Most of the women interviewed have children, the average being four. Women with small children (12

years or younger), 41 per cent of the total, must face the daily challenge of finding someone to help them with childcare while they are at the market. Mostly, they rely on relatives, friends or older children to help take care of the young ones. For all but one of the women questioned, shrimp selling is the only income-generating job they have, so they cannot afford to miss a day's work.

The average respondent has been selling shrimp for 19 years. Most of the women started selling shrimp young, as street peddlers going house-to-house and asking people if they wanted to buy shrimp. Sometimes they stationed themselves on a corner of a street and sold their shrimp from there. Neither approach was particularly stable or comfortable.

It was precisely because of this lack of a secure, comfortable space in which to sell shrimp that a number of women decided to get organized 25 years ago. They invaded the street now known as the Street of the Shrimp Ladies and set up shop. At first they faced opposition from government authorities who claimed that they were making the street crowded, dirty and smelly. But with the support of students from the Autonomous University of Sinaloa, they organized protests, sit-ins and hunger strikes until the authorities finally decided to leave them alone.

They later organized a shrimp-sellers' association that is still active. This association has a directorship composed of a president, a secretary and a treasurer. The main object of the association's members is to have more power within the overall political and economic structure of Mazatlán. The association also functions as a support group in which women share their daily challenges, problems, aspirations and accomplishments.

Despite the association's support, there are still many problems that the women must face, both at the marketplace and at home, in order to perform their jobs and attend to the needs of their families. Most of the women I spoke to talked very openly about their problems. The following were most commonly mentioned:

- Too much competition—all the women are selling the same product to the same clients, which generates conflicts and rivalries.
  - Commuting to Mazatlán takes time and energy—some must travel two hours by bus daily.
  - Lots of time spent sitting or standing in the heat and sun.
  - Long hours—the great majority of the women begin their workday at four in the morning, when the retailers and wholesalers come to supply the women with shrimp and other seafood products, and end around seven or eight at night.
  - Haggling—clients do not want to pay the price women ask, and always look for a way of getting cheaper prices.
  - Shrimp that are not sold must be beheaded so they do not go bad, but then sell for less because they weigh less.
  - The income they obtain is never enough to cover the basic needs of their families.
  - There are no economic alternatives—no other work. This is especially crucial during the offseason, because the only shrimp available for sale then are those produced on shrimp farms, which bring a lower price.
- Most of these problems are difficult to deal with within the women's association. The pressure to sell shrimp on the same day that the suppliers bring them, lest they go bad, generates animosity and competition among women. Other conflicts, such as the lack of other income-generating activities and the low income obtained from shrimp sales, are related to the structure of the regional Mexican and global economies. Women also mentioned, however, that shrimp trading provides them with benefits that other occupations do not. Among these are freedom, independence, a source of income, and the ability to be their own bosses.
- Last October, at least 1,000 people became intoxicated after eating shrimp in the southern Sinaloa region, including Mazatlán. The intoxication was initially attributed to the use of Purina pet food in shrimp fishing. In response, the government implemented a moratorium on the inshore shrimp fisheries until they could verify the cause of the intoxications. This had a tremendous impact upon the local economy; people stopped consuming shrimp. The shrimp traders feared that they were losing their livelihoods.



Women shrimp traders in Mazatlán and nearby rural communities organized a protest, demanding that the health authorities conduct a study to determine the source of the intoxication. Due to pressure from them and the fishermen, the local health department conducted a more rigorous study and discovered that the intoxications were caused by the presence of a bacterium, *Vibrio parahaemolyticus*, in the Huizache-Caimanero lagoon system, one of the most important sources of shrimp in the southern Sinaloa region. This discovery allowed women to take preventive measures, such as not selling shrimp caught in this lagoon.

This is not the first time that women shrimp traders in Mazatlán have organized around an issue that affected all equally, once again proving that Mexican women have the capacity and the knowledge required to generate collective action in defence of their livelihoods and the well-being of their families.

This is, however, the first time that women shrimp traders have appeared in the news—not for breaking the law, but for getting together to make their voices heard. At last, women shrimp traders are becoming visible in the eyes of government officials.

*Maria L. Cruz-Torres can be contacted at [maria.cruztorres@ucr.edu](mailto:maria.cruztorres@ucr.edu)*

## Latin America / Chile

### Questioning invisibility

*Women workers in the fisheries sector in Chile are often not formally recognized or covered by social security*

**By Dodani Araneda, Jacqueline Salas, Alejandra Pinto and Marisol Alvarez, working with the Undersecretariat for Fisheries, Government of Chile, and Cecilia Godoy, working with Prisma Consultants, Chile.**

As part of a research project, 1,571 interviews were undertaken with women who work in artisanal fisheries and aquaculture activities in 10 councils of Chiloe Province, in southern Chile, between November 2004 and February 2005. The aim was to obtain information about their activities, age profile, income and education levels, professional recognition, and future expectations.

There are 80 fish landing centres in Chiloe Province that are recognized by the government via Decree 240/1998. All these were visited for the research project. In addition, information was collected from 74 other places where women engage in fisheries and aquaculture activities.

For some years now, the invisibility of women's labour in artisanal fisheries has been a matter of reflection and research in several countries where fishing has been a traditional activity. In Chile, the existence of native groups living in coastal areas has been recognized from pre-Hispanic times, and women have been working along rivers and estuaries, maintaining a direct relationship with fishery activities and collection of seaweed and shellfish, abundantly available in their immediate environment.

As a first step towards looking at the activities of women in fisheries, the Undersecretariat for Fisheries in Chile felt it necessary to quantify the work, both formal and informal, of women in artisanal fisheries and aquaculture.

Towards this end, it initiated a project named "Quantification of the Formal and Informal Activities of Women in Artisanal Fisheries in Chiloe Province, X Region, Chile". This project, funded by the Japan International Co-operation Agency (JICA), was

executed by Prisma Consultants between November 2004 and February 2005.

Chiloe Province was selected because of the high concentration (35 per cent) of artisanal fishermen and divers in this region (Region X), equivalent to 33 per cent of the total artisanal fisheries workforce engaged in extractive activities in Chile (National Statistics Institute, 2002).

This research was the first of its kind at the regional and provincial levels. 1,571 personal interviews were undertaken in the 10 councils of Chiloe Province, as follows: Ancud (536), Quemchi (68), Dalcahue (34), Curaco de Velez (111), Quinchao (346), Chonchi (70), Puqueldon (71), Castro (72), Queilen (42) and Quellon (221).

The results showed that the principal activity of women is the collection of shellfish and algae along the coast, with 88.2 per cent women reporting themselves to be engaged in such activities. Children, teenagers and old persons were also found engaging in these activities. Additionally, about four per cent women were found to work as *desconchadoras* (workers engaged in de-shelling the shellfish), while two per cent did actual fishing.

According to the General Fishery and Aquaculture Law (Decree 430/1991), some categories of labour must be recorded in a national registry. The research found that most women work 'illegally' as their activities are not registered in the National Artisanal



Fisherwomen's Register or in the National Aquaculture Register.

The incomes of these women were seen to be low at about US\$ 86 per month. A high percentage (69 per cent) declared no coverage under social security. As for the age profile of women in the sector, about 45 per cent of the women interviewed were between 20 and 40 years of age, another 45 per cent were older than that, and about 7 per cent younger than 20 years. Ninety-five per cent of the women interviewed had received some education—19 per cent had completed primary school and six per cent, high school.

The project is the first institutional effort to recognize and valorize women's participation in fishery and aquaculture activities at the national level. The main outcome expected from the project is the formal recognition of the fishing activities performed by the women in Chiloé Province, and their registration in existing records, so that their productive activities gain official recognition. It is also worth remembering that most of the funds earmarked for the artisanal fisheries sector are granted to formally constituted organizations.

The co-operation of the women interviewed for the research project indicates their yearning for a better quality of life and for changes that can ultimately lead to greater recognition of women's work.

*Jacqueline Salas, one of the authors, can be contacted at [jsquirola@subpesca.cl](mailto:jsquirola@subpesca.cl)*

**Latin America / Chile****Unaccounted and undervalued**

*Even though women are highly involved as workers in artisanal fisheries and in their communities, their roles have been constantly undermined and undervalued.*

**by Fabio Iacomini of Terra Nuova, Italy**

In a context where development is identified fundamentally with the exploitation of natural resources, and where fishing is mainly associated with men in the sector, the work and presence of women is largely invisible. Illustrative of this is the fact that only since 2001 has gender been included as a variable in the official register of the sector. However, the Artisanal Fishing Register of the Servicio Nacional de Pesca (SERNAPESCA) does not recognize the support activities generally undertaken by women, which include baiting hooks, processing and the direct sale of fishery products. What is more, only 4,105 women are officially recorded in the artisanal fishing register as being directly involved with artisanal fishing, a figure far from reality, and estimated to be only 10-18 per cent of the female workforce associated with fisheries.

This situation marginalizes women in the various government programmes: if they are not taken into account, how can they become the focus of any development strategy? A similar situation exists with the official programmes that aim to improve productivity in the sector, through larger-scale production, requiring higher levels of organization. Groups of women interested in developing economic and productive activities tend to be excluded.

This prompted the Women's Network of the Confederación Nacional de Pescadores Artesanales de Chile (CONAPACH) to prioritize the issue of access to, and control over, natural resources as a key strategy. In effect, because women are not recognized as actors in the fisheries sector, they cannot claim any access rights. The control they can exercise over the resources they harvest or those on which their work depends, is even lesser. They can neither show any record of their past activities in production nor any landing figures that could be used to claim historic rights. This has a particularly important bearing

in the context of the fisheries management model being currently promoted, which is strongly geared towards the privatization of resources, and the establishment of fishing quotas based mainly on recorded catch histories. This policy has been fiercely contested by organizations of artisanal fishermen, who feel that their fishing rights are threatened.

This situation, combined with the intrinsic uncertainty and insecurity of fishing, is made even worse by the fact that neither men nor women benefit from any savings or insurance schemes, greatly increasing the social vulnerability.

A further aspect that affects a significant number of women is that their productive work is not valorized. The work of fishermen's wives is seen as an extension of their roles in the family. This also includes the support activities of their daughters and other female relations. It is thus difficult to assign any economic value to their work, which generally remains invisible, along with all their domestic tasks, and makes it difficult for them to get access to any professional occupational training. In addition, their participation in unions and other organizational activities is restricted, and they are excluded from any healthcare and insurance schemes.

Another issue is women's low levels of participation in decisionmaking and their representation in artisanal fishing organizations. Thus, for example, in CONAPACH's previous 21-member National Committee (prior to 2004), there were only three women. At the local level, there were no women presidents in any of the 24 regional federations, and only 14 women in the entire country were presidents of union bodies out of a total of 504 artisanal fishing organizations at the national level.

Nevertheless, there have been important increases in the numbers of women found in organizations with jobs that require low levels of decision-making—as treasurers and secretaries in unions and federations. It is important to highlight that some women's capabilities for financial management are held in high regard, and their skills for handling cash and for financial management are generally recognized by fishermen and particularly appreciated by their leaders, an accomplishment that is associated with their gender.



This provides the context for addressing many of the practical needs of women engaged in the sector, which are difficult to resolve without dealing with issues such as access to resources and decisionmaking.

Contact Fabio at: [fabioiacomini@yahoo.com](mailto:fabioiacomini@yahoo.com)

## Latin America / Chile

### Long road ahead

*Seeking allotments of management and exploitation areas can be a major challenge for women engaged in artisanal fisheries in Chile today*

by Maria Teresa López Boegeholz, Professor of the State and Specialist in Environmental Education and Gender Relations, University Deacon, University of Concepcion, Chile

In Chile, use and exploitation rights are granted to organizations of artisanal fishermen in the five-mile coastal zone through management and exploitation areas (AMERB), an administrative measure of the Fisheries Subsecretariat (Subpesca).

The AMERB process involves a number of steps, starting with a request from the interested organization, with an outline and co-ordinates of the possible management area. This must be submitted to Subpesca, which then, together with other public bodies (the National Fisheries Service, the Marine Subsecretariat, and the General Direction of the Marine Territory), elaborates a technical report. This is followed by the publication of the decree in the Official Diary publicizing the fishermen's proposal.

The request from the fishermen's organization goes through the following stages in an AMERB project: proposal for a baseline study (ESBA); undertaking the ESBA; and formulation of a management and exploitation plan (PMEA).

Once this is sanctioned by the fiscal institution, the area is handed over to the fishermen's organization through a user contract. The PMEa is formulated based on a modern understanding of coastal management that balances conservation and exploitation objectives, so as to achieve sustainability of the coastal ecosystem. It requires the technical advice of relevant professionals. In this way, fishery access is regulated, conservation of resources attempted, and the capacity of the fishermen/fisherwomen for responsible commercial management, enhanced.

Requesting management areas is a major challenge for women engaged in artisanal fisheries in Chile today.

In this context, it is important to note the efforts of a group of 45 women who have overcome major hurdles to enhance their basic competence and capacity to use new technologies, and to administer and manage their scarce economic resources.

These 45 women live in the *caleta* (village) of los Moros in the bay of Coliumo, Chile. Of the 1,200 people in the *caleta*, 380 are fishermen, belonging to four *sindicatos* (unions). Two of the *sindicatos* are of men (fishermen and vessel owners), one is mixed, and the other groups the 45 women. These women are engaged in administering three management areas for the following seaweed species: 'marine chicory' (*Chondracanthus chamissoi*); 'black luga' (*Sarcothalia crispata*); and 'spoon luga' (*Mazzaella laminariodes*). The first species, highly sought after in Taiwan for direct human consumption, requires ever more stringent quality certification, a lot of care to control growth and profitability, as well as systems for replanting and protection. The value of the other species comes from their gel and agar content.

These 45 women formed the *sindicato* of "Independent Women Workers, Fisherwomen and Women Gatherers", a legally constituted body that meets the requirements of the Labour Inspectorate. The president is Sara Garrido, who started off her career in fishing 16 years ago when still in her teens, gathering seaweed in spring and summer, and later going with her husband to sea to fish for conger eel and crabs. She learned to commercialize the catch and administer the income for the wellbeing of her family and the education of her two daughters, now 17 and 12 years old.

In 2002, this group of women decided to apply for a seaweed management area, in view of the overexploitation affecting this resource. Even today, there are no regulations or administrative plans for exploiting seaweeds. The women, therefore, "became alarmed and took defensive action". They were allotted three management areas, and a management plan (PMEA) for sustainable management of the resource was finalized.

The women have three management areas: the first of 0.6 hectares, already in use, and two others of 4 hectares each. Due to a dispute with a men's *sindicato*, which is against ownership by the women's *sindicato*,



there is objection to all of these. The problem may finally be resolved through a negotiation process that will provide the women with access to other areas, in exchange for the ones under litigation, even though these already have their ESBA's approved, and are co-financed through a project that they put together and got approved. The areas they will receive in exchange have no ESBA, and, moreover, they have no natural banks of seaweeds.

The vision of Sara Garrido is striking. In the tiny assigned management area of half a hectare, and with the management plan accepted, she is thinking about how to effectively assess and replant seaweeds, so that the spores of 'marine chicory' will take root and grow. She feels confident because she listened attentively to the university specialists and technicians who helped her with the ESBA and she always took their advice and heeded their warnings.

She also has another approved project comprising a seaweed drying and dehydrating plant, with which profitability can be greatly improved. The women have worked hard to obtain funding through the organizations, Fosis (Social Solidarity Fund for Investment), Sercotex (Service for External Credit) and Chile Barrios (a development programme to alleviate poverty in vulnerable settlements). This has allowed them to establish a micro-enterprise to start activities within an appropriate legal (co-operative) framework.

In future, they want to manage a project for an "experimental fishery" for seaweeds, and through this, gain access to co-financing, which will also help them get effective technical advice on socioeconomic and environmental sustainability of the coastal areas where the natural seaweed banks are found.

In the fiercely oppressive atmosphere arising from the response of the men's *sindicato*, which may influence local fisheries policies, listening to Sara, feeling her energy and understanding her courage, makes one realize how long a road must be travelled before there is a genuinely transparent and gender-balanced participation in the development of artisanal fisheries.

(This article has been translated by Brian O'Riordan of ICSF's Brussels office)

*Maria Teresa's can be contacted at the following e-mail: mtlopezb@hotmail.com*

## Latin America/Brazil

### A historic victory

*Recently, in March 2006, the Superior Federal Court of Justice, Brazil, ruled in favour of the rights of the community of Prainha do Canto Verde over their land*

**by René Schärer, of the Instituto Terramar, Brazil, and a Member of ICSF**

Prainha do Canto Verde, a small fishing village in the State of Ceará in northeastern Brazil, was settled around 1870, soon after the abolition of slavery, by people from neighbouring communities, mostly freed slave labour from sugarcane plantations. While fishing is the main source of livelihood in Prainha do Canto Verde, the village does not have a port, as the *jangadas* (sailrafts) used are beach-landing craft.

The calm of the village was interrupted in 1976, when Antônio Sales Magalhães, a specialist in acquiring beach terrain, appeared in the vicinity and made up purchase contracts of land belonging to 12 families, stretching from the dunes behind the village until the coast. Within a year and a half, he had acquired 749 ha of land at about one US cent per sq m. The fisher families living on, or close to, the beach did not know what was going on. Actually, nobody seemed to understand why the well-dressed gentleman, Antônio, was buying sand dunes.

In 1979, Antônio started a process to clear the land titles; that is, the local judge began to call neighbours and other interested people to find out if the purchase of land was legal. The fishers again were not aware of the process as they were not specifically invited and could not read the official, or any other, newspaper.

In 1984, the district judge of Beberibe ruled in favour of the purchase since no objection had been registered and there were witnesses who testified to the legality of the purchase. Once the land purchase had been laundered, Antônio passed the land on to the real-estate company called Henrique Jorge SA.

Though the fishers had missed the deadline to register their objections to the deal, they were fortunate in

receiving support from a human rights group called ‘The Centre for Defense and Promotion of Human Rights (CDPDH)’, founded by the Cardinal and Archbishop of Fortaleza, Dom Aloisio Lorscheider, one of the defenders of liberation theology and social action by church members.

In August 1989, legal advisers of the CDPDH appealed against the verdict of the district judge and against Antônio Sales and the real-estate company, in the Superior Tribunal of Justice of the State of Ceará. The Court judge returned the case to the district court of Beberibe for an inquiry into the circumstances of the purchase. For the next 10 years, between 1989 and 1999, the case remained in the district court.

In 1999, things began to move when a new district judge started to clear the backlog. The case was opened again and witnesses were heard. The case was then referred back to the Superior Tribunal of Justice, Ceará.

In 2000, the community learned that the legal opinion of the State Attorney was in their favour, with the land purchase being described as immoral and illegal, and proposing that the land be turned over to the “(morally) rightful owners”—the community. In May 2001, judges in the Superior Tribunal of Justice followed the opinion of the State Attorney and voted eight votes to nil in favour of the community.

The legality of the transaction was questioned, given the fact that part of the land (at least 30 m of beach) was State property (under the federal government), so that only a federal judge could have ruled the legality of the land purchase.

Despite this ruling, in 2001, the real-estate company Henrique Jorge SA appealed to the Superior Tribunal of Justice. It lost the case, again by eight to zero votes. Not satisfied, the real-estate company appealed again, this time to the Superior Federal Court of Justice in Brasilia in 2003, claiming procedural mistakes.

On 14 March 2006, five Superior Federal Court judges, following the legal opinion of the Federal Attorneys, voted five votes to zero to uphold the sentence of the lower court in favour of the community.



The real-estate company was asked to compensate for the costs incurred by the court and the lawyers.

This was a historic victory for the community. They won because there was a small group within the community that never gave up, all the way to the last appeals court. Many other communities in the same situation would not have been able to resist the resultant pressure, violence and aggression, and, sooner or later, would have accepted a settlement out of court, which invariably would have been against their interests. Antônio Sales and Henrique Jorge SA could never have dreamt that illiterate fishers would outlast them.

The people of Prainha do Canto Verde held out to the end, because they always had support from other communities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and supporters throughout Brazil and even abroad. And the man who deserves most of the credit is, without doubt, Dom Aloisio Lorscheider, Cardinal and Archbishop of Fortaleza, who created the Centre for Defense and Promotion of Human Rights. The community is hoping that Dom Aloisio Lorscheider, though aged, will respond to the invitation for the victory celebration some time later this year (2006).

The decision of the Superior Federal Court should give new hope and courage to the many communities

that are being driven from their beach lands along the vast and beautiful coasts of Brazil.

*René Schärer's e-mail: fishnet@uol.com.br*



## Latin America/Chile

### Whose gain?

*The community of Mehuín, on the southern coast of Chile, is fighting against the polluting operations of the cellulose company, CELCO, in order to preserve the source of their livelihoods*

**by Juan Carlos Skewes and Debbie Guerra, Professor and Associate Professor, respectively, at the Universidad Austral de Chile**

The ten years spent defending Mehuín, on the south coast of Chile, has developed into a kind of saga for the population, whose only demand is that the source of their livelihoods be protected and preserved. Fishermen, women, indigenous people and coastal inhabitants have united to defend their birthright from a daunting foe. And their foe has now come armed with the Chilean Navy, and is confronting fishermen in the bay of Maiquillahue along the coastal fringe. Fishermen have deployed their boats to prevent the destruction of their source of livelihoods: the sea and the water courses.

But what is this story all about? In 1986, a company, Celulosa Arauco y Constitución (CELCO), planned the construction of a cellulose processing plant. Then, as now, they looked at the possibility of discharging the plant's waste into the sea through a 20-km long pipe. The resistance of the people of Mehuín in 1998 stopped that from being realized.

When the company started up in 2004, it opted to dump its waste in the Río Cruces, whose waters feed the Carlos Anwandter Nature Sanctuary, a Ramsar site (Ramsar Site No. 222). That this was a catastrophe was clear after the deaths of the black-necked swans, the usual residents of the reserve, were recorded.

In their search for alternatives, CELCO came up with new proposals and, once again, the sea seemed to be the most convenient solution for waste disposal. For the Valdivian coast to be put to such a use, new environmental impact studies were required. The vessel hired by the CELCO company to do this work had the protection of the Chilean State, and the coastal residents knew that they had no option other

than to prevent these studies from being undertaken — studies that would then allow the construction of the ominous pipe.

The huge ship contracted to carry out the environmental impact studies has entered the bay twice this year, towards the end of July and in mid-August, under escort from Chilean naval vessels. The naval-industrial advance was confronted by numerous artisanal fishing boats and fishermen who sought to prevent the intended operations.

The community of Mehuín do not — and cannot — trust a company that, since the outset of its operations, has deceived them, sending, first of all, divers operating in an undercover manner and then, attempting to do so at night, on New Year. Worse still, they cannot trust a company whose claims of technological excellence were only mere distractions, as past experience has shown, to set up one of the most lucrative businesses in Chile, that of processing cellulose.

Thus the questions of the artisanal fishermen and their organizations seem legitimate: Who does the State serve? Who is the enemy? What is a legitimate State? The community of Mehuín has not only been witness to the unleashing of naval power by the public authorities to protect private interests but is also the victim of persecution and surveillance at home by the police.



The official response in such cases is well known: authority is backed by legality. Even as the authorities hide behind legal norms, such norms permit disasters to happen, like those in the nature reserve. It is, of course a fact that there is no scientific proof to indicate that CELCO is the direct cause of the tragedy of the Río Cruces— just as it is possible that there is no convincing proof that the victims of Hiroshima suffered from the direct action of the atomic bomb. Whatever the men and women in the locality have seen can obviously be twisted around by scientific reasoning and (especially) by the use of statistics. But, is this the role of the State? To turn a blind eye to, and step back from, such a terrible act, whose only objective is personal gain?

Once again, Mehuín is calling for Chile's attention. Once again, the resources belonging to Chilean men and women are being used for the benefit of a few Chileans, to the disadvantage of the great majority of the people of the country, and once again, such benefits are being procured at the cost of the health of current and future generations of coastal inhabitants.

*Debbie Guerra's e-mail: dguerra@uach.cl*

**Latin America/Chile****Supporting the struggle**

*Many groups are providing support to the struggle being waged by the community of Mehuín in southern Chile*

**by Brian O' Riordan, of ICSF's Brussels office, based on information provided by ECOCEANOS, Chile**

There is now a nationwide campaign to halt the latest move by CELCO (see story above). A group calling itself the "Communities in Conflict with Celco Nueva Aldea", which brings together producer organizations, NGOs and community-based organizations from the Itata Valley and the coastal fringe opposed to CELCO, have organized mass protests. They have accused the authorities, whom they consider to be the most "compliant and irresponsible that the region has known", of approving a project that will pollute the last remaining basin of clean waters in the Eighth Region, on which 45,000 people depend for drinking water and irrigation for fields and vineyards of international quality.

They are demanding that CELCO be ordered not to start discharging its liquid waste into the river Itata, and describe the environmental regulations applied to CELCO as being "irresponsible, polluting and not giving any guarantees to the communities, while violating their constitutional rights to live in an environment free from pollution".

At a meeting in the city of Temuco on 28 July, more than 100 representatives of civil society organizations associated with human rights, environmental issues, social movements and NGOs gave their total support to the community of Mehuín. They issued the following statement:

1. We demonstrate our solidarity with the community of Mehuín and its organizations who have decided once more to reject the intervention of the CELCO-ARAUCO company in its territory.
2. We reject the position of the government in providing support to CELCO-ARAUCO

through ordering the intervention of police and navy personnel in this area so as to assist the work of this company. Through this action, which took place last Tuesday (25 July), the government showed its total lack of interest in the views of its people, and endorsed the activities of a company whose irresponsible social and environmental behaviour has been brought into question.

3. We demand that the government finish all collaboration with CELCO-ARAUCO, which is accused in this province of destroying a nature reserve and polluting the rivers of Valdivia, causing serious damage to many agricultural and indigenous communities and local economic activities, and also putting the health of the people at risk. We also demand that the surveillance of the community representatives be stopped, and that the alleged agreements between CELCO and the Chilean Navy for operations at sea be clarified.

*Brian O'Riordan: briano@scarlet.be*

## Latin America/Chile

### Sea Martyrs of San Antonio

*Out-of-work women encarnadoras (hook baiters) in Chile take up acting and win wide acclaim*

**This article has been compiled by Brian O’Riordan from various sources, including the Conapach website (<http://www.conapach.cl/>)**

A play written and performed by 11 artisanal fisherwomen from San Antonio and Valparaiso, first staged in 2004, has recently made a comeback in Chile’s Vth Region, thanks to the support from the Regional Government of Valparaiso.

The play, *Women, the Embodiment of Abundance*, depicts the story of San Antonio over the last 40 years, from times of abundance to the current harsh realities faced by the artisanal fishing sector. The women have gathered together anecdotes, legends, and life experiences, and show how the catch quotas now set under the fisheries law have deprived women of their work.

According to Maria Teresa Olivera, the play’s director, “We want to tell people about the work that we used to do, to make women’s work in the sector—not previously known in this country—visible. The play is based on real-life stories taken from the book *Women in Artisanal Fisheries* by Michele Alarcón. It looks at the process of artisanal fishing from a woman’s perspective: male work has always been recognized, but the thankless women’s tasks of baiting the hooks, essential for catching the sea’s bounty, have been ignored.”

The play is currently (October/November 2006) touring theatres in Chile’s Vth Region, but its producers have put forward a much more ambitious proposal: to develop a nationwide tour. They have applied for support from the National Culture and Arts Council, the Fisheries Subsecretariat, and various fishermen’s organizations countrywide, in order to realize their project ‘Women forging networks...from San Antonio throughout Chile’. They hope to initiate this before the year-end and to continue through the whole of 2007. Maria Teresa Olivera asserts: “The project has been successful in demonstrating the important cultural rescue work that is being done to

get such unique and unknown practices as hook-baiting recognized”.

It was in 2004 that 11 women from the Encarnadoras Union Mártires del Mar de San Antonio (Sea Martyrs of San Antonio), with no previous acting experience, won a National Culture and Arts Council (Fondart) award. This enabled them to participate in the “Theatre of the Sea and Fishing Theatre Workshops with Artisanal Fisherwomen”. It involved five months of hard work, including acting and theory classes, which inspired them to create the play.

When people talk about artisanal fishing, they only tend to think about the fishermen who put out to sea every day, risking their lives in order to feed their families. However, if men are to go to sea, thousands of anonymous women must prepare the fishing trip at home, putting the bait on the hooks; a scene that is replicated in other spheres of economic activity: for men to work, women must take care of the domestic tasks and childcare, work that is not recognized by society.

“To begin with, we were very scared of failing, but, with hard work, we achieved our objectives of making the situation of women in artisanal fishing known, which had been invisible for so long,” recalls Viviana Cornejo, one of the actresses in the play, a representative of the Sea Martyrs Encarnadoras Union of San Antonio, and a member of Conapach’s Women’s Union Committee.



Another of the actresses and former *encarnadora* is Miriam Almonacid. Several years ago, when the resources depleted, she had to leave her work of baiting hooks. Since then, she has been working in the Valparaiso municipal programme for employment generation. Miriam says that acting in the play “is like stepping back in time, reminding me of when I learned hook-baiting, and how difficult it was at first. I did not like it because it pricked my fingers and everything stank, but, over time, I realized that this work allowed me to meet people and to earn good money. As far as supporting the struggles of the sector is concerned, this play provides some useful ammunition that allows us to say things that we could not otherwise say, that is, that artisanal fishermen’s continued existence depends entirely on hook-baiters continuing their work of preparing the trip so that the men can continue putting out to sea.”

In San Antonio alone there are at least 800 *encarnadoras*, and it is estimated that in Chile around 10,000 women live, or rather used to live, from this work; all belong to the informal sector, so they do not even have the basic rights historically gained by women, like maternity leave, social security, healthcare, etc.

*Brian O’Riordan can be contacted at:  
briano@scarlet.be*

## Latin America

### Networking to support

*This is a report of the Latin American Network of Women working in the fisheries sector (NETWIF), which has been active for five years*

**This article by Helga Josupeit, Fishery Industry Officer, Fish Utilization and Marketing Service FAO, is based on various reports of NETWIF (<http://mujeres.infopesca.org/>)**

For the last five years, the Centre for Marketing Information and Advisory Services for Fishery Products in Latin America and the Caribbean (INFOPECSA) has been co-ordinating the Latin American Network of Women working in the fisheries sector (NETWIF).

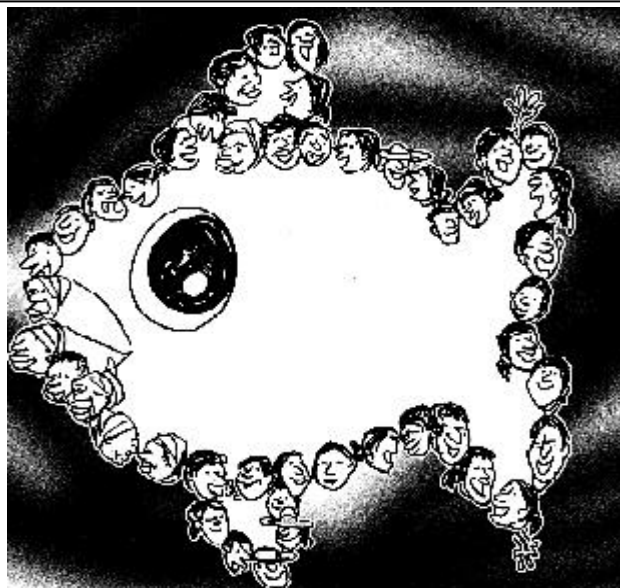
The network now has some 400 members from all the countries of the region. It is open to all women working in the fisheries sector—from those in production, processing and marketing, to those in the university or government.

Two meetings of the Focal Points of NETWIF have been held, in October 2000 and March 2002. In the first meeting held during 5-6 October 2000 in Montevideo, Uruguay, 28 persons from 10 countries of the region—Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Peru, Dominican Republic, Uruguay and Venezuela—participated. The delegates presented studies on various topics related to women in fisheries and aquaculture.

The meeting observed that women in fisheries were mainly working in the following areas:

*Fish factory workers:* Main activities of women working in fish factories are: filleting, selection of raw material, classification of species, gutting, heading, labelling, packing and cleaning in general. These are all activities that require meticulous work. In some cases, companies that do not work the year round, maintain the most efficient women in the tasks of cleaning and maintenance. When the season restarts, these women are tasked with supervision and training of new workers.

*Self-employed workers:* Self-employed workers include wives/ daughters/sisters of fishermen engaged in preparing and selling preserves, fish paste



and cakes, dried, salted and smoked fish, etc. This sector is growing due to the high unemployment in many countries.

*Artisanal fisherwomen:* These are usually the wives of small-scale fishermen, engaged in skilled and time-consuming jobs onshore, such as net-making and mending, and processing and marketing of catch. Frequently, women and children wade and collect bivalves and seaweed. In general, levels of education and income tend to be low.

*Aquaculture:* Women in small-scale aquaculture tend to work in feeding and harvesting fish, as well as in processing and selling fish and fish products.

*Fishing:* It is rare for women to go fishing at sea. It is, however, common to see them engaged in inland fishing in lagoons and rivers, where they use small boats and canoes.

*Marketing of fish and fishery products:* Women selling their husband's catches is a common sight at landing sites. It is also common to see women selling fish in markets and supermarkets.

*Quality assurance and fish and fishery products inspection:* Approximately 75 per cent of the professionals carrying out this activity in Latin America are women. Professionally, they are veterinarians, biologists, chemists and food engineers. Moreover, 20 per cent of fish inspectors are women, in general, veterinarians.

*Research and development of new products:* Women constitute 55 per cent of researchers working

on fisheries in universities. They are generally biologists, veterinarians, chemists, engineers and economists.

*Management and administrative activities:* There are many women who work as managers, executives, and directors in fishing and fish-processing companies, often in family-owned companies. Women are also found in public administration, working as professionals and secretaries. In some Latin American countries, maybe due to the low salaries, the public fisheries administration is in the hands of women, up to the highest levels. Only the posts of directors are in the hands of men.

The meeting recognized women's important roles in the fishery, as well as the skills they possessed. It also recognized, however, the following problems:

- discrimination in some Latin American countries against indigenous and Afro-American women, particularly in the context of the patriarchal structures in such communities;
- poor diffusion of the laws that have been promulgated in favour of women;
- low self-esteem, and weak and unstable unionization of women workers, as well as little information about family planning;
- occupational health problems faced by women workers in fish plants, linked to high levels of humidity, low temperatures, repetitive movements over a long period of time, and standing for long periods; and
- lack of remuneration of women's work in the artisanal sector, lack of social security coverage, etc.

The meeting stressed the importance of training for Latin American women in fisheries, including on technical topics (technology, handling, preservation, quality control and marketing), social topics (legislation, family planning), and on micro-enterprise development (creation and management of small companies and co-operatives). It was noted that women workers also need childcare support when they are away at work.

The meeting concluded that Latin American governments are not sufficiently aware of the problems of women in fisheries and aquaculture, and

that, as a consequence, they have not invested enough human or financial resources to assist them. Even where investments have been made, they are insufficient. The meeting also noted that, with few exceptions, most Latin American countries do not have statistics or information about the situation of the women in fisheries and aquaculture. Information is particularly lacking on women's participation, needs and expectations. In most countries, moreover, there are few women's organizations, and fishery and aquaculture communities lack good access to credit and co-financing.

Some of the recommendations from the meeting:

- Prepare a study on technical, socioeconomic and micro-enterprise-related aspects of women's needs in fisheries and aquaculture. This study should include qualitative and quantitative information, with the purpose of defining the priorities for action in the countries.
- Formulate an action plan for the medium term, directed towards improving the working conditions, diversification possibilities and the conditions of women in the fishery and aquaculture sector.
- Undertake training activities on specific topics towards capacity building of small-scale 'fisherwomen', aquaculturists, plant workers and wives of fishermen.
- Identify and promote credit lines and other loan systems accessible to women.

The participants committed to:

- consolidate local networks co-ordinated by the focal point of reference in each country;
- disseminate the activities and work already prepared for this First Latin American Meeting of Focal Points, as well as others, useful for the network;
- establish a permanent communication system among the members of the network through e-mail, and to encourage the active participation of all members;
- promote the interest and commitment of the national governments of the region to provide



active support to women in the fishery and aquaculture sector; and

- collect publications, existing legislation, photos and any other document regarding Latin American women, in general, and women of the fishery and aquaculture sector, in particular, in order to build an information centre for the network.

NETWIF's second meeting was organized by INFOPESCA from 18-20 March 2002. It was attended by 41 participants from 13 countries of the region. In addition to the country's focal points, workers from the artisanal sector also participated, voicing their specific needs and concerns. Since the first meeting in 2000, several activities had been initiated, especially in the field of data collection. Participants from Argentina and Uruguay presented studies on the role of women in their fisheries, showing the huge participation of women in the fish-processing industry in both countries.

The second meeting recommended, among other things, surveys to complete the analysis of the situation with regard to women working in fisheries and aquaculture. It also recommended that training activities be undertaken. A holistic approach to training was proposed, to include training aimed at improving fishing methods, processing, marketing, bookkeeping, and credit management.

Some of the following activities that have since been carried out by NETWIF include:

*Surveys:* The Directorate of Fisheries in Cuba (focal point of NETWIF) carried out a survey on the role of women in fisheries and aquaculture during 2003. The Directorate of Fisheries of Nicaragua (focal point of NETWIF), assisted by INFOPESCA and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) Netherlands Partnership Programme, carried out an analysis of the role of women in fisheries and recommended specific training needs.

*Training:* The 'Livelihood Diversification and Enterprise Development project' of FAO (LDED) carried out three training activities in Colombia (2004-2006), Honduras (2005) and Mexico (2005)

for fisherfolk (mainly women) communities. Training focused on fish processing, distribution, quality problems, marketing, bookkeeping, and small enterprise organization. The focal points of NETWIF in Colombia, Honduras and Mexico were instrumental in organizing and lecturing during the training events, while INFOPESCA and FAO were involved in the preparation of training material and carrying out the courses. These activities resulted in the creation of new enterprises (in Colombia and Honduras) or in the strengthening of already existing associations.

*Studies:* NETWIF carried out studies on women working in the fisheries industry in the Patagonian region of Argentina, Uruguay and southern Brazil. The studies were carried out in early 2002. The financing of the studies came from small grants of FAO. In 2004, the FAO Fisheries Circular No.992 summarized the main findings of the three studies in English, to more widely disseminate the outcomes of the studies. It was found that in the processing industry, women outnumber men. It was also found that the number of women increased in proportion to the degree of complexity of the processing function. The plant owners consider women as better capable of carrying out more precise tasks. It was generally noted in the studies that a high share of women's salaries is used for the purchase of food for the family and for higher education of the children. Therefore, the creation of jobs in the fish-processing industry could improve food security.

*Enterprise development:* A women's co-operative in Betume (Brazil) was equipped and trained under the project, "Development of Processing and Marketing of Tilapia Produced in Big Latin American River Basins". One ice machine was installed, the filleting plant was refurbished and the members of the women's co-operative were put into contact with potential buyers in the area. The project resulted in higher incomes for the members of the co-operative, and better infrastructure for the village.

More information on NETWIF can be obtained by contacting: [mujerpes@adinet.com.uy](mailto:mujerpes@adinet.com.uy)

*Helga Josupeit can be contacted at:* [helga.josupeit@fao.org](mailto:helga.josupeit@fao.org)

---

## FROM NORTH AMERICA/Canada

### Women in the shellfishery

by Donna Lewis, a fisher/aquaculturist from Prince Edward Island, Canada

---

I am a 40-year old mother of three, a fisher/aquaculturist and Director of the Prince County Shellfish Association in Mill River, Prince Edward Island (PEI), Canada. Of all the fisheries in our area, the shellfishery is one in which women have been the most involved.

My family and I have leased 34 acres of water in which we cultivate oysters and soft-shell clams. We specialize in top quality Choice Malpeque Oysters and take great pride in the success of culturing soft-shell clams — these same clams were in danger of becoming extinct in public waterways due to overfishing and contamination.

There is a public fishery (in the open seas) here which boasts many grades of oysters and mussels, and various species of clams. It is a seasonal fishery — closed for the majority of harvesters from December to April, both months inclusive. There is also a growing interest in a certain sector of the population in developing aquaculture in all of these areas to create some sense of sustainable economy within the shellfishery.

Along with this comes the risks we are now facing with large corporations investing heavily and driving down the prices to the individual harvesters. These corporations are buying up large leased areas of water (not in their own names) and collecting their own seed stock.

When the stock reaches marketable size, there will be a glut of shellfish. They will control the price and the established markets, and they will no longer have to purchase the product from the public fishers. We suspect that the price will drop dramatically even for those who do manage to grow a top quality product for which demand is high, while the rest will be forced to work for these same buyers for a minimum wage or on a commission basis.

At another level, the lack of access to timely, accurate information is causing a rift between the recreational fishers and the public, and the people who earn

their living from the sea. This is because there are many misconceptions about methods of harvest now used, i.e. mechanized harvesters, and about whether they are depleting the fishery or enhancing it.

The general public is overwhelmed with myth and rumour and has only recently begun to accept and acknowledge that the new methods of mechanized harvesting are positive, and actually nurture and help to re-establish fishing grounds previously depleted.

Women play an increasingly vital role in the public fishery, in aquaculture and in protecting shellfish environments, not only with their physical contribution, but also through advocacy for changes to legislation and education of the general population on the potential of this industry.

While the role women play is critical, this does not imply that they have not had, or that they will not continue to face, many obstacles in the path they have chosen.

There is much prejudice in almost all government Ministries involved in regulation and licensing about the physical ability and ‘knowhow’ of women to participate in the harvesting of shellfish and the operation of such basic equipment as a dory and motor.

While most seafood processors and buyers recognize the ability of these same women, they are continually challenged and harassed by government officials when income is declared. In PEI, when income is below a certain level established by the government, fishers are entitled to income supplements called Employment Insurance Benefits during the months when it is impossible to fish or find other work.

Sexist attitudes allow prejudice and assumptions to enter into the determination of applications for these benefits, which are only 50 per cent of earned income.

The government has also decided that marriage does not constitute a legal partnership—spouses must operate “within arms length” of each other and show no special favouritism when sharing equipment, fishing ground, etc.

Logistically, this makes fishing an expensive proposition for families who have to have two sets of gear,

or separate leased sites, etc. Everything has a fee. While the cost of licenses has gone up over the last couple of years, the cost of leases are expected to rise by about 600 per cent soon.

There is a generation of shellfishers in PEI who were forced to work at a very early age, giving up all opportunities for formal education and learning—earning their degrees from the school of life instead.

Many women now take leadership roles here in protecting the habitat of shellfish, creating partnerships with those who can affect change, starting local newsletters and workshops to invoke a greater understanding and appreciation of the industry, all the while participating physically and in most cases being responsible for all of the bookkeeping and reporting requirements that come with the job.

I am one such woman, but I am not alone by any means. We are very lucky here on PEI to have come to identify and realize the resources available to women in the industry.

These include resources like Cooper Institute, a non-profit research group, as well as invaluable publications, such as the Atlantic Women's Fishnet, which is written by women for women and which deals specifically with gender issues in the fishery and the accomplishment of women of fishing communities.

Newfoundland and Labrador

## Low value or high value?

*Changes in the fishery and in processing technology have affected the nature of the work available to processing workers in Catalina, Newfoundland*

by **Bernice Duffett**

---

*Bernice Duffett is from the Bonavista peninsula, on the northeast coast of Newfoundland, Canada. She has been a plant worker for 28 years. She worked for 20 years processing groundfish (primarily cod) and her plant now processes shrimp. She is president of the local union in her plant and is on the women's committee of the FFAW/CAW that represents fish harvesters and many of the processing workers in Newfoundland.*

Since 1992, the fishing industry in Newfoundland has gone through a major restructuring in terms of what we fish and the amount of work generated from that fish. The fishery has gone from a lower-value, labour-intensive groundfish industry to a higher-value, technology-intensive shellfish industry.

In 1988, in Newfoundland and Labrador, cod and flatfish fisheries produced catches of 400,000 tonnes. By 1993, these groundfish catches were under 30,000 tonnes. In less than five years, 90 per cent of the Newfoundland and Labrador groundfish base had disappeared—and with it, thousands of jobs. Ten years ago, shellfish made up seven per cent of total landings and less than 30 per cent of landed value. By 1998, shellfish made up about 53 per cent of total landings and 75 per cent of total landed value. The production value of the fishery in 1998 was Can\$750 million. It was expected to exceed Can\$800 million in 1999, despite the continuing crisis in our groundfish fisheries.

One of the biggest problems facing our fishing society continues to be a resource shortage. However, technological change is also an issue. Technology has changed the nature of our work in processing plants throughout the province. Shellfish processing is considerably more automated than groundfish processing. The shift from a labour-intensive groundfish fishery to a technology-driven shellfish industry has resulted in less employment for plant workers, many of whom are women.

In the late 1980s, estimates suggested that about 26,000 people in Newfoundland and Labrador got some employment from the processing sector of the fishery—many of these jobs provided full-time employment, and many of them were held by women. Today, few processing jobs are full-time, and only about 13,000 people (more than half of whom are women) work in the processing sector of the fishery.

My own plant is a perfect example of the changes that have taken place in the Newfoundland and Labrador fishery. Fishery Products International's Port Union plant used to employ over 1,000 people to process groundfish. We worked full-time, all round the year. This plant was recently renovated for shrimp processing. This meant new ventilation systems, new equipment and a complete reworking of the plant's internal structures, at considerable capital investment. It also meant retraining for the workers. Today, fewer than 200 people work in the Port Union plant processing shrimp for between 14 and 20 weeks a year. Since they tend to have lower seniority than the male workers, women now make up only a small minority of the workers who are still employed in the highly automated Port Union plant.

Some women have disappeared from the paid workforce. Others have moved into boats, working alongside their husbands, brothers or fathers. Women fish harvesters are directly affected not only by the resource shortage, but also by how the resource is shared. The future of women fish harvesters in the industry is tied to a more equal sharing of our fisheries resources.

The main challenge facing our communities is survival. Most of the women in the processing sector of the industry will tell you there is less work and that work is more uncertain. Add to that the cuts to the unemployment insurance system and what we end up with is an economic reality far removed from the policymakers in Ottawa. Therefore, the challenge is to see not just how our coastal communities can survive, but whether there is the political will to ensure that they will survive and prosper.

Newfoundland and Labrador

## **We, women, are out there, fishing....**

*More women are fishing after the crisis, though the going is not always smooth*

by Mildred Skinner

*Mildred Skinner is an inshore fisher from Harbour Breton, Newfoundland. She is the representative for inshore fishers at the Fish, Food and Allied Workers Union (FFAW/CAW) in her region.*

I am a crew member and a partner aboard of a 38-foot longliner. I also fish lobster with my husband from a 22-foot open boat. Talk to any woman who fishes inshore for a living, myself included, and they will tell you they are fishing out of necessity. When the fish stocks started to diminish 12 years ago, that's when we women started to fish in our area. It just made sense financially for me to go fishing with my husband. It meant we could still make a living from the fishery, but now we have two shares coming to one household.

We were always part of our husbands' enterprises, but we weren't seen. Earlier, we took care of banking, and picked up groceries and other supplies for the vessels. We were the communication link to the Canadian government's Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO), the union, fish buyers, and other government agencies. Without our work, our husbands' enterprises wouldn't have thrived as well as they did. All of this was unpaid labor.

Now we are crew members. Most of us are getting fair wages for our work or receiving the same wages as other crew members on vessels. But we still have women out there in those fishing boats who are not getting paid or are getting what their husbands see fit to give them as a share. If fishing women in my area were asked, they would tell you that if another job became available, they would grab it in a second.

Most working women are stressed. Their stresses relate to childcare, work performance, and workplace issues. But for a fishing woman, these issues take on an entirely different dimension. Our work starts at three

or four in the morning and ends at seven or eight at night. For those of us who need it, it is very difficult to find adequate childcare because of the long hours involved. If there are older children, they have to take on more responsibility. One woman told me she got lucky last year because she found a good sitter. For the first time in ten years, she could fish and not have to feel guilty, for someone was taking care of her children.

Since we are seasonal workers, dealing with the Employment Insurance (EI) system has always been a nightmare. But, when you have to hire a caregiver for your children and work with this system, then you are dealing with a bigger nightmare.

I know one woman who was caring for her daughter's child this year. She is the grandmother and was doing this because the daughter is attending Memorial University. So, the time came for the grandmother to go fishing this year, and she hired another daughter to care for the child. She contacted all the right people in the government and they told her the exact deductions to take out of this daughter's cheques to pay for her EI premiums. She did it all right. Everything was fine and when the baby sitter/daughter filed for EI, she was approved and started to receive benefits. Meanwhile, her file came up at Revenue Canada. They are now reviewing her case. The reason? They think she was paid for too many hours. This should be a nine-to-five job, they think. They said: "You are not out there fishing for twelve hours a day. That's not possible." Somebody has to convince someone at Revenue Canada that fishing is not a nine-to-five job. I am sure there are a hundred stories like this one out there.

One woman told me this year: "Mildred, I've aged. Since I started fishing, I have aged because of the stress, the stress of feeling guilty. I feel guilty when I am out fishing because of the time I spend away from my family. If I take the day off, I feel guilty because my husband has to fish alone. If I am not aboard the boat that day and my husband comes to the wharf, I feel guilty when people think I'm not fishing and could think that I don't deserve my EI next winter. The chances are that someone will call the government and report that I wasn't in the fishing boat that day."

As women fish harvesters, we find that there is a stigma attached to us. People outside the fisheries see us as using the system. Some do. But for those of us who are legitimate fish harvesters, we constantly have to prove we are more than just fishing on paper. Most men think we shouldn't be on the fishing boat, to start with. One of the women on board a boat told me that her husband feels guilty. He doesn't feel right when other men see his wife aboard the boat. Other men tell him: "You know, you are going to ruin her aboard of the boat; it's not good for her to be doing that. You shouldn't have her there to start with."

We find that women have very little voice in decision-making. Not many of us sit on an advisory board or fishermen's committee. We've no outlet, and most of us have gotten lost and feel overlooked, even within our own local union committee. Our women's committee at the FFAW is working hard to change this. I find all of the meetings that I attend are for fishermen, and there are not many women who come to those meetings.

I remember last year we had one man in our meeting, and he was giving me a rough time about paying union dues. He said: "Most people get to pay Can\$150 and I have to pay Can\$300 a year." I said: "Why would you have to pay \$300 a year?" He replied: "I pay \$150 for me and a \$150 for my wife." And I said: "But isn't your wife aboard the boat fishing as well?" He said, "Yes." And I said: "But of course she pays her *own* union dues." But he could not understand that. In his mind, he was paying the dues for his wife. Even though she was aboard the boat doing as much work as he was doing, she really wasn't there in his mind.

On the south coast of Newfoundland and Labrador, as well as in other areas, vessels are being forced further offshore. A lot of these vessels are not big enough to travel such long distances. Our boat went out to the Laurentian Channel this year, 110 miles from shore. The seas are very, very rough. It scares me when I think of the potential for disaster. If there is a disaster, it won't be like it was in the past when fathers and sons drowned and mothers and wives were left. Now, mothers and wives would drown as well.

Another major problem I see is inadequate healthcare protection. Very few, if any, of us are paying into a medical plan. We know women who are developing ailments — back problems, joint problems, kidney

infections...the list goes on. One thing I am really proud about is that our union is now in the process of bringing a medical programme to our membership for approval. This would be a tremendous help for us.

I am very proud to be part of our union. Somehow, we need to encourage women to get involved in issues that affect them. We are working to achieve that. We women fish harvesters are out there, and our numbers are increasing every year.

## Newfoundland and Labrador

### A crabby life

*Workers in snow crab processing plants are prone to accidents, repetitive strain injuries and to other work-related illnesses*

by Della Knee

---

*Della Knee has been working at Beothic Fish Processors Limited in Valleyfield, Newfoundland, a snow crab processing plant, for the past 10 seasons*

New-Wes-Valley, Bonavista Bay, consists of a number of adjacent, small sub-communities located on the east coast of Newfoundland. In the community of Valleyfield, you will find a fish processing business that has been around for over 30 years—Beothic Fish Processors Limited (BFPL). At Beothic, we have a multi-species plant, a very modern and growing place. Workers are a very important factor when you look at the success of this establishment. The consideration for the workers at BFPL is second to none.

The snow crab processing plant at BFPL is state-of-the-art and is a very good place to work. However, we have watched our work hours decline dramatically in the crab processing area. Once, we produced meat products only. Today, we are sending our crab out in sections. A section is where the crab is cooked, butchered and packed as two separate pieces per crab. This process has cut the labour intensity of the work and hence the number of jobs created.

Technology is also playing a role in the number of person-hours required to process this product. Technology is often seen as something that makes our jobs a little less stressful to our bodies, but technology is two-sided in that often it comes with job losses. When considering new technology, it has to be assessed who will benefit most from it. Will a new invention help a troubled area in the plant or will it just increase productivity, putting the workers in other areas of the plant at higher risk for injuries?

When people look at our way of life, they rarely see how this type of work can place stress on a worker's health. The human body can only stand so much strain, until eventually it will let you know how it is suffering.

The continuous use of the same muscle will eventually result in an injury. The number of workers who suffer with repetitive strain injuries would frighten anyone. Some injuries are accidental, but most injuries are the result of too much work in a very short time doing the same job day in and day out.

When we talk about injuries, we only touch the surface of the health problems we as crab plant workers face. For many years, the workers have experienced many symptoms, some associated with the flu. Today, we recognize this illness as work-related. It is known as Snow Crab Occupational Asthma (SCOA). The symptoms are many, and some are hard to associate with the workplace. Research has come a long way in recognizing what causes these symptoms and how to diagnose this problem as work-related. To date, only a handful of workers have been diagnosed with SCOA, but this does not mean that the problem is not widespread.

SCOA is affecting many of our workforce, and the company and workers alike are striving to improve the quality of the air we breathe when we are at work. A majority of the workers at Beothic, when filling out a survey on symptoms of SCOA, said they had experienced one or more of the symptoms on the survey. That gives us some idea of how serious this problem is. We now have to educate our rural doctors, our plant owners, and the workers alike in how to diagnose this illness, find out how to improve the quality of air in our plants, and let the workers know that they are not alone and that there are things they can do to protect themselves from this illness. The research and conclusions done in this area will benefit both the workers and the company.

Wearing a mask of any kind with a filter is a help to the worker who experiences chest congestion and coughing. Research has shown that the main things to look for that increase the risk to the worker are cooking steam, water vapour, and crab dust that accumulates around the saws.

Recognizing that this is a work-related illness indicates that the worker with this disease should be compensated for time off work, medical costs and disability by Workers Compensation.

However, this qualifying for Workers Compensation is a very long and tiresome process that is often expensive for the worker. Not only is the worker unable to work but, under the present system, she must travel to urban areas to be diagnosed and then, if diagnosed with SCOA, she will be reimbursed for costs by Workers Compensation. The reality is that people are coping with the illness and making do the best way they can until they can no longer work in the plant.

Beothic Fish is second to none in the concern they express for the health of their workforce. We all need guidance on how to improve the quality of the air we are breathing in our plants. Together with research, follow-up and interest by all employers and employees, we can minimize the effect processing crab has on the health of the work force.



## Newfoundland and Labrador

**Women are human too**

*Women workers are demanding to be judged and rewarded according to their commitment, experience and ability*

by **Carol Penton, Cheryl Cobb-Penton and Bonnie McCay**

*Carol Penton is a reporter for the Fogo Island Flyer, a monthly magazine that serves Fogo Island. Cheryl Cobb-Penton is the editor of this magazine and Bonnie McCay teaches anthropology and ecology at Rutgers University, New Jersey, USA*

Fogo Island is on the northeast coast of the Canadian province of Newfoundland and Labrador. Since the late 1960s it has been the site of a fishing cooperative which serves six island communities, home of over 2,500 people. The Fogo Island Cooperative has been remarkably successful over the years in helping make it possible for people to continue to live on the Island, dependent on the inshore and nearshore fisheries for income and employment.

The Co-op was always seen as both an economic and a social institution, and during the 1980s it was able to expand the work opportunities for islanders by developing fish and crab plants, which came to employ up to 500 women and men. Today it runs a plant for filleting and freezing groundfish as well as capelin, lumpfish roe, herring, and other products; another for crab processing; and as of July 2000, one for shrimp processing.

Both the fishers and the fish plant workers have the opportunity to be members and hence owners of the Co-operative. The fish plant workers have resisted efforts to bring them into a union that represents almost all the fish plant workers, and fishers, in the rest of Newfoundland and Labrador. The ideology has been "we are all in the same boat." But of late unionization has come under greater scrutiny as members search for a solution to the issues that face the general plant worker.

There has been a tension between management and the fish plant workers, and even more so, between the plant workers and the large-scale 'longliner' fishers.

These fishers are heavily represented on the Co-operative's board of directors and have a strong say in the co-operative's policy, including fish plant policy. This is because their large vessels, equipped for turbot, crab, and shrimp fishing, supply the plants with most of the raw product upon which fish plant jobs depend.

The long-standing local dilemma is that the Co-op depends on the raw product of the fishers, and the fishers thus claim some 'right' to ask that their own family members get special consideration at the fish and crab plants. On the other hand, workers claim the right to be judged and rewarded on the basis of their commitment and experience (i.e. seniority) and their ability, no matter who they live with and are related to. Complaints about hiring for other reasons—the so-called 'fishermen's wives' preference—are long-standing. This situation came to a head recently. The Fogo Island Co-op has been in the throes of competition for raw product with numerous other buyers, with other communities struggling with unemployment and failed fisheries, and with its own members trying to make the best of the very bad situation of the cod moratorium of the 1990s. The Co-op has diversified, and its crab fishery and crab plant helped families get through the groundfish crisis in the early nineties. However, the crab fishery's season gets shorter by the year, reducing the chances that plant workers will qualify for unemployment benefits during the long winter off-season.

Forced to compete on a global market, the co-operative invested in a new, more efficient crab plant—with a much-reduced work force. Competition for jobs at the plant increased, and the need for clear rules about hiring and firing went up. Meanwhile, competition for the crabs caught by Fogo Island's large longliner vessels, and the inability of the Co-op to offer them financing to upgrade their vessels for the crab fishery and the new shrimp fishery, combined with more specific issues, has resulted in the loss of many boats to other buyers. Plant capacity has become far higher than the raw product available and there is less work.

The Co-op's board of directors hit upon a solution to both problems in its 'preferential hiring' policy, based on ability and seniority but 'with preference given to family members' of fishers who delivered all of their fish and shellfish to the cooperative, rather than to other buyers. These incentives were to increase raw prod

uct to the plants, ensuring that the benefits of employment went to the members and were not shipped out to off-island buyers. Those members whose spouses shipped their catch elsewhere would therefore not be 'eligible' for employment at the plant.

As a result of this policy many senior women plant workers lost their jobs. They subsequently took the case to court. Many of the 33 women who filed complaints had long been Co-op members in good standing. A typical situation was one where their spouses had been small-scale inshore fishers who shipped their lobsters traditionally to a buyer off the Island. Another typical situation was where a woman's spouse or boyfriend worked on a nearshore longliner vessel, and the owner decided to ship his fish or crabs off the island.

At the hearings in March 2000, testimonies were given by both the employees who had lost their jobs, and representatives of the Co-op. One of the women, who had held a supervisory position at the plant for many years, spoke of how surprised and upset she was when she found out that she too had lost her seniority and job. "I was shocked at losing my job because of something my husband had done that I had no control over? The Plant had become my second home, my second family, and that in the year 2000, this should not be happening."

Representing the position of the Co-op, the Project Coordinator commented, "with approximately 20 Fogo Island boats shipping their catch elsewhere, we were forced to do what was in the very best interest of the Co-op to ensure its survival". He also stated, "to accommodate members whose spouses are supporting other businesses we would be helping to subsidize another business, often at our own expense" and that "it was only fair to hire workers who were full supporters of the Co-op."

As of this writing (the end of July 2000) no decision has been reached in the matter, and most of the women are no longer working for the Co-op. They are struggling to make ends meet as low-paid home care workers, baby-sitters, or by simply trying to make do with no income of their own.

Although Fogo Island is remote, a small island in the North Atlantic, it is firmly enmeshed in a globalized system. The Fogo Island Co-op's markets are established, yet ensuring its stability in a competitive marketplace is a priority. To add to this, globalization, regional and local issues are affecting the role of women, whose sole source of income is the fishery.

## Prince Edward Island

# Cleaned Out

*Women traditionally working as cleaners on oyster boats find themselves forced out of their jobs*

by **Donna Lewis**

*Donna Lewis is a shellfisher from Brooklyn, Prince Edward Island. She and her husband, Lloyd, work 34 acres of leased waterway on the Mill River where they fish oysters and clams. Donna is an articulate advocate and spokesperson for the rights of artisanal fishers. She is active on environmental issues, lobbying for changes in government regulations and advocating for children's rights. Donna is a regular contributor to two publications on fisheries issues.*

Prince Edward Island has earned an international reputation for excellence on the world shellfish market. One species that has achieved this recognition is the Malpeque oyster.

The physical labor associated with fishing oysters is intensive. 'Tongs', which are basically two rakes, 6-14 feet in length and fastened together, are used to grapple the oysters from the ocean floor and lift them to the boat for cleaning and sorting. Every oyster must be free of spat (oyster seed), barnacles and mussels, and must be at least three inches long to be sold. This activity takes place on public fishing grounds from 1 May to 15 July and from 15 September to 1 December (weather permitting), providing a small window of opportunity for oyster fishers to make a living.

For the most part, women, often the spouses, have done the task of cleaning and sorting. To do this, they must possess a commercial fishing registration card, which costs Can\$50.00. The fisherman who owns the boat and gear either pays them a nominal fee, or, by special agreement, they earn a share of the catch. The latter is more lucrative, and not many women are paid that way.

The practice of employing a 'cleaner' has been widely accepted in the past, even though the DFO acknowledges that under Licensing and Registration Regulations 4.1, "no person shall fish for or catch and retain fish...without...a licence."

Several years ago, the federal government saw fit to reclassify and divide fishers into two groups: 'core' licences were given for species that could bring in higher incomes such as lobster, crab, scallop, and 'non-core' licences for species with a lower potential for bringing in income, such as oyster, clam, quahog, eel, etc. The price of a 'core' licence package has risen to over Can\$400,000 in recent months. This has made it difficult for those making marginal incomes to enter the more prosperous fisheries. Few 'core' licence holders are women.

To qualify as a core fisher, several criteria have to be met, including: being head of a fishing enterprise; holding a licence for a main species (lobster, crab, shrimp); being part of the fishery for a long time; and earning one's main income (more than 75 per cent) from the fishery.

The PEI Shellfish Association, an organization representing Island shellfishers, had never pressed for the enforcement of Regulation 4.1 until this past April 2000. At that time, a public meeting was called and, with approximately 200 fishers in attendance (out of a possible 2,000 license holders), a vote was held on the issue of banning 'cleaners' from the boats unless they held an oyster licence. Only oyster licence holders were permitted to vote. Those who only had commercial registrations, even though they were members of the Association, were excluded.

Jimmy A'Hearn, vice-president of the Association, fishes in one of the more popular Spring grounds in Wilmot, PEI. According to him, the number of cleaners appears to have dropped by 60 per cent since the vote took place. He also claimed that conservation was the incentive for pressing the enforcement of the existing legislation.

The dilemma facing all the women who have been displaced from the position of cleaners is that, in 1987, a moratorium was placed on new oyster licences. Speculation over the past couple of years has driven the price for a licence up to approximately Can\$10,000. To further complicate the situation, the DFO has started buying back licences in response to the Marshall Decision. In this decision, the Supreme Court of Canada has acknowledged native and aboriginal treaty rights to earn a moderate livelihood within the existing fisheries. The DFO's intent has been to buy 'core' packages that would also include oyster, clam,

etc. However, in recent weeks, a third party has purchased 16 individual oyster licences at an undisclosed price. This practice has increased the price of all licences, pushing the prospect of a cleaner being able to afford a licence even farther out of reach.

The media's response to women being forced out of their traditional occupation was to print excerpts from a press release issued by the Federal Government stating, "The taking of cleaners in the boats allows licence holders to increase landings significantly, as the time-consuming job of sorting and cleaning is performed by cleaners. While this practice was not considered a major issue for the oyster industry in the past, the PEI Shellfish Association has asked the DFO to increase enforcement of these regulations, authorizing only licensed fishers in the fishery operation."

In my opinion, one decision made by mankind in the name of conservation has dealt a fateful blow to those women continuing the struggle to survive and maintain access to fish resources in Island coastal communities.

New Brunswick

## Closing the gap

*Women from New Brunswick are concerned about equity in terms of women receiving equal pay for work of equal value, and equity in terms of access to the fisheries resource*

by **Docile Cormier, Kouchibouguac**

*Docile Cormier is a secretary in a school board. Though not directly involved in the fishery, she was born, raised and still lives in a fishing community where she is very active. She is a union activist and has been helping women from her area organize within the 'Comité des femmes côtières du Nouveau-Brunswick', a group devoted to bringing women from coastal communities together and giving them a voice. This write-up is based on a statement presented at the Newfoundland workshop.*

Women are working together in order to achieve pay equity. We want to close the gap that exists between the wages of women and men, for the same work. The major reason for this gap is that, historically, work done by women has been undervalued and underpaid, in relation to work done by men.

Pay inequity is a widespread problem, but it is even more crucial for women in the fisheries sector in New Brunswick who work under difficult conditions and are paid very low wages. In fish-plants, men are paid an average of Can\$2 an hour more than women doing comparable work. Very few fish-plants in New Brunswick are unionized and the seasonal nature of the fishery gives very little bargaining power to the workers. Production is very concentrated and requires women to work long hours but for short periods of time.

This is why the *Comité des femmes côtières du Nouveau-Brunswick* has joined a coalition of women organizing for the Women's World March 2000 which is dedicated to pay equity. In October 2000, before joining other women from the world in New York, the women from New Brunswick will meet their provincial premier to request a Pay Equity Act.

Women are also demanding equity of access to the resource for the inshore fishers. We all know that fishermen have high payments to assume: boats, fishing gear and now they have additional costs with mandatory dockside monitoring, observer fees, costs for harbour authorities, and so on. All these extra costs come at a time when the fishing industry is least able to absorb them. This puts a great deal of additional stress on the fishers and also their wives and children.

In our communities, there is a widespread feeling that fairer sharing of access to fisheries resources would enable more fishermen and their families to survive. For instance, we want, and should have, quotas for snow crab in inshore waters.

In New Brunswick, the lucrative snow crab is fished by a relatively small mid-shore fleet of approximately 100 vessels which are engaged in a partnership agreement with the DFO. This fleet contributes to the costs of research and monitoring and, in exchange, has been given exclusive access to the snow crab resource. For years now, the inshore fishers, through their organization, the MFU, have been asking for fair access to snow crab in inshore waters. This would allow them to develop a sustainable multi-species fishery. The snow crab would help our communities, as the fishermen would bring in more money, and other members of their families would work in the fish-plants to prepare the crab meat.

Nova Scotia

## Profits for a few

*The common person can never afford to become a fish harvester again*

by Mary Desroches

*Mary Desroches is a member and volunteer in several non-profit organizations such as Coastal Communities Network (CCN), FishNet, Western Area Women's Coalition, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, and Women's CED Network. CCN developed as a provincial umbrella organization with its membership representing rural and coastal organizations to provide a collective 'Large Voice for Small Communities'. Since it was founded in 1992, CCN provides a forum for these organizations to find common ground for activities and information sharing.*

CCN has just completed a Rural Revitalization Project aimed at strengthening regional and provincial networks. As I worked on this project, I was fascinated by the way each regional pilot took on a life of its own. In one region, the focus was on raising awareness about Community Based Management (CBM) of our resources. Workshops were held in four counties to both spark interest and increase participation in developing and implementing a pilot CBM plan for the Fundy region. Another region began a process of cross-cultural dialogue with First Nations, the black community, Acadian and communities of European descent. The three dialogue dinners held have provided a safe atmosphere for each culture to learn about one another and to recognize our similarities. An outcome has been the recognition of our similar values that will be the foundation of working together to bridge the gaps within the cultural diversity of rural Nova Scotia. Although the Rural Revitalization project has ended, activities to move CBM and cross-cultural dialogue forward continues.

Many fishery organizations and some provincial organizations have developed to deal with public concerns and are very active.

Consultation with government representatives continues, but, in most cases, to no avail. Over the past decade, thousands of meetings have been held with government officials, with very clear requests for fair policies that protect the rights of coastal people and the environment. However, the same policy directives continue to appear: privatization of the best wharves, while wharves in poor condition are unloaded onto small communities. The privatization of fisheries resources continues, even as our diverse forests are clear-cut, our waters become highly polluted, and there is a substantial increase in the number of families living in poverty.

Currently, I'm working with The Women for Economic Equality Society (WEE). We are working on a pilot project called Women's Community Economic Development Network (WCEDN) in three counties of Nova Scotia. One of our goals is to assist women with information and workshops to develop or strengthen home-based and small businesses. The Learning Series of self-help modules aims to strengthen existing or newly organized groups. Over 200 people in Nova Scotia, PEI, and Newfoundland have just completed a test of this model, with participants' suggestions incorporated into the final draft.

I am a woman of the fisheries. My culture and my family's way of life have always been 'the sea' as far back as one can trace. My husband, who has fished in the Fundy region for 25 years, started his fishing life at the age of 12, alongside his father in Prince Edward Island. His family also comes from a traditional culture based on earning a livelihood from the sea. Our grown children, as well as my husband and I, are in the throes of building an alternative way of life that provides the basics and a bit of security for the future. Why are my family and thousands of other fishing families facing the necessity to change our culture, our way of life? Especially when this way of life has depended on a renewable resource that could not be destroyed by sustainable methods of fishing such as hook-and-line?

The devastation of the various species of fish stocks that once were plentiful in our region began in the late 1950s with the introduction of new technology. By the early 1960s, overfishing was having a negative impact, with fishing folk having to travel further and further from home to find groundfish. The slaughter of fish stocks continues today in this region, as two of the three remaining species being fished are in trouble. Yet, the fishing industry in Nova Scotia is doing well in terms of 'profit for a few', with the overall value of the fishery not dropping once since the devastation of the Atlantic groundfish.

So, with such great landed value from our fish stocks, what is all this talk of a fishing crisis? It is evident to us: corporate takeovers, the quota system, public policies implemented by the government including support for privatization of our natural resources, continued downloading of responsibilities to communities and community organizations, continued removal of government responsibility for infrastructure vital to the survival of coastal and rural communities. The resulting issues include rising costs, deteriorating, unsafe harbours with no place to dock, stress, unhealthy communities, conflicts between individuals, cultures and communities. All these actually arise from policy directives.

In all this, the reality of people's lives remains invisible. Invisible are the truly emotional trials of adjustment that families have to confront both within the home and within the community. Fishing families, men and women, have lost not only their livelihood but also their identity. Men have been socialized to believe that they are the main 'breadwinners', the 'kings of their castles.'

What happens when their livelihood is ripped away from them? Often, in this situation, men go into denial, then withdrawal. Fear for the future is an underlying, ongoing concern. There is loss of self-esteem, self-confidence, and blaming of self for failure, because we live in a society that claims that anyone can be successful if they work hard enough.

Put it all together and those with the decision-making power continue to disregard the generations of families who earned their livelihood from the sea. A culture, a way of life, is facing 'genocide' in the first degree. Women are dealing with stress, added responsibility to hold the family together in dire economic times, suicide or fear of suicide, and, in many cases, conforming to the status quo (for example, accepting ITQs) against personal values and principles in order to continue to make a living from the sea. Each year, neighbors and family helplessly watch their members succumb to the ever-increasing pressures and costs that force yet another family out of the fishing industry.

How many families have been negatively affected by the fishery crisis of the 1980s and 1990s? Fifty thousand Atlantic Canadians were displaced from the fishing industry by 1995. At that time, thousands more uncounted people fell through the cracks of the income-support programmes. Over the last five years, the displacement of small-scale fishworkers and fish harvesters and the loss of a way of life continue. What is it really like to live in the midst of this trial and tribulation? What does it take to go beyond this level of hopelessness to move into the mode of resiliency that has allowed Atlantic Maritime peoples to remain in their homeland? Where do we take account of the courage to pack up your family and to move in hopes of finding that alternative livelihood elsewhere? Where do we account for the loss of the extended family that supports each other throughout these periods of economic hardship?

The new wave of fisheries under quota systems allows for a paper fish market that is traded on stock markets. The owners of these fish resource may never see the Atlantic waters, let alone catch a fish. Invisible owners of our fish. Invisible pain and suffering of coastal women and men. What needs to be recognized and supported is the tremendous courage and determination of these Maritime families to move beyond these stages resulting from a severe loss of a way of life and living that is robbed not only from this generation but also from our children and our grandchildren.

All of my four children left Nova Scotia to find jobs in other places. All have returned home and are doing as well as they did in their travels. My family is still dependent on our natural resources to survive. We are adjusting, adapting. Those terms instilled from somewhere beyond. The common person can never afford to become a fish harvester again. It is time that the toll on families, the emotional turmoil, poverty, uncertainty, and fear be recognized and addressed. Politicians must be held accountable for their decisions that cause such havoc in the lives of our families, our communities, and our environment. For us, it is not over yet. We are trying hard to rebuild our lives. It is not easy.



Nova Scotia

## The invisible ones

*No union or association can speak for those who can no longer fish*

by **Ishbel Munro**

---

*Ishbel Munro is Co-ordinator of the Coastal Communities Network (CCN) in Nova Scotia. The CCN is a volunteer association of organizations whose mission is to provide a forum to encourage dialogue, share information, and create strategies and actions that promote the survival and development of Nova Scotia's coastal and rural communities.*

We are the invisible ones. In our snug homes by the sea, no one hears our silent cries hanging like fog over our villages, coves and towns.

Our families have fished for generations. It is not what we do. It is what we are. One by one, we have been squeezed out of the fishery. The small, independent fishing family hanging on, hanging on... while costs rise—fees to tie up at the wharf, fees to be monitored, rising insurance costs, gas and bait, even as the amount of fish we are allowed to catch gets smaller and smaller. One more regulation breaks our hope. There is nowhere else to borrow from, to hang on and hope for another year. We are the invisible, silent ones. No union or association speaks for us, as we can no longer fish.

When we lose our spouse to death, the community supports us, extends a helping hand. We can grieve and slowly heal. When we lose our way of life, we are alone. We are invisible. The pain is internal, turned in on the family. The man's pain is like bone cancer, gnawing at his confidence, his self-esteem, his image, the reality of who he is. The woman's pain is a knot of silent tears circling, squeezing tighter and tighter around her heart. It takes the strength and goodness out of her body, until her legs ache as she carries another load of laundry up the stairs, while bills and needs replay and re-play in her mind. For the children, it is seeing the strain grow in your parents' eyes. You never know when they will snap.

The child forgets money is tight and asks for new shoes for school and then feels so bad to see the pain in his mother's eyes grow. The pain often eats at the bond that holds the family to

gether. The woman tries to bury the pain deep inside her and wills her body and mind to carry on, searching for hope, for solutions, for a way to make things right again.

Morning comes grey and still. The man thinks of friends on the wharf. Their voices carried over the still waters - laughter, smiles and then the boats slip out of the harbour.

For some, still hanging on, it will be a good day. Their incomes are down by 60 per cent from 10 years ago. But the sun is shining. There's a slight breeze and - hey- they are fishing lobster. Out on the water, the rhythm of their lives, matching the world around them. For those left behind on the shore, the rhythm of their lives is gone.

## North America/ Canada

### And so we Meet Again

*A report of a meeting to mark the first anniversary of the Workshop on Gender, Globalization and Fisheries held in May 2000*

**By Donna Lewis, a shellfisher from Brooklyn, Prince Edward Island, Canada. Donna is an articulate advocate and spokesperson for the rights of artisanal fishers.**

May 5 2001 marked the first anniversary of the *Workshop on Gender, Globalization and Fisheries* held in Newfoundland, Canada in which women from 18 countries had participated. To sustain the momentum of the partnerships that had been formed within Canada, the Women's Committee of Fish, Food and Allied Workers (FFAW/ CAW) Union, with support from the Status of Women Canada, hosted a meeting to "review issues raised last May, introduce new issues and concerns and prioritize issues that participants wish to work on". Twenty women from Atlantic Canada—fish harvesters, plant workers and researchers—participated.

Barbara Neis of the Department of Sociology, Memorial University, who had hosted the May 2000 workshop, updated delegates on the status of the book and the documentary film on the workshop—part of the planned outcomes of the gender and globalization project. She also spoke of upcoming projects and priorities for Memorial University and its partners.

This was followed by regional updates by representatives from Prince Edward Island (PEI), Newfoundland, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. Representatives from Newfoundland spoke of crab or shellfish asthma—on the rise in plants across the Atlantic Region. This year 750-900 workers were tested for links between their respiratory problems and their work with shellfish. Other occupational health problems include swelling, hives and breathing difficulties.

Nova Scotia reported progress in establishing Family Resource Centres. These provide support ranging from literacy to educational opportunities for setting-up home-based businesses for women displaced from the fishery. 'Women Outside the System' are a priority—women who do not receive employment insurance or

social assistance and are unable to secure funding for upgrading their skills and education. This project is attempting to tie up with local community colleges to make it possible for women to take courses that will facilitate their re-entry into the workforce. A Community University Research Alliance has been established with representatives from coastal communities and universities, to develop a 'tool box' for coastal communities to effect policy change. The Nova Scotia Women's FishNet has submitted a provocative and inspiring Discussion Document to the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, in response to the request for inputs to the document on Management of Fisheries on Canada's Atlantic Coast.

Representatives from New Brunswick reported a continuing preoccupation with the issue of pay equity. Workshops have been held across the province with fish plant workers to discuss the issue, gain support and lobby for policy and legislative changes. Participation in the workshops has, however, been poor.

Prince Edward Island (PEI) reported on the events on World Fisheries Day. This included news of the Save Our Seas (SOS) and Shores Coalition and their concerns with the proposed development of the petroleum industry.

In PEI the plight of oyster cleaners continues to be a concern and priority. Previously allowed to fish with a Can\$50 permit, oyster cleaners now face a ban and can fish only if they purchase a license costing more than Can\$10,000. An oyster cleaner who had purposely defied the ban last fall, was arrested on the first day of the fishing season. She is still awaiting trial.

Other areas of concern are the methods of investigation and continuing disqualification of individuals from the Employment Insurance Program by Human Resource Development Canada and the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency. Stories from across the Atlantic Region reflect the ongoing physical, mental and financial stress on families of low-income fishers and helpers. In Newfoundland there are ongoing cases in court over TAGS (income support programme for those displaced from the cod fishery after its collapse) qualification.

In the workshop last year ethics and industry-driven, practical research was a hot topic. I am pleased to report from PEI that at our Annual Aquaculture Alliance meeting in April 2001, we passed a resolution that we, as Alliance members, distribute and promote the use of Industry Research and Development Priority lists and take an active lead on developing project proposals and partnerships. This view is being accepted and adopted at the provincial level but still meets with resistance at the Federal level.

None of us could have summarized our feelings of frustration over the attitudes of bureaucrats, policy-makers and governments, including Ministers—the lack of consideration and exclusion of coastal communities, small family fishing operations and plant workers who rely on the industry and provide financial support to their communities.

Recognizing the importance of communication to the sustainability of our coastal communities, there was much discussion around a website that was created for this project and its potential value for communities currently connected to the internet. It was agreed that it is an excellent resource and a good place to continue to post regional/ international updates. The possibility of creating a ‘chat room’ or ‘bulletin board’ was discussed.

The consensus from this meeting was that communities are still dying and that the state of family mental health continues to be a cause for concern. The importance of developing social work skills remains paramount. Participants (they continue to amaze me with the depth and breadth of topics discussed—no fluff or flowers here), remain committed to developing a strategy to stay connected, as there is an invaluable wealth of information to be shared, enabling even the smallest of communities to improve their quality of life.

The energy and enthusiasm witnessed last May has not diminished. I am proud to be a part of this project and to witness the inspiration it provides to the smaller, more remote communities, mine included, in our country. The next meeting, which will include a larger number of participants, hopes to facilitate a public forum on community-based management of fisheries. Scheduled for November 2001, it will be hosted by representatives from Nova Scotia.

*Donna Lewis can be contacted at [kidswest@auracom.com](mailto:kidswest@auracom.com)*

## FROM ASIA/ Philippines

### Fisherwomen as researchers

**A research project proves to be a fascinating learning process**

**by Cornelia Quist, Research Adviser for the CB-CRM Programme of Pipuli, Philippines, and member of ICSF**

After several years of preparatory awareness building and organizing work, fishing communities and the supporting NGO, Pipuli, decided that they were ready to take up the management of the 2279 hectares covering Danao Bay (Misamis Occidental in Northern Mindanao). By that time, every *barangay* (village) around the bay had a local fisher organization, which, besides addressing local needs, together formed a Resource Management Council (RMC), which is the officially recognized representative body of the fisher community to undertake the resource management of the Danao Bay. Various resource management initiatives had been organized, such as the establishment of a fish sanctuary, a ban period for fishing, a ban on destructive fishing methods such as dynamite and poison, and mangrove rehabilitation.

Until then, women had been practically invisible in the resource management initiatives. Women had participated in these initiatives, but mostly as supporters and not as initiators. There were no women in the leadership of the organization and women's special interests as resource users were practically not recognized, leave alone addressed. The NGO, while working with the communities, had already observed this gender-imbalance and had begun organizing work among the women. They had started with leadership training for women and gender sensitivity training for the local leaders and their wives. Women were encouraged not only to give voluntary support, but also to speak out their specific problems and needs in the resource management initiatives. This resulted in women coming forward in their roles of shellfish gleaners, fish-trap operators and mangrove harvesters.

Now, at the threshold of taking up the management of the Danao Bay, the leaders of the fisher organizations and the supporting NGO realized that until now, the resource management initiatives had never been assessed with the community. Plans had been made and projects designed mostly based on assumptions or on

the (technical) views of the NGO and also on the problems and needs of the most active members of the fisher organization. To be sure of a broadly-supported and effective management plan, they were in need of more insights about the resource users. They required more factual data about their socioeconomic background, their resource-use practices and dependency, and their perceptions about resource management. They also wanted to know what their experiences with the resource management initiatives and the fisher organization were so far.

In mid-1998, the leaders of the organization, some active fisherwomen, the supporting NGO, myself (research adviser) and a colleague (gender adviser), gathered to prepare the research, which we called the Resource Users Profile of the Danao Bay. We had decided to make it a community-based research, which is to be understood as involving the community in all stages of the research, from defining the research question, and collection of data, up to the final analysis. The approach is process-oriented and, therefore, needs time and intensive monitoring, but yields interesting insights and, moreover, it generally has an awareness-building and mobilizing effect on the community.

During the first session with this preparatory group, we organized a workshop where all could familiarize themselves through various exercises with what research is and how to define a research question. The formulation of the actual research question led to the first exciting discussion. It appeared that the leaders (men) had a rather limited definition of a resource user. In their eyes, resource users were first and foremost fish harvesters—who were mostly men—and that the data collection should focus on these. This implied that other resource users, such as shell gleaners, mangrove harvesters and those involved in pre- and post-harvest activities—all activities where women were to be found—would be left out from the research. The women participants were encouraged to give their views on who a resource user is and, after a lively discussion, the men indeed broadened their definition.

In order to collect solid baseline data, it was decided to choose the survey as research methodology. The formulation of the questionnaire showed again how important the involvement of the community leaders and women was. They pointed out issues, problems and views that would have been overlooked by the NGO, which had a different perspective. The women

were of great help in making the questionnaire gender-sensitive, meaning that the concerns of the women as resource users were addressed as well. The women also pointed out that the resources are not only valued commercially in the community, but also considered for their non-cash value, such as food for the family, and that they were also used as an exchange product. This preparatory phase of the research was already a fascinating learning process for all.

The next step was to select and train research volunteers in the community. It was decided that we would select only women research volunteers, because women were seen as more approachable and better listeners than men. After we made a profile of the research volunteer, the leaders of the organization and the NGO went to look around in the community. More than 29 curious and enthusiastic women of all ages came for our training session. Their motivation and commitment was great and this made them good learners. And we also learned a lot from them, because after they pre-tested the questionnaire, they gave us very valuable feedback that enabled us to make important improvements.

When the first batch of filled-in questionnaires came in, we found out that it was mostly men who had been interviewed, despite our instructions to interview in every household, both the husband and the wife. During our assessment meeting with the research volunteers, we were confronted with rather persistent gender biases, as they told us that women were just housewives and, therefore, did not need to be interviewed. They also said that many women did not want to be interviewed and had told them that it was sufficient to interview their husband only. We encouraged them to go back to the households and interview the women too.

When the preliminary processing of data showed that women were very much involved in resource use—it was even revealed that 21 per cent of the women respondents were actually engaged in fish capture—and that women's knowledge about the state of the resources and ideas about resource management were as good as that of men, the last barriers to interviewing women were finally taken away. So, again, we had an exciting step in the learning process.

As said earlier, community-based research also has an impact on the mobilization of the community. After

we had presented the initial findings to the community, not only did more people join the organization, but the organization also adjusted its strategy based on the feedback from the community. And moreover, many of the women research volunteers became activists, advocating the concerns of the women as well.

**From Asia/ Indonesia**

## **Skirting the ban**

*Illegal trawling takes a heavy toll on fishing communities in North Sumatra*

by **Chandrika Sharma, Programme Associate, ICSE, Chennai**

I met Lely Zailani recently, during a meeting in Thailand. She spoke of the problems facing fishworkers in the region she comes from: North Sumatra in Indonesia. The most important problem, she said, is the negative impact of trawling, both on the coastal environment and on the livelihood of local fishing communities.

What she said was surprising because it is commonly known that there is a complete ban on trawling in Indonesia. In fact, the government was forced to implement the trawl ban in the 1980s as a result of the pressure from artisanal fishworkers. To the outside world, Indonesia has always been held up as an example of a country that has successfully banned trawling activities in its waters.

However, talking to Lely, it became clear that the situation 'on the sea' is quite different. It appears that trawling continues due to poor enforcement, as well as the nexus between trawler owners and enforcement officials. Traditional fishermen in North Sumatra have been badly affected. They have tried to draw the attention of local officials to illegal trawling. They have even 'arrested' trawlers and handed them over to officials, only to find that they are released the very next day.

The conflict between local gillnet fishermen and trawlers has even turned violent on several occasions, and several artisanal fishermen have lost their lives as a consequence. Between 1993 and 1998, in the district of Teluk Mengkudu, Deli Serdang Region (North Sumatra) alone, 31 fishermen were killed. Several other unrecorded incidents took place in other regions, such as in Langkat, Asahan and Belawan. Obviously, the impact of this conflict on fishermen's wives has been high, as many of them have lost their husbands in it.

In 1998, fishworkers from three regions in North Sumatra—Langkat, Asahan Deli and Serdang—came

together to form the *Sarekat Nelayan Sumatera Utara* (SNSU) or North Sumatran Fishers Union. Women are active members in this union. The aim of the organization is to draw the attention of the government to the problems of artisanal fishermen, especially the problems from illegal trawling, and to make a case for technologies that do not destroy the coastal environment.

**FROM ASIA/ India****Not amusing**

*Fishing communities staying next to one of India's largest amusement parks have much to complain about*

**Compiled from information provided by Sushila Cordozo of Stree Shakti Sadan, Mumbai, also a member of the National Fishworkers' Forum (NFF).**

In recent months, about 50,000 people from the traditional fishing communities of Gorai, Culvem and Manori in Mumbai have been trying to focus the attention of the authorities, the media and the general public, on developments in their neighbourhood. Developments that are affecting not only their livelihood, but also the ecological integrity of the sensitive and rich ecosystem that gives them this livelihood. At the forefront of this struggle have been the women of these communities.

Six years ago, India's first and largest amusement park, Essel World, spread over an area of 64 acres, came up near their communities. Owned by a powerful industrial group, this park has been a big success and attracts upto 10,000 visitors per day.

How have the local communities been affected by this park? In several ways, they are quick to point out. Visitors to the park are taken by ferries owned by the park, across the creek. These have, in the past, damaged the nets and boats of fishermen fishing in this creek. The daily requirement of approximately 20,00,000 litres of fresh water, drawn from underground sources, is diminishing ground water levels and leading to salinity ingress. The enormous amount of waste generated by visitors to the park is dumped untreated into the nearby sea, affecting coastal fish resources.

Moreover, while this "state of the art" park has access to all facilities, the fishing communities close to it, though also part of the Greater Mumbai Municipal Corporation, are still deprived of basic amenities: piped potable water, proper roads, sanitation or drainage facilities, uninterrupted supply of electricity, adequate health and education facilities, etc.

Plans to expand the operations of this park are now underway. An additional area of about 700 acres of land was allotted for the purpose by the erstwhile gov-

ernment of the state (province) of Maharashtra in May 1997. What is significant is that the land allotted is actually mangrove area. The vital functions performed by these remaining mangrove areas in an over-populated and polluted city like Mumbai need not be elaborated. This allotment is also in clear violation of the Coastal Regulation Zone Notification of 1991, which seeks to protect coastal resources, as well as fragile natural resources along creeks and natural channels.

Since the allotment, mangroves in the area are being systematically destroyed. An illegal 1500-metre illegal dam constructed under cover of night in April 1998, stopped the natural flow of tidal water and obstructed the free plying of the small boats used by the community. As a result of the dam construction and the use of chemicals, mangroves in about half the 700-acre area have perished. Despite orders by the Collector the dam has still not been broken to re-establish flow of tidal water. In April-May 2000, there was yet another attempt to construct yet another small dam. However, as a result of opposition by local people and an order from the Chief Minister of Maharashtra, this activity was brought to a halt.

Local villagers have undertaken a series of actions to seek justice. They have come together to form a Joint Action Committee. They are demanding action to protect and regenerate the mangroves. They are demanding a recognition of the right of fishing communities to live in dignity off the resource base they have depended on for generations. They are seeking to question the meaning of what is seen as "development". For this, they have undertaken a series of protest actions using non-violent means. They have also taken the case to court.

In order to make money the rich are able to displace people, and destroy the environment. The vast majority of people depending on these life resources are the victims. In the process natural capital is destroyed and fishing communities are displaced.

FROM ASIA/ Sri Lanka

## Whose problem?

*Families of fishermen in foreign jails have a difficult time surviving*

by Herman Kumara, the National Convenor of National Fisheries Solidarity (NAFSO), Sri Lanka.

We would like to tell you about the situation of women of fishing families, when their fishermen husbands find themselves in foreign jails. Deep-sea multi-day boat operators often get arrested when they cross the borders of foreign countries. Occasionally this is done on purpose. But most of the time the actual reason may be different. For example, some boats may drift into foreign seas due to engine breakdown. But since they have violated maritime boundaries the charge is the same—violation of the maritime boundaries. The ultimate result is that the crew has to be in a foreign jail for a period ranging from six months to two years.

Our story is about W.M.Lourdes Mourine Fernando, a 37-year old mother of three school-going children, living at Munnakkara, Negombo. Her husband, K.Anthony Joseph Ironius Fernando, has been in an Indian jail for six months already. He is a share labourer in a multi-day boat that belongs to a *mudalali* (investor), also from Negombo. Anthony and his crew left the shore on 30 January this year. They were arrested at the Indian border on 12 February. They are still in an Indian jail, waiting to be released.

Back home, the situation of his family continues to worsen. Mourine has to feed her children and send them to school. Even with an average income this is hard enough, given the present economic situation and rate of inflation. Mourine's mother and mother-in-law helped her to run the family for around one month. Since all families are facing a similar problem, this was not easy. The boat owner gave them Rs.1000 (US\$14) for two months. But for the past four months now there is nothing.

Says the *mudalali*: "We are also helpless. When the boat and crew are under custody we don't have any income. How do we pay back the loans and the interest, while feeding the five families of our boat crews?"

Determined to feed and educate the family, Mourine finally decided to find a job. She took up a job ironing the washed clothes from a laundry. They paid her Rs.100 per day with meals, a meagre income on which it is difficult to survive. In the meantime, there has been no good news about her husband. Nobody to help them.

"They are not organized. They do not want to get organized. Fisher people do not think about their future, and they do not care when we try to form a union. So there is no one to fight when they are in a difficult situation". This is what one of our trade unionists had to say about this situation. "But we will do our best to get the fisher people released."

"These fisher people have gone to rob fish resources in foreign waters. So we do not want to intervene in this problem. Please do not come to me with this problem." This is what our fisheries minister had to say when the family members of the crew and the boat owners went to meet him. When they tried to meet the minister a second time, the main entrance to the fisheries ministry was closed to them.

So what do we do? There is no assistance to the families or any attempt to secure the release of the arrested fishermen. 135 fisher people of more than 25 boats are facing this situation.

Mourine, together with 300 other people, has started an agitation against the policy makers. "You people promoted the deep-sea fisheries industry. You provided high technology and continue to provide such technology that is not appropriate to our fishing grounds. So our people run behind the fish stocks and end up crossing the borders and getting caught. The promoters of the deep-sea fishery should settle this problem." NAFSO is demanding that the fisheries minister help secure the release of innocent fishermen in foreign jails.

The World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fish Workers (WFF) was requested to intervene. "There is free flow of capital under globalization. But there is no such space for human labour. People need passports and visas. While investors have access to passports and visas to over-exploit our resources, poor fisher people who come for mere survival do not have such facilities. How should fisher people know the



boundaries in the sea? Is there any demarcation?" asks Thomas Kocherry, the co-ordinator of the WFF, who joined the peoples' struggle in Sri Lanka.

Although the number of women facing a situation similar to that of Mourine is increasing, this is not their problem alone. This is a problem of all resource users in our oceans. There should be a collective effort to settle the problem and policy makers should take the initiative. But this will be a long and time-consuming procedure.

But Mourine and others like her need immediate action and prompt settlement if they are to survive. Mourine has been at the forefront among other women, organising prayer services, and joining agitations in front of the ministry seeking the release of fisher people in foreign jails. Their demands are very clear:

- Release all fishermen in foreign jails.
- Prepare an agreement for use of resources reasonably in the Indian Ocean.

**Asia/ India****Life and Debt**

*A woman fish vendor from Kerala, India, describes her life and the problems she has had to deal with*

**Excerpts of an interview with Selvaraji by Indu MG of ICSF's Documentation Centre**

My name is Selvaraji from Vizhinjam. We are here for the last 18 years. My husband is a fisherman. I have four children: two boys and two girls.

I was a housewife but for the past three years I have been going to the harbour after the situation at home became worse. I buy fish and sell it at the local market. From what I earn I run the house. When only my husband earns, it is not enough to educate our children and other needs.

I normally leave home at 5.00 am, buy the fish, wash it and pack it with ice, and reach the market by 8.00 am itself. Then I wait till 10.30 am when the customers start to arrive. If all the fish is sold, I reach home by 12.00 noon. If not I return at about 2.00 pm. I bring home the unsold fish packed with ice.

When the landings are poor, I have to go to the harbour really early—at 2.00 am—to buy the fish, wash it and pack it with ice. I return home by 5.00 am and do the housework. There is no time to sleep again. I have to sweep and wash vessels and do the other work. I go back to the harbour by 9.00 am to wait for the *tempo* (small vehicle used to carry goods) to take us to the market.

When there is a lot of fish I have to dry and salt it. Until it is sold and the money recovered there will not be any peace of mind. Till it is sold, the money is in the water.

To buy fish worth Rs1,000 (Rs45=US\$1) at the auction, I have to pay Rs20 as auction fees. Rs10 goes to the church and Rs5 per basket to pay those who load it into the *tempo*s. One piece of ice costs Rs25. That is already Rs60. For Rs2,000 worth of fish it is Rs120. After that we have to get the baskets transported to the markets. Whether it is 3, 4, or 7 of us, it is Rs40 by *tempo*.

We share this fare. After that when we reach the market we have to give a market fee of Rs5 per basket—it is the same whether the basket is full or half. If we do not pay, they start to abuse us.

Thus I have to spend about Rs150 as external expenses. So if I want to make some margin, I have to sell the fish bought for Rs2,000 for Rs2,500. Only then I can make about Rs300 at the end of the day and repay my debt. Otherwise I will get into more debts.

Although I am doing fish vending for three years, it is not my money. It is a loan from the *blade* (moneylender). I have been in debt for almost two years now. What happened was that I had with me Rs5,000 that belonged to someone else. While travelling in a bus I somehow lost this money. For the next four days I did not eat anything, not knowing how to return the money. It was then that someone told me about the moneylender. I took a loan of Rs5,000. I got only Rs4,500, since they cut the interest of 10 per cent and give us only the rest of the amount.

Then I borrowed Rs500 from another woman to return the Rs5,000. I had to repay the loan by giving Rs70 each day for about 80 days. But this was difficult. So to repay I took another Rs5,000 loan. Thus it became Rs10,000. Last week the moneylender came asking for this money. I told him I could not repay immediately, but I will repay it slowly. So when my husband got Rs400 one day, all of it went as repayment. Now I have to repay the rest.

Now I am thinking that once I clear all the loans, I should not go after the moneylenders. I have suffered so much because of their loans. There are days when I do earn money from selling fish. If I did not have to repay the loan I would have been able to save some money. Now I realize that whatever loans I took from them was of no use to me; it made me more poor.

Initially when I started selling fish, I had some savings. Once when my husband and son fell sick, all that money was spent. It is only after that, that I started going after the moneylenders. If I had not taken the loan, by now I would have had a saving of Rs5000. But today I am not even able to thatch this house.

My mother was a fish vendor. That is the reason why I am in this line. There are losses, there are profits. Losses and debts should not deter one. As long as you have life in you, you can repay your debts—that is the

thought that makes me go ahead.

In any case, from my own experience as well from that of other women fish vendors, I can say that women benefit by getting into vending. Even if they earn a pittance, they supplement the income brought in by men.

That is a gain. Another thing is that some women do not have their men with them. In Vizhinjam itself there are many women who became widows at a very young age. So they go to sell fish to bring up their children with the profits made from this.

Also, before I started selling fish I had to listen to all that my husbands said. When I talk to other women vendors, they also tell similar stories. So, when we think, we realize that it was because we did not have any earnings that we had to listen to the men. So today, in fact I work harder than my husband and I am able to make him understand the worth of my work. I have the confidence to do that now. Only when we women share about our lives, we realize the similar threads running through them. Most women in this area are fish vendors. There is nobody in this world who can beat a fish vending women!!!!

## From Asia/ India

### Harsh working conditions....

*The National Campaign on Labour Rights (NCLR), India—a network of trade unions and other support groups—has initiated a campaign to highlight the exploitative conditions of work faced by women workers in fish processing plants in India. We carry the letter written by NCLR to the Union Ministry of Labour, India.*

We are a group of trade unions, NGOs, and concerned citizens who have been monitoring the developments in the fish and seafood processing industry, particularly from the perspective of labour rights. We have conducted a number of studies to gather in-depth information about labour conditions in this sector and we have come to a conclusion that the situation in this regard appears to be alarming, to say the least. We wish to convey our observations through this letter and also to establish communication with your association on this issue.

We are aware that over the last few years, marine food products have come to occupy an important position among India's exports and, consequently, are a major source of foreign exchange so vital to India's economy. We also appreciate the new employment opportunities it has opened for the workforce. However, we are dismayed to note that not only have the gains of the sector's phenomenal growth not percolated down to the workers employed therein, but that the situation of the latter remains no better than that of bonded labourers.

The industry is almost completely run on the basis of young migrant women workers who are employed either on contract or piece-rate basis. The factory owners disclaim any responsibility for the workers on the pretext that the latter are the responsibility of not them but the contractors. As a matter of fact, this is in complete violation of the Contract Labour Act, which holds that the ultimate responsibility of the workers lies with the principal employer.

It has been observed that the living conditions of the workers are inhuman and highly oppressive. Around 40 to 50 women are provided with one hall which generally has just a couple of bathrooms. These dwelling units, usually located atop or beside the processing unit, are also characterized by extremely unhygienic conditions and a lack of sanitary facilities.

Living in such proximity to the processing unit also exposes the workers to hazardous substances and chemical leaks.

You may be aware that a strict surveillance is maintained over the women workers in the fish processing industry and they are not allowed to go outside the factory premise or their place of accommodation. A total control over the lives of the women workers is an important characteristic of this industry. It's a virtual confinement for them where they live like bonded labour.

The workers are made to work from 8 am to 8 pm with just a one-hour lunch break and a half-hour tea break. In peak season, workers are often forced to work beyond the normal 12 hours. Also, paying them extremely low wages is the norm rather than the exception, and a large number of units don't even pay their workers the legally-stipulated minimum wages. In a study conducted by Centre for Education and Communication (CEC), it was revealed:

- In Mumbai, 20 workers out of 50 get less than Rs1,500 per month.
- In Mangalore, most of the workers earned between Rs900 to 1,200, peaking to Rs2,000 in some busy months. At the same time, there are also months when the income dips to the level of Rs500.
- In Tuticorin, in the sample of 47 it was found that 34 got up to a maximum of Rs1,500 and 18 of them got below the prescribed minimum wage.
- In Calcutta, out of a sample of 32 workers, 14 were found to get below Rs1,000. On the higher side, it was found that seven got more than Rs.2,000.

The working conditions in these units are very harsh. The workers are made to work without any protection. This renders the workers highly susceptible to common diseases like malaria, chickenpox, and jaundice. Peeling and handling frozen material over long periods of time leads to the skin of the palms developing rashes and even peeling off. If this remain untreated for long, it may develop serious infections. These may even compel the affected workers to leave the job. It also transpires that employers do not provide any medical facilities. Such a practice is questionable even from the point of view of expediency, since the health of the workers has a direct bearing on the hygienic quality of the product and, consequently, its saleability in the

international market.

The above are only some of the most glaring problems characterizing this industry. We would like your ministry to respond to the issue of labour rights in this sector and come out with a fact sheet on this issue so that we can initiate a dialogue on it. This is extremely important for an export-oriented industry because it also has to be internationally accountable for the labour right records. As you know, this sector is already being internationally monitored for hygiene of the product and environmental impact. It has also faced sanctions in the past due to these reasons. Hence, it would also be in the interest of the processing industry and national economy to improve labour conditions in this sector.

We hope your ministry would look into the specific issues raised by us and take stern steps to effectively enforce the relevant labour laws in this sector. In particular, we request you to organize a tripartite meeting (i.e. between representatives of the workers, the industry and the Government) with a view to evolve mechanisms to address issues regarding the fish-and seafood-processing industry, such as the constitution of a welfare board for its workers.

*(More information about this campaign is available from [cec@nda.vsnl.net.in](mailto:cec@nda.vsnl.net.in))*

## Asia/ India

### Public Hearing

*Women workers in Kerala highlight how globalization processes affect them*

**By Nalini Nayak, working with the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA), Kerala, and also a member of ICSF**

At the end of September 2001 the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA), Kerala organized a Public Hearing on "The Impact of Globalization on Women Workers in Kerala". This was one of several hearings organized by the National Commission for Women, Delhi, in an effort to understand, at first hand, the problems women workers face in different sectors of the economy and eventually to make necessary policy recommendations to the Central Government

SEWA, Kerala is concerned about the numerous suicides and hunger deaths reported in the media. These deaths have occurred mainly in the plantation and small farm sectors in Kerala, partly as a result of recent import-export policies that have caused a massive drop in prices, dragging small farmers into a debt trap and leaving them with little alternative to surrendering their lands to the banks.

Kerala's economy is based on its agricultural and traditional sectors like coir-making, cashew-shelling, fishing, transformation of forest produce etc. Most of these sectors are in turmoil as a result of the New Economic Policy, the Structural Adjustment Programmes and the WTO-induced import-export policies. The majority of workers in these sectors are women.

There were women from four sectors that testified at this Hearing—from the plantation, farm and fish processing sectors and from the Cochin Special Export Processing Zone. I will report here only on what the women in the fish processing sector had to say.

The ICSF Women in Fisheries Programme, through the National Fishworkers' Forum (NFF), had, in 1996, conducted a Hearing on the problems of migrant women workers in fish processing plants in India. At that time, a majority of such migrant workers were from Kerala and worked under sub-human conditions in processing plants in distant areas. These plants undertook the entire gamut of processing activities from procurement of shrimp to freezing, canning and

export, and were not regulated.

Under pressure to regularize the sector, several of them have subsequently adopted the casualization and 'putting out' policy. This means that they try to sub-contract as many of the processes as possible, in this case, the actual peeling of the shrimp. Over the years there has been a rise in the number of shrimp peeling sheds in Kerala where merchants with relatively small investments set up a shed, purchase shrimp in bulk and hire women to clean the shrimp. These merchants then sell the cleaned shrimp to processing plants.

This is what Sreedevi says about the way these sheds operate: "I have been cleaning shrimp ever since I was 12 years old as I needed money for the family and for my studies. I had to stop my education when I completed 8<sup>th</sup> standard and I went full time into cleaning shrimp. At that time we went to the landing centre, sorted the catches and did some cleaning there itself. But about 10 years ago these sheds came up in our village itself, as work in coir processing declined. Over the years the sheds have grown bigger. The owners keep changing either because they have made enough money and want to move on, or because they are incurring losses. We women just keep working. We are paid on a piece rate basis and receive no other benefits. Our present owner, who has been here for the past few years, used to give us 10kg of rice at festival time but this year gave us only Rs50 (approximately US\$1.1) as a kind of bonus."



“For cleaning a basin meant to contain 1.5 kg of shrimp—generally it is much more—we are paid Rs3. So on an average we can make Rs30 to 40 (less than one US\$) a day. We work in permanently damp conditions, sitting in rows on our haunches. We do not use any gloves or boots. When there are bulk landings we work for 12-14 hours non-stop and there are several occasions when our fingers bleed but as they are so numb we do not feel the pain until we go home at night. I generally soak my hands in a hot decoction of tea. This helps me to go back to work the next day. I need the work as my husband is only a casual worker and we have no other means of livelihood. When my child was born, I stopped work for a few months and then my mother helped to care for the child. But there are several women who bring their babies to the work sheds and hang them in cradles outside so they can feed them when required.”

“Over the years we have created our own union to represent our case to the government. Not only do we lack any kind of job security and workers benefits, we are not even considered as workers by the Fisherman’s Welfare Board. We waged a long struggle last year and the Labour Officer—a woman—intervened. She made a good report about our actual working conditions, making a case for punitive action. But, rather than taking action based on her report, she was transferred. It became clear that the owners of peeling sheds are better organized than we are and certainly have more political clout. We know that Kerala claims to be a progressive state where labour rights are concerned. However, the reality in our case is the opposite. There are thousands of women like me working in the hundreds of peeling sheds in my district. These peeling shed also cause considerable pollution as they dispose of the contaminated water in common water bodies, leading to the spread of disease.”

“This year shrimp catches have fallen and several peeling sheds have closed down. We also hear that consignments of shrimp exported last year were returned to India as they did not pass the sanitary standards of the importing country. The owners try everything possible to maximize their profits but, in the end, it is at our expense.”

Sreedevi’s account sums up the problem in the processing industry quite lucidly. More and more women are being employed on a daily wage basis with no workers benefits or job security. Labour laws are

being modified to suit the new labour practices that favour the casualization of labour. All this will further facilitate the movement of work from northern countries to the south where labour standards will be flouted at all levels.

*Nalini can be contacted at [nalinin@md5.vsnl.net.in](mailto:nalinin@md5.vsnl.net.in)*

## Asia/ Pakistan

### A bleak future

*Women of fishing communities in Pakistan face increasing marginalization*

By Mohammad Ali Shah of the Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum (PFF)

In Pakistan, fishing communities are considerably more liberal than their agrarian counterparts. In earlier times communal property was the norm and personal property was almost unheard of in fishing communities. There was no gender discrimination and women were the virtual heads of the family, responsible for distributing the harvest. Unlike in other rural communities, there was no 'veil system', and women enjoyed a lot of freedom.

As men spent more time fishing, women had a greater role in family matters and in dealing with problems of the family. In fact several women of fishing communities developed reputations of being the chief of not only the family but also of the locality or caste group. People, including men, were identified by the names of their mothers, not their fathers—a practice that still continues in fishing communities. Similarly, some caste groups engaged in fisheries are also named after women. Even Karachi—the metropolitan coastal city of Pakistan and the provincial headquarter of Sindh province—was named after a woman called Mai Kalochi, who was the chieftain of this small fishing village of earlier times. It is said that she herself used to run the fishing business and engage in other trade.



Presently, however, two trends can be discerned. While traditional fishing communities still tends to be liberal *vis-à-vis* women, this is not the case with the large number of agricultural communities who now derive their livelihood from the fisheries, following their displacement from agricultural activities in the Indus deltaic area. Agricultural societies have usually been rigid with regard to the accepted roles of women. Women tend to be considered as a commodity whose ownership rests with the male and are often confined within the four-walls of the house in the name of morality and decency. Many of these values have now also been transmitted to fishing communities.

#### *Women in fishing*

In the past the women often accompanied their male family members on fishing trips. There was no major division of work. The fishermen would take the entire family to fishing trips to remote islands, where they would all engage in fishing as well as in cleaning and drying fish. In the case of big nets men and women would jointly throw the net in the water and pull it back. Back in the village women would sell the fish in local as well as in distant markets while the men would continue to fish.

In cases where men left for longer fishing trips of ten to twenty days, women would stay home and continue to fish on a smaller scale in shallow coastal waters. In the coastal regions of Sindh province, women fished with nets in creeks off the coast. However, with the commercialization of fisheries and the entry of outsiders (non-indigenous fishermen) into the fisheries, women were gradually pushed out of fishing activities. With the industrialization process, fishing no longer remains a family-based activity in Pakistan and the role of women of fishing communities within the family unit has almost come to an end.

#### *Women as net weavers*

In the sub-continent women of pre-historic times are said to have been the architects of fishing nets, baskets, etc. The earliest nets were made of fibre collected from the jungle. Cotton thread was introduced at a later stage. Even after women of fishing communities more or less withdrew from active fishing and focused more on the home, they continued to make fishing nets.

This brought in a steady income. Women who wove nets were paid for it, even within their own families. Women earned a stable and regular, if modest, income. Earnings depended on the complexity, strength, and



weight of the net. When nets were made exclusively of cotton thread, women earned between Rs 5 to 10 per day. The currency then had a very high purchasing power. Income was steady, as work was always available. Buyers of fishing nets gave work to women on a piecemeal basis. Many sections of nets were then pieced together to make a larger net.

However, after the late 1960s, processes of modernization began to affect women net-weavers adversely, ousting them from this profession in the same way as they were ousted from fishing activities. This began with the import of nylon nets into Pakistan. Later factories were set up in Karachi for the manufacture of nylon fishing nets. These nets quickly started replacing the traditional cotton nets, and, as a result, the demand for cotton nets started dwindling, depriving a large number of women net weavers from this source of their livelihood. The governments of the time never gave it a thought or even considered creating alternative means of income for the affected women.

By the early 1970s women had effectively been thrown out of the net weaving business. Today few of the present generation have any memories of their womenfolk working as skilled, paid craftswomen fashioning fine fishing nets. The impacts of the nylon net on fishing communities are multidimensional. Women have been particularly adversely affected as this income-earning activity came to a standstill.

#### *Post-harvest activities*

Women have always been involved with post-harvest activities such as drying and cleaning fish. Women have also been working in fishmeal plants, producing fishmeal or powder sold to poultry farms. They have been involved in processing crabs for export. Crabs are caught from the foot of the mangroves and are kept in baskets covered with mangrove leaves, till they are processed. This involves boiling them, extracting the meat, putting this into plastic bags in ice. Women would extract the meat while the men would fill the bags for freezing.

However, jobs of local women in fish processing factories and fish cleaning sheds have been taken over by the arrival of illegal immigrants from Bangladesh and Burma. Desperate for work, the immigrants are even willing to work for half the wage, outside the terms of formal employment. Illegal immigrants who have settled along the coastal areas of Karachi have

thus affected the earnings of women of local fishing communities.

#### *The role of the government*

With the decline in their economic roles within the fisheries, the status and clout of women of fishing communities has decreased. Women no longer manage the business as they once did. A very small number of local women are involved in peeling shrimps, weaving nets, making fish baskets, etc. as wage labourers. Their economic condition has deteriorated and poverty has become endemic.

The government has pursued no policies or programmes to improve the socio-economic condition of women of fishing communities. The complete lack of acknowledgement of the role of women in the fisheries sector can be judged from the fact that women of fishing communities have not found even a single mention in government policy documents, laws and rules etc. The Handbook of Fisheries Statistics of Pakistan—the annual publication of Pakistan's Marine Fisheries Department last published in 1993—for example, has no mention of women, even though it carries a full chapter on the fishermen population.

*Mohammad Ali Shah can be contacted at: [pakistanfisherfolk@hotmail.com](mailto:pakistanfisherfolk@hotmail.com)*

## Asia/ Thailand

### Coming together

*A recent meet in Thailand focused on Asian fisheries in the era of globalization*

**By Chandrika Sharma of ICSF's Chennai office**

Millions of people in Asia depend on fisheries for a living, making it a critical component of economic growth and a major source of food security in the region. According to FAO estimates 84 per cent of the world's fishers were concentrated in Asia—9 million in China, nearly 6 million in India, and 4 million in Vietnam, Indonesia, Bangladesh and the Philippines taken together. The majority are small-scale, artisanal fishers, eking out a living from coastal and inshore resources. A conservative estimate would place the total number of people involved in fishing, processing, trading and other fisheries-related activities in Asia at about 120 million. For artisanal fishing communities, fishing is a source of livelihood as well as a culture and a way of life.

Asian fisheries have, however, witnessed major changes in the past few decades, as governments have sought to modernize the sector by bringing in more efficient gear and technologies, including bottom-trawling and purse-seining. The focus on expanding production and exports has received an impetus in the current phase of globalization.

It was to discuss these developments and their implications for the small-scale marine and inland fisheries sector that representatives of fisherfolk and peasant organizations as well as NGOs from 11 countries in Asia met from 25 to 29 January 2002 at Prince of Songkhla University, Hat Yai, Thailand for the *Asian Fisherfolk Conference: Cut Away the Net of Globalization*.

Representatives from the following countries were present: Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam, along with representatives from the World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP) and those from Aotearoa-New Zealand and South Africa.

The conference was organized with the following objectives:

- to analyze the impact of globalization, specifically liberalization, privatization and deregulation, on the small-scale fisheries sector;
- to document initiatives and gains by Asian fisherfolk to improve their situation, such as, but not limited to, organizing, peoples' campaigns, advocacy, resource management and lobbying;
- to learn about the role and situation of women in the fisheries sector; and
- to consolidate networks among fisherfolk organizations in the Asian region.

The workshop was a joint initiative of several organizations. These included the Federation of Fisherfolk of Thailand, the Sustainable Development Foundation (SDF), the Foundation for Sustainable Agriculture (FSA), NGO-COD, the World Wide Fund for Nature, the Andaman Project, the Prince of Songkhla University and the Waliluk University—all from Thailand, as well as PAMALAKAYA (the National Federation of Fisherfolk Organizations in the Philippines), the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF) and the Asia-Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD).

Participants felt that globalization processes lead to a loss of income and livelihood, dislocation from fishing grounds, denial of access rights, breakup of communities, social problems, loss of traditional systems of knowledge and wisdom, degradation and destruction of aquatic resources and violations of human rights. The pressure on women of fishing communities has increased in specific ways, translating directly into increased workloads, stress and pressure to earn higher incomes. Participants called for a reversal of laws, programmes and policies as well as the dismantling of institutions of globalization that are primarily attuned to the interests of powerful economic players and that marginalize fishing communities.

One of the objectives of the meeting was to understand better the situation of women of fishing communities in Asia. For a start, the effort was to ensure that there was equal representation of women from fishworker organizations at the meeting. However, this was not possible in all cases. In several countries of the region efforts of fishworkers to organize are relatively recent. Even where fisherfolk have organized, women often do not participate actively within the organization. As a consequence, there were fewer women representatives from fishworker organizations.

It was also clear that this situation was problematic as everyone recognized that women were playing active

roles within the fishery and the fishing community. At the same time they were at the receiving end of several developments within and outside the fisheries—developments that were negatively affecting their income, livelihood, workload and quality of life. The participant from Sri Lanka, for example, shared how artisanal women processors, mainly women, are being affected by imports of dried tuna from neighbouring countries. As the imports were priced cheaper, local processors are finding it difficult to compete.

That governments in the region have largely failed to recognize the role of women of fishing communities and constructive support their work, was also discussed. To quote from the presentation of a participant from India: “The history of the 100-years of fisheries development in the country is also one of ‘masculinization’ of the sector where, with increasing inflows of technology and outflows of fish, women found themselves at the receiving end, both literally as well as figuratively. A review of the ‘development programmes’ shows a heavy bias against women—in the plethora of programmes that were spawned as part of the modernisation drive, there is hardly one targeting specifically the women in the sector.”

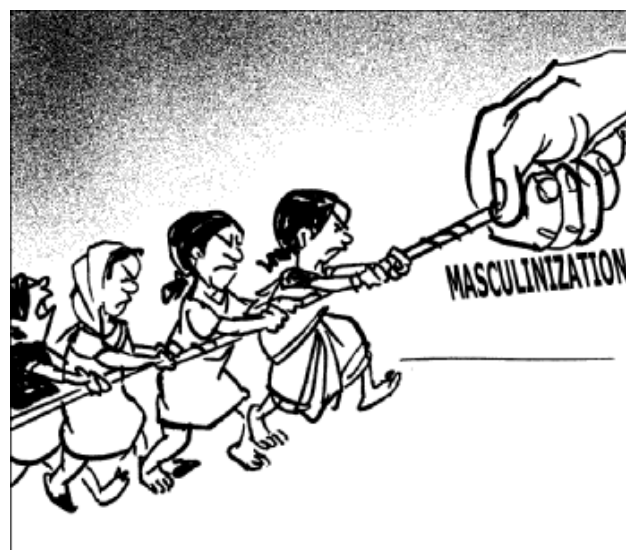
At the meeting, there was discussion on these issues. Nalini Nayak, a resource person from India who has been involved with the fishworker movement at various levels, made a presentation on the women in fisheries. Her presentation critiqued the current model of fisheries development that has marginalized women, destroyed livelihoods and the environment. She highlighted the need for a feminist perspective in fisheries.

A representative from one of the stronger fishworker organization in the region, with a long history of trying to organize women fishworkers, shared the difficulties they still faced in trying to facilitate the genuine representation of women in their organization and in adopting a feminist perspective in their work. Even though these were desirable goals, he said, they were difficult to translate into reality.

Overall, it seemed clear that women of fishing communities within Asia are starting to organize only in a few countries. They have a long way to go yet and special efforts need to be devoted to helping women organize in defense of their livelihoods and communities.

Participants at the meeting called for establishing participatory mechanisms to ensure that all decisions related to the use and management of fisheries resources at the local, national and international level are made in partnership with the fisherfolk.

Above all, participants called for the sustainable and non-destructive management and use of the resources of the lakes, rivers, seas and oceans by all humankind and asserted that the rights of artisanal fishing communities—the guardians of these water bodies—to use, manage and benefit from them, must be protected and accepted.



Finally, participants committed to protecting the rights to life and livelihood of fishing communities and to protecting and conserving aquatic resources, indigenous species and ecosystems, while demonstrating concrete alternatives towards a people-centred development. They also committed to observing the World Food Day on 16 October, the World Fisheries Day on 21 November and the Anti-WTO day on 30 November at the Asian level with a regionally co-ordinated action by fishing communities to demonstrate their solidarity.

At the end of the workshop, participants formed a follow-through committee (FTC) to take forward some of the issues discussed at the workshop. The plans discussed related to participation of fisherfolk in events related to the World Summit for Social Development to be held in September 2002, research and training on fisheries-related issues, exchange programmes between fisherfolk in the Asian countries, World Fisheries Day celebrations, training for lobby work, and participation at the World Food Summit in June 2002. The report of the workshop is under preparation and should be available by May 2002.

*Contact Chandrika Sharma at [icsf@vsnl.com](mailto:icsf@vsnl.com)*

## Asia/ India

### Planning them out?

*Fishing communities settled along the coast of Chennai, a metropolitan city on India's south-eastern coast, are being threatened with relocation in the name of beach beautification*

**Based on an affidavit presented by T Mohan, a Chennai-based lawyer long involved with various civic environmental and community-based organisations, before the National Commission on Women, India.**

The role of fishing communities in town planning and coastal zone management planning continues to be a neglected area. Town Planning in Tamil Nadu (a state in southern India) is the subject matter of *The Tamil Nadu Town and Country Planning Act, 1971*. Though seemingly wide, there is little guidance in the Act for imbuing the planning exercise with any sensitivity regarding the cultural aspects of town planning, specifically with reference to the life style and livelihood patterns of fishing communities, which are separate and distinct from those of a migrant population that usually characterize cities in India.

After the 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution (strengthening the role of local government), the *Madras City Municipal Corporation Act, 1919* was amended. A Metropolitan Planning Committee was constituted to prepare a draft development plan for the Chennai Metropolitan area having regard *inter alia* to matters of common interest pertaining to the city of Chennai, including co-ordinated spatial planning, sharing of water and other natural resources and integrated development of infrastructure and environment conservation.

Despite this, comprehensive and sensitive planning still does not exist judged from the viewpoint of either statutory guidelines or actual planning. As a result of insensitive planning, the eight fishing villages along the Marina beach, which possibly predate Chennapatna (city of Madras/ Chennai as it is known today), have been subjected to enormous pressures.

There is a lack of recognition of fishing communities' control over coastal land. Though these communities have been resident along the coast for centuries, the right over these lands is not recognized. The State considers them usually as encroachers and slum dwellers. In the absence of any law in the matter, fishing communities have always been under threat of eviction as both the state and the middle class have

seen the settlements as an eyesore.

Several strategies have been employed by the state to weaken the communities' claim to the lands. These have included:

- construction of inappropriate and inadequate tenements for housing fishermen and seeking the consequent eviction from existing tenements
- interference with beaching craft and net drying on the beach
- permitting high value urbanization along the coast and encouraging competing recreational use alongside the settlements
- widening the coastal road and converting the same into an alternate highway, thereby placing the lives of coastal residents at risk.
- demarcating various parts immediately adjoining the settlements as open space and recreation zone, thereby inhibiting scope for settlement expansion.

The Tamil Nadu Government attempted to remove the fishing craft and the nets of the fisherfolk along the Marina beach in 1986. A writ petition filed in the Supreme Court thwarted these attempts. The Supreme



Court directed the return of the confiscated craft and gear by interim orders and the writ petition appears to have been disposed off recently.

With the enactment of *the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) Notification of 1991*, there appeared to be grudging institutional recognition of the rights of fishing communities to dwell along the coast, even though the notification has been rendered ineffective by the machinations and/ or inaction of all coastal states, including Tamil Nadu.

When the Tamil Nadu government initially submitted its coastal management plan under the CRZ Notification, the Ministry of Environment and Forest appears to have returned the same because the Chennai coastline did not figure in the plan. Thereafter the Chennai Development Authority added a chapter with five maps and three pages for the Chennai coast. This made no reference to the fishing settlement, their livelihood patterns or their cultural specificity.

Prior to this plan, efforts by the Tamil Nadu government to articulate an integrated coastal zone management plan, actually spoke of relocating fishing villages that did not exhibit potential for growth. There was also widespread concern when the second Master Plan for the City of Chennai in 1995 spoke about relocation of all the slums in the city to the outskirts. This document was, not surprisingly, published for comment only in English thereby denying crucial stakeholders space for participation in the planning process.

Fishing along the city's waterways, like the Adyar and Cooum rivers and the Buckingham canal, have almost come to a standstill on account of the fact that these water bodies have become virtual cesspools of domestic and industrial effluents. The High Court of Madras, even after 10 years of the filing of a writ petition (W.P.No. 14858/93) that sought the framing of a scheme for cleaning up the city's heavily polluted waterways, merely directed the Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board to continue action to prevent institutions and industries from letting out sewage and other pollutants into the waterways. However pollution continues and it is unlikely that the waterways will ever be reclaimed for fisheries.

Thermal plants which discharge hot water into Chennai's coastal waters and a phalanx of chemical industrial complexes, have also seriously impacted fisheries. There has also been large-scale salinization of coastal aquifers on account of excessive extraction for industrial and urban purposes along Chennai's coast. These deleterious impacts have placed serious stress and severe burden on women fishworkers in their capacity as market vendors, caregivers and resource providers.

The recent amendment issued by the Ministry of Environment and Forests, which made it necessary to obtain prior sanction for all projects involving an investment of more than Rs50 million would appear to have put a check on the Tamil Nadu government's recent move to evict the fishing hamlets and convert these lands into a complex for diplomatic missions, residences and multinational offices. The state government, which even denied access to the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed with a Malaysian Company stating that it was not a public document, has protested against the amendment. While the stand of the Tamil Nadu government is clearly motivated, the rights of the fishing communities cannot be solely dependent on the discretion of Central government.

In my opinion the threat to the livelihood of women fishworkers along the Marina can only be averted by strengthening the CRZ Notification, by averting development on the coast adjoining the fishing settlements, by enacting legislation which would recognize the rights of fishing community to all resources, including land, by framing and implementing national, state and local policies and plans for the small-scale fisheries sector, and by creating institutional mechanisms and processes sensitive to their distinct culture and livelihood patterns.

*Mohan can be contacted at [devika@xlweb.com](mailto:devika@xlweb.com)*

## Asia/ Indonesia

### “Pay for it”

*People in Buyat Bay, North Sulawesi, Indonesia, have been affected by the mining operations of PT. Newmont Minahasa Raya, a subsidiary of Newmont Mining Corporation, based in Denver, Colorado, USA*

**By Suwiryo Ismail, an activist working on issues of environment and human rights in Indonesia.**

Surtini Paputungan is a 40-year-old cookie-and-fish-seller living in Buyat, a small village at the Buyat Bay, in a remote region of Indonesia. From Jakarta, the capital city of Indonesia, it takes four hours by plane and then around three hours by bus to get there.

Surtini is married and has four children. She is poor, like other villagers in her community. Her family's life depends on a small boat without motor, simple fish hooks and a net. Such tools can only be used for short-distance fishing, when the sea is calm, during October to February. The sea used to be rich with coral fish. Buyat Bay provided coral fish as living resources for its neighbouring villages.

At the peak fishing season, Surtini sells in the village market fish caught by her husband. When there were strong winds, no one goes fishing, and Surtini then sells home-baked cookies. Her earnings are only enough for a simple living. Sometimes, the family had to borrow money from neighbours and buy food on credit at the village's small store, all to be repaid, with luck, from the earnings of the next catch.

The lives of that poor fisher community with 53 households—around 240 persons—took a turn for the worse as a gold mining company, PT. Newmont Minahasa Raya, a subsidiary of Newmont Mining Corporation, based in Denver, Colorado, USA, the fifth largest mining company in the world, got a mining license from the Indonesian government in 1994 for around 500 hectares of land. Newmont started to operate an open-pit mine in 1996 and daily disposed around 2,000 tonnes of tailings (mining waste) directly into the Buyat Bay. It used a technology called ‘Submarine Tailing Disposal’ (STD), only about 82 m below sea level. Leaks of the pipe have occurred several times. Some studies by researchers from the university in North Sulawesi, Agriculture Institute in Bogor and the Indonesian government environmental impact monitoring agency, showed that Buyat Bay is now polluted by heavy metals such as arsenic, cadmium and mercury.

The only sources of livelihood of the community are polluted and destroyed, coral reefs are damaged, and many fish have been found rotten on the beach. It is now more difficult to get fish. Even when they are caught, nobody wants to buy the fish because they are afraid to eat poisoned fish. The life of Surtini and her family became more difficult because her husband could not afford a motorboat to go farther from the bay to the still unpolluted fishing grounds. Surtini stopped baking and selling cookies in 1998, as she started to suffer pain in all her joints. Her whole body became numb, and she suffered headaches, myopia, hearing disorder and speech difficulties. The worst was in 1999, when she became paralyzed for about three months. Even touching her hair became very painful. The village clinic could not explain what was wrong with her. The doctor provided by Newmont stated that nothing had happened to her, though a couple of weeks later a team from Newmont came to take blood samples of Surtini and other villagers.



A year later, following pressure from national and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to disclose the result of that blood examination in a laboratory in Santa Monica in USA, Newmont admitted that the blood of the villagers was contaminated with arsenic, mercury and cyanide.

Surtini stopped eating fish from Buyat Bay because she realized that her health was getting worse when she consumed it. She eventually overcame the paralysis

and got better. The pain in her joints and headaches often returned, in particular after eating fish from Buyat Bay, which could not be avoided as she had no other alternative food. In October 2001, Surtini was brought to Jakarta by NGOs to have a medical check-up, and she stayed for one week in hospital. Doctors could not explain her sickness. This also showed how difficult it is to deal with illness from contamination by heavy metals. No hospital in Indonesia can deal with it. When Surtini gave birth to her fourth child in September 2002, her condition was so weak that she couldn't produce milk, and she had no money to buy milk for the baby. She merely suckled her baby to calm her, giving her tea and water instead. In June 2002, Surtini met two forensic doctors who informed her that her illness was a symptom of arsenic poisoning. Surtini is not the only case in Buyat. Fifty-one other villagers—80 per cent among them women—have suffered the same symptoms as Surtini: constant headaches, pain in the joints, lumps spread on the body and itchiness. A blood examination of 19 villagers by two Indonesian environmental networks (Walhi and Jatam) showed a high accumulation of arsenic and mercury in their blood.

“Tailings is the worst crime to me, my children and my community,” stated Surtini in her testimony in a workshop on Women and Globalization during the People's Forum in June 2002 in Bali prior to the Preparatory Committee Meeting of the UN World Summit on Sustainable Development. Since 1997, Surtini has been part of the movement in her village against Newmont. She was in the villagers' delegation to the local and provincial government and provincial parliament to submit complaints. She delivered testimonies in various meetings and conferences on mining and submarine tailing disposal.

All efforts have so far been fruitless. The provincial government of North Sulawesi and Newmont always insist that the tailings are safely piled on the sea floor, and that there is no pollution. They have branded villagers as subversive agents against foreign investment. Moreover, international NGO campaigns, including an intervention in the shareholder meeting of Newmont in Denver, USA in 1999, led to more oppression of villagers.

The Indonesian government fully supports foreign investment by, among other things, providing military, police and civil bureaucracy to oppress people in safeguarding the projects. USAID has threatened environmental NGOs that it will stop its funds if they

campaign against Newmont, and will not fund NGOs working against the operation of US companies in Indonesia.

Surtini and many villagers who joined the struggle suffered, on the one hand, by intimidation by the local government, and, on the other, by hatred from villagers who embraced the community development programme provided by Newmont. The programme has successfully divided the struggle. Surtini's take on globalization during the abovementioned workshop is illuminating: “It is a conspiracy between multinational corporations and our government in Jakarta, in Manado, and in the regency up to the village. Our lives are determined by Newmont, because government serves only its operation, and does what Newmont says. This conspiracy has caused suffering to us: women, children and men. We have lost everything—our livelihood, food, health, bay and land. Our children have no future. And women are the most victimized by Newmont because more women are affected by the pollution.”

This awareness encouraged Surtini to mobilize women in her village to discuss their situation, attend advocacy training by women NGOs, and take part in seminars and conferences where they delivered their testimonies, telling other people their experiences.

During the medical check-up in 2001 in Jakarta, Surtini visited several women's groups and asked for solidarity. She gave all her testimonies while suffering severe headaches. Surtini and other women pleaded with the other villagers to reject the community development programme offered by Newmont in the awareness that the struggle against the mining giant should be started by rejecting everything offered by Newmont.

Right now, Surtini and villagers of the Buyat Bay are conducting an assessment to identify what they have lost economically, socially, culturally and environmentally due to the presence of Newmont, which will stop operation in North Sulawesi in 2004. She says, “They cannot just go away leaving the damage with us. They have to pay for it”.

[This article was earlier carried in People's Voices (Preliminary Volume), Asian Social Forum 2003]

*Suwiryo Ismail can be contacted at [claras@mailcity.com](mailto:claras@mailcity.com)*



## Asia

### A feminist perspective

*This Statement was adopted at the Asian Regional Consultation on Women in Fisheries, held in Medan, Indonesia, from 11 to 14 August 2004*

We are 53 women and men from the Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Nepal. We have met in Medan, Sumatra, Indonesia, from 11 to 14 August 2004, for the *Asian Regional Consultation on Women in Fisheries*, to analyze the impact of globalization on women in fisheries in the Asian region. This consultation takes forward the reflections and processes that were initiated at the *Asian Fisherfolk Conference: Cut Away the Net of Globalization* that took place in The Prince of Songkhla University, Hat Yai, Thailand from 25 to 29 January 2002.

We meet in Sumatra to express solidarity with the decades-old, yet still ongoing, struggles of coastal fishing communities against destructive fishing technologies, particularly trawling, that are destroying their coastal habitats and resources, their lives and their livelihoods.

This has been an occasion for women and men of fisherfolk organizations, mass-based women's organizations and non-governmental organizations to come together to reflect on, and highlight, the problems being faced by coastal fishing communities due to globalization processes.

It has been an occasion for us to reflect on the vital roles women play within the fisheries, within families and communities and within organizations—roles that need better recognition and valuation.

It has been an occasion for us to define strategies to counter the negative impacts of globalization, to define our vision of development, to draw strength from each other and to bring synergy between our struggles.

The negative impact of neoliberal processes and trends, particularly the liberalization of trade and investment; the promotion of exports; privatization of natural resources; the rollback of the State, and the privatization in the delivery of basic social services; among others, are evident to us.

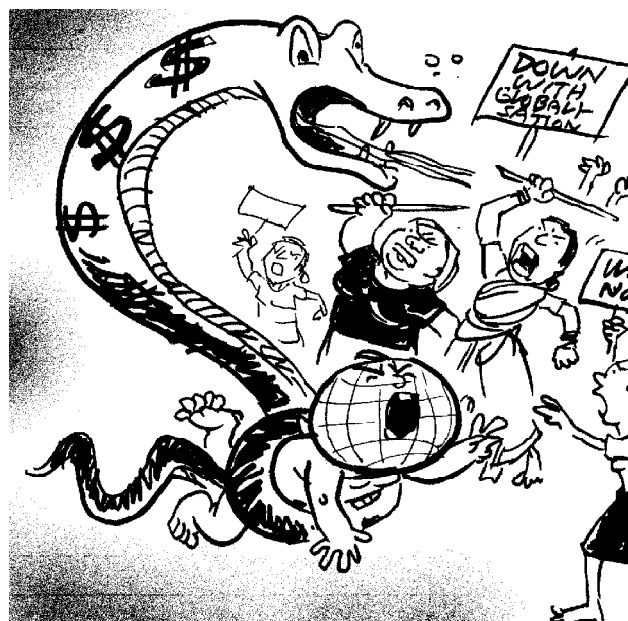
These processes have led to the proliferation of fishing technologies aimed at maximizing production with scant regard for resource sustainability, uncontrolled industrialization, urbanization, infrastructure and tourist development in coastal areas, and big 'development' projects such as mines and dams that negatively affect tail-end coastal ecosystems.

These developments have had devastating consequences for coastal fishing communities. They have led to the degradation and destruction of aquatic resources, loss of income and livelihood, break-up of communities, social problems, loss of traditional systems of knowledge and wisdom, dislocation from fishing grounds, denial of access rights, and violations of human rights.

We endorse fully the statement from the Thailand workshop that analyzed these processes and called for a halt to processes of economic globalization.

We further recognize that such neoliberal policies are experienced in very specific ways by women of fishing communities. As livelihoods from fisheries are rendered more vulnerable, women within fishing communities shoulder the additional burden of having to seek higher incomes.

In many countries, there is a transition from self-employment to wage labour, with no access to social security or decent conditions of work. We oppose the manner in which poor women are being used as banks of cheap, unprotected labour in fish processing plants and other industries.



The withdrawal of the State from provision of basic services such as health and education, and the degradation and privatization of natural resources, impose greater stress and workloads on women, who are responsible for the care and nurture of their families.

We oppose the withdrawal of the State from its role in protecting and promoting the welfare of its citizens while becoming mere agents of international capital.

With higher levels of insecurity and stress within families and within communities, women of fishing communities are experiencing greater violence, sexual and otherwise, within and outside the family.

We are particularly concerned that the oceans are being seen not as living systems and sources of food for thousands in our regions, but more as sinks for dumping wastes and for the non-living resources, such as oil, that they are expected to yield.

Equally of concern to us is the projection of aquaculture as the future of fisheries. We have witnessed the negative social and ecological aspects of export-oriented and intensive forms of aquaculture. We are aware that the benefits from aquaculture are going to a few entrepreneurs and corporate houses, while the costs are being borne by our communities. We reject this form of aquaculture development.

While there are laudable efforts to conserve marine resources, without the recognition that fishing communities play an integral part in the marine space, these efforts are, at best, ineffective. Marine conservation efforts should involve fisherfolk and not seek to alienate the livelihoods of the traditional fishing communities. We further reject measures taken in the name of “marine conservation” that are merely disguised trade barriers.

We realize that the nature of ongoing development itself is patriarchal—there is a systemic divide between the public and the private spheres in life and the systemic subjugation of women and of their sexuality, fertility and labour.

This patriarchal paradigm of development puts profit before life and is based on the exploitation of nature and disrespect of life processes. This kind of development jeopardizes the life and livelihoods of our people, while causing irreparable damage to sensitive

ecosystems and the biodiversity on which life is sustained.

We understand that these trends need to be challenged and new priorities set. We see the importance of working with a feminist perspective in creating alternatives and putting into play processes that are just, that challenge caste, class and patriarchy, and that are based on the sustainable use of resources.

We call for a people-centred, gender-just, equitable and participatory development, based on the sustainable use and management of natural resources. We call for development that values the resources—human or natural—that go towards the sustenance and nurture of life. To achieve this, we will further our organizing and mobilizing work among women within our own organizations and movements. We stand united in our struggle to fight the systems and structures of globalization.

## Asia/ Pakistan

### Not a rosy picture

*Conditions of work of women workers in warrachs, sheds for processing fish, leave much to be desired, highlighting problems in the implementation of existing labour laws*

**By Tayyaba Ahmed, a doctoral student at the University of Karachi**

More and more women are stepping out to work to supplement the income of their men. This is a positive change in that finally women are also being viewed as providers, compared to their traditional roles as unpaid housekeepers. This may be a sign that women's empowerment is finally taking place, but the picture is not as rosy as it may seem. While within their homes they are under the control of their fathers, husbands or brothers, when they step out, their problems increase, as their employers and society, in general, exploit them. This exploitation may be physical, emotional or even sexual. It brings to the fore a sad picture of human rights violations, and of little effort towards implementing laws and bringing about social awareness to help the victims. An example of this gross negligence is the condition of women who work in Pakistan's *warrachs* (sheds for processing fish), where one can witness human misery and manipulation at its worst.

*Warrachs* are big halls or rooms, measuring 20 ft by 50 ft or more. The walls are typically bare, unplastered cement blocks, and the roofs are made of asbestos or iron sheets. Women workers sit on the floor with their backs towards the walls. The number of women workers (and their children) in each *warrach* ranges between a minimum of 40 and a maximum of 250, depending on its size. Workers employed are usually female, more often than not accompanied by their young children, who also lend a helping hand with their work.

In the fisheries sector, *warrachs* are used for peeling shrimp, cleaning and gutting fish, and extracting meat from crabs, shellfish, etc. The manager/ operator of a *warrach* could be the owner of the premises or the one who has rented it. Typically, the following activities are undertaken in *warrachs*:

- Supply of peeled shrimp, gutted fish, etc. to processing plants on terms and conditions agreed

on by both parties. Arranging for raw materials (fish) is the sole responsibility of the operator.

- Peeling/cleaning of fish/ shellfish provided by the processing plants on terms and conditions mutually agreed on by both parties.

In both cases, the managers/operators of the *warrachs* are doing the job for processing plants or for some third party/firm exporting seafood. Hence, they are called contractors in the local fisheries industry.

In some situations, it may be absolutely necessary to give out certain tasks to a contractor. For instance, a small publisher who does not regularly handle bookbinding work, has no option but to get this task done by a professional binder. The binder, in turn, works for many publishers, employing his own labour. Thus, if there is exploitation of labour, it is the binder who is prosecuted, not the publisher who has subcontracted work to the binder.



It is the job of the employer to obtain work from the labour he employs. The job of the Labour Department is to ensure a fair deal for labour and due compliance with labour laws. The contractor has to be treated as an employer and has to be made to comply with labour laws.

With this in mind, one must look at the status of the contractor/owner/operator of the *warrach*. It appears obvious that in the case of fisheries *warrachs* as well, the contractors must be seen as the 'employers', responsible for payment of wages, labour welfare, terms

and conditions of employment, discipline and compliance with labour laws. However, in practice, this does not happen. In general, workers are paid poor wages, made to work for long hours without overtime payment, are not entitled to leave, and have no social security, health or accident coverage, or access to welfare schemes. In other words, laws for the protection and welfare of labour are not adhered to. In fact, the fault is more with the poor enforcement machinery, which is the Labour and Manpower Division, and its failure to deal with such violations in a suitable manner.

There are several provisions in existing labour laws that should apply to the labour employed in the *warrahs*, namely:

- The West Pakistan Industrial and Commercial Employment (Standing Orders) Ordinance, 1968 (section 1 (4) (a)) explicitly covers those “Employed directly or through any other person”. In Section 2(b), a commercial establishment is defined to include “the office establishment of a person who for the purpose of fulfilling a contract with the owner of any commercial establishment or industrial establishment, employs workmen” and “such other establishments or class thereof, as Government may, by notification in the official Gazette, declare to be commercial establishment for the purpose of this Ordinance.”
- According to Section 2 (xxx) of the Industrial Relations Ordinance, “workman” means any person who is employed in an establishment or industry for hire or reward either directly or through a contractor . . .”, and, according to Section 2(xiv), “industry means any business, trade, manufacture, calling, service, employment or occupation”.
- The Workmen’s Compensation Act, 1923 ((section 2 (1) (n) and Schedule II) covers numerous types of work, including those of contractors.
- Section 2 (ii) (g) of the Payment of Wages Act, 1936 refers to “establishment of a contractor who directly or indirectly employs persons. . . .”
- According to section 2(h) of the Factories Act, 1934, “worker” means a person employed directly or through an agency. . .” in work “connected with the subject of the manufacturing process.”
- According to section 2 (9) of the Provincial Employees’ Social Security Ordinance, 1965, “employer” means in the case of works executed or undertakings carried on by any contractor or licensee on behalf of the State, the contractor or licensee working for the State, and, in every other case, the owner of the industry, business, undertaking or establishment in which an employee works, and includes any agent, manager or representative of the owner.”
- According to the West Pakistan Shops and Establishment Ordinance, 969 (section 2 (g)), an employee “means any person employed, whether directly or otherwise, about the business of an establishment.” As per section 2(g), the Ordinance can be applied by Gazette notification to any other establishment not presently covered by the Ordinance.
- According to the Employees’ Old-Age Benefits Act, 1976 (section 2 (b)), “employee” means any person employed, whether directly or through any other person, for wages or other-wise in any industry, and as per section 2 (g), “industry” means “any business, trade, undertaking, manufacture or calling of employers, and includes any calling, service, employment, handicraft, industrial occupation or avocation of workmen.”
- According to Employees Cost of Living (Relief) Act, 1973 (section 2 (b)), “employee” means “any person employed, whether directly or through any other person . . . in any undertaking”, and, as per section 2 (d), “undertaking” “includes any class of establishments which the Federal Government may, by notification in the official Gazette, declare to be undertakings for the purpose of this Act.”
- According to the Minimum Wages Ordinance, 1961 (section 2 (9)), a “worker” means “any person including an apprentice employed in any industry. . .” and, as per section 2 (6), “industry” has been assigned the same meanings as in Industrial Relations Ordinance, viz. “any business, trade, manufacture, calling service, employment or occupation.”

It is clear from the above that contractors, such as the owners/operators of *warrahs*, are already covered under most labour laws. If violation of labour laws and consequent exploitation continues to take place, the responsibility falls on those who fail to enforce the law. In order to make the law more effective, a provision could be added, making it mandatory to register

addresses of worksites and offices of contractors with the Labour Department. Regular inspection of such worksites, maintenance of proper records and submission of returns by them must be made compulsory, as for other employers. These measures can check the abuses of the contract system. There is no need for any fresh legislation. The laws are already there—it is only that the people in power need to set right their priorities. Only then can this gross exploitation of labour be stopped.

*Tayyaba Ahmed can be contacted at [sweetie2kewl@hotmail.com](mailto:sweetie2kewl@hotmail.com)*

**Asia / Tsunami****Consult us first**

*This Statement is from the Asian Women's Consultation on Post-tsunami Challenges, held at Banda Aceh, Sumatra, Indonesia, 25-27 July 2005.*

We, over 60 women, survivors of the tsunami and activists involved in the tsunami relief and reconstruction efforts, from India, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Malaysia, gathered in Banda Aceh in the village of Lambaro Seibun during 25-27 July 2005, for the Asian Women's Consultation on Post-tsunami Challenges.

Seven months after the December 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, affected women continue to be marginalized, discriminated and excluded from the process of rebuilding at all levels: the family, the community and the nation.

We met in Aceh realizing the significance and challenges women face in the tsunami aftermath:

1. Gender discrimination and women's human rights violations. Thousands of women and children in the affected countries still live in camps and other temporary facilities, which lack adequate sanitation, clean water, health services and security. Government compensations have not reached them or are insufficient to restore their livelihoods. In Thailand, women are discriminated even in death: funeral expenses paid for men's deaths are twice as much as for women's.
2. Women's right to food is violated. People are on the verge of starvation getting one meal a day. The food rations provided are of very low quality. This affects the health of children and pregnant, breast-feeding and elderly women.
3. Women suffer from increased domestic violence in camps and temporary shelters, especially in India, Sri Lanka and Thailand as a result of increased alcoholism. There is inadequate protection provided by the police and camp administration because of the general perception



of violence against women being a personal matter.

4. Children in camps and temporary shelters do not have access to education. Government scholarships are not sufficient to cover education costs. In Sri Lanka, Indonesia (Aceh) and India, schools are too far away from camps, and transport is not provided.
5. Both temporary and permanent housing facilities are of low standards in design and construction, and climatic conditions have not been taken into account; for example, it is impossible to stay in tin shelters that heat up in the tropical sun. Facilities do not meet women's needs: there are no kitchen and bathing facilities. In Sri Lanka, people remain uncertain regarding permanent housing. The Sri Lankan government's policy on buffer zone implies that fishermen and others are denied assistance in any rebuilding activities within 100-200 m from the shoreline. However, hotels and tourist resorts near the sea have been restored. In Indonesia, similar restrictions prevail, but some communities went back to their villages to rebuild their houses even though it means they will not receive government assistance. In Thailand, some permanent housing have ownership problems: houses are built by sponsors on rented land or on land owned by someone else, so some time in the future, resettled people will face eviction.

6. The tsunami exacerbated the problem of women's access to land. Women in Indonesia (Aceh) and India do not have ownership rights to land registered in their husbands' and fathers' names, as women are not recognized as heads of households. In Sri Lanka, joint ownership to land remains an unresolved issue in relation to post-tsunami reallocation of land. In Thailand, the tsunami has created new land conflicts, with big businesses claiming the land of entire communities, especially of minorities, who have lived on such land for several generations but never had land title deeds.
7. Jobs and livelihoods: In all the affected countries, women lost their jobs and livelihood sources. The governments have failed to respond effectively and survivors have to rely on non-governmental organization (NGO) support.
8. Caste and ethnic discrimination: In India, entire communities of *dalit* (so-called untouchables) and *irula* (indigenous people) have been left out of relief and rehabilitation efforts. They have not been receiving any assistance from the Indian government, as they are not seen as directly affected by the tsunami although they have lost their livelihood sources.
9. Plight of Burmese migrants in Thailand: Burmese migrants in Thailand have been completely ignored by both the Burmese and Thai governments in the tsunami aftermath. In the immediate aftermath, they could not recover dead bodies of their family members for fear of getting arrested as migrants. Since they have lost their registration/identity cards, they do not have access to government assistance and health services. As migrants, they do not have any income-generating capacity of their own, and have to rely on their employers to give them jobs, and these latter have lost their businesses in the tsunami.
10. The armed conflict situation in Indonesia's Aceh region and in Sri Lanka exacerbates the human rights situation. Child military recruitment in Sri Lanka has increased after the tsunami. The presence of armed forces inside the camps has increased the vulnerability of women to violence, and threatens their security, rather than provide protection. The military hinders the free movement of people and the distribution of relief aid.
- In the light of the above, we express grave concern about the lack of consultation with the people affected by the tsunami in the relief and reconstruction process. We demand that:
1. The governments of the affected countries and non-State actors consult and involve affected people in the process of reconstruction and rebuilding. International and national NGOs must consult with the affected communities in the planning, design and implementation of projects.
  2. We are also aware of significant foreign assistance received by the governments of the affected countries and international and national NGOs, and we demand transparency and accountability in the spending of funds.
  3. Both State and non-State agencies working with the displaced must recognize and address gender-specific and special needs of women.
  4. Recognize the needs and rights of children, the elderly, the disabled, women living with HIV/AIDS and affected women who need long-term medical and psychological treatment and assistance.
  5. The governments must immediately provide gender-disaggregated data in tsunami-affected regions.
  6. State and non-State actors in the tsunami-affected armed conflict areas must stop activities threatening the lives of the people, especially women and children. Rebuilding and reconstruction should promote peace-building efforts, especially in Sri Lanka and Aceh, Indonesia.
  7. The governments of the affected countries must ensure that relief and reconstruction activities are implemented without discrimination based on gender, caste, class, ethnicity, religion, age, migration, citizenship and other factors.

8. The governments must provide legal and financial assistance to women who have to fight for their right to land in disputes with business corporations.

The governments must recognize the rights of the fishing communities to the sea and the coastal land, and ensure that business interests in the rebuilding process do not negatively impact the livelihoods of the seashore people.

*Contact the Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD) at: [apwld@apwld.org](mailto:apwld@apwld.org)*



**Asia / Pakistan****Ready for the struggle**

*Pakistan's first-ever fisherwomen's convention took place in July 2005, as a large assembly of women from the fishing villages of Sindh*

**By the Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum (PFF)**

On 10 July 2005 the Karachi Press Club witnessed a large assembly of women working in the fishing sector, at the first-ever Fisherwomen's Convention organized by the Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum (PFF). Representatives of various civil society organizations, including women members of parliament (MPs), attended. The fisherwomen, who came from fishing villages of the coastal and inland fishing areas, highlighted their problems through tableaux, folk songs and other cultural shows that simultaneously provided entertainment.

In his presidential address, Haji Shafi Jamote, Director, Fishermen Co-operative Society (FCS), underlined the need for fisherfolk communities to be provided their due share and the recognition that only fishermen have the right to catch fish without any interference. He opposed the contract system, which exploits poor fishermen. He appreciated the struggle of PFF against the contract system and lauded the leadership role of PFF Chairman, Mohammad Ali Shah.

The chief guest of the convention, Vice Chairperson of the First Women's Bank, Shafqat Sultana, appreciated the PFF for organizing such a big gathering of women to discuss their problems. She said that her bank provides easy loans to small entrepreneur women for running businesses. She pledged to assist PFF members in getting loans for purchasing sewing machines and so on.

In their speeches, the women MPs paid rich tributes to fisherwomen for waging a war against exploitation of their rights. They particularly appreciated the role of fisherwomen in fully participating in rallies and hunger strikes in the struggle against the contract system in fisheries.

Sassui Palejo said that in this 21<sup>st</sup> century, when the world has achieved a lot of progress, the fisherwomen in Sindh are living miserable lives. They do not even have basic facilities like drinking

water, education and healthcare. She regretted that the government has not taken any steps to bring positive changes in the lives of fisherwomen. She said the rulers are only concerned about the development of the cities of Karachi, Lahore and Islamabad; they do not have any concern about Ketri Bandar, Ibrahim Haidri, Shah Bandar and other coastal villages of Sindh. Are these not part of Pakistan, she asked.

Shazia Atta Mari pointed out that over one million women of Sindh are living below the poverty line. She said the women in rural areas do not enjoy any basic rights. The conditions of fisherwomen are even more deplorable, she added.

Muttahida Majlis-e-Ammal Mohammad Hussain Mehnati said that PFF has always highlighted the issues of poor people. He assured his full co-operation in solving the fisherfolk's problems.

Addressing the participants of the convention, the PFF Chairman, Mohammad Ali Shah, congratulated the fishermen for their successful struggle against the contract system. He said that due to the continuous struggle by PFF, the Sindh government has been forced to withdraw the contract system.

Mohammad Ali Shah reiterated that the PFF would not sit silently, as the government has still not issued a notification regarding the contract system. Moreover, he said the PFF wanted a permanent solution of the problem through legislations. He said PFF would organize a Mallah Convention against the contract system in Hyderabad, in which thousands of fishermen from all over Sindh would participate. He said that this convention too would celebrate the success of the struggle against the contract system.

The PFF Chairman regretted that hundreds of thousands of fisherwomen in Sindh are living their lives like animals. He said that even though the male members of the fishing communities are also leading inhuman lives, the condition of women is much more miserable. The women not only have to work in their homes and raise their children, but also have to share with their male partners the work in fishing-related activities.

He paid rich tributes to the fisherwomen for making the campaign against the contract system a success. He said the fisherwomen have now found a way to

solve their problems and are inviting their friends and colleagues to organize themselves around one united platform to save their livelihoods.

Mohammad Ali Shah said the participation of such a large number of women at the convention indicates that fisherwomen have now woken up to their rights and are ready for the struggle against every injustice.

In her welcome address, the chief of PFF's Women's Wing, Tahira Ali, said that fisherwomen have proved themselves an equally strong force within PFF. She spoke about the problems of the fisherwomen. They have to take equal part in fishing activities like rowing boats, pulling in nets, carrying fish catches and selling the fish in the market. At home, they have to collect wood for fuel, fetch water, clean the homes and cook food, she added. Apart from such difficult schedules, they lack proper medical facilities, and many lose their lives during childbirth. The women of Sindh are working like machines, she remarked.

Tahira Ali pointed out that women members of PFF have fully taken part in every movement for the rights of fisherfolk, and the recent success in the campaign against the contract system is due to the total participation of the women. She pointed out that it was for the first time in the history of Pakistan that PFF was organizing a convention for fisherwomen.

The General Secretary of PFF, Saeed Balcoh, said that without fisherwomen, the PFF is incomplete. He said that the female members are effectively performing their duties in the activities of PFF. He pointed to how at this meeting, thousands of women demanded the abolition of the contract system once and for all and the introduction, in its place, of a licensing system.

At the end of the convention, the following resolutions were passed:

- The historical rights of fishermen to the fishing grounds should be recognized by removing the contract system and granting them licences, so that they can freely fish in all the lakes, rivers, ponds and coastal areas.
- Fisherwomen should be allowed to participate equally in fishing activities. They engage in fishing-related activities, along with male members, in catching fish, weaving nets, repairing boats, drying



fish and selling the catch in the market. With the commercialization of fishing, several of the women have been marginalized. The government should provide them some alternative employment opportunities and compensations.

- Many women suffer from lack of medical care in the fishing villages. To save precious human lives, basic healthcare units and maternity homes should be set up in the villages. These should be apart from other basic amenities and facilities.
- Due to shortage of water in fishing villages, fisherwomen have to draw water from sources situated many miles from their homes. Water supply schemes should be initiated in fishing villages to solve the water problem in those settlements.
- Electricity and gas facilities should be provided to fishing villages spread in far-flung areas along banks of rivers, canals, lakes and coastal areas, so that women can be spared the tiresome labour of cutting fuelwood.
- Handicraft and vocational training centres should be established in fishing villages to provide alternative employment opportunities for fisherwomen.
- A ban on destructive nets and fishing techniques should be strictly enforced, and deep-sea fishing trawlers should be banned as well.

- Primary and secondary schools should be established to provide education to fisherwomen.
- Over two million acres of land in the Indus delta area has been claimed by the sea due to the lack of flow in the downstream Indus river. Due to this situation, the older settlements of the delta area have been ruined, and that has affected the women and children, who are faced with migration, unemployment and various diseases. This convention demands that the required water should be released in the downstream Kotri barrage to stop the sea intrusion and to rehabilitate the fisherfolk.
- The poisonous water of the Right Bank Outfall Drain (RBOD) project is being discharged into the Manchhar lake, which has become highly polluted, affecting the environment and livelihood resources of the people of the area. The government should immediately stop the poisonous and polluted discharge of RBOD into the Manchhar lake. The affected families should be provided adequate compensation.
- The convention also demands the withdrawal of plans to dispose of RBOD's polluted water into the sea through the Gharo creek. The participants were of the opinion that every city and province is responsible for treating all its sewerage water, and disposing polluted water from one city or province into another should be stopped forthwith.

**Asia/India****Development for whom?**

*Even though incomes have increased as fishing becomes more technology- and capital-intensive, they often do not translate into a better quality of life for the fishing community, particularly for women*

**by Nalini Nayak, a member of Protsahan, an NGO based in Trivandrum, India, and a Member of ICSF**

I recently saw the film *Darwin's Nightmare*. While, on the one hand, it highlights the impact that the introduction of the Nile perch in Lake Victoria has had on the ecosystem, on the other, it also vividly reveals the interlinkages between neoliberal globalization and patriarchy that result in inhuman lives for people who actually live around this 'highly productive' lake. The film was well done, although a bit long-drawn-out. Yet it has the effect of entering one's bones and arousing anger from within.

I also saw another film in the making, which depicts child labour in the fishery of the Upper Volta region of Ghana. The children lead a hard and precarious life and, in the process, are denied the normal rights of children. This is another face of neoliberal globalization, where children's labour is exploited. And yet society is supposed to be progressing and technology so highly advanced. It is clear that all these advances are not aimed at creating better lives for most people, but at profit and well-being for a few.

In this context, I would like to mention a study that I, together with two other colleagues, have just completed, on the impact of development on coastal population dynamics and the environment. This is a study undertaken in three locations on the west coast of India. Although there is no space here to share all the complexities and findings of the study, some disturbing facts are worth highlighting.

One of the locations of the study was a coastal town (population: 158,000) that houses two major industries, the fishing industry and a chemical industry that produces rayon. Both these industries employ a large number of people, and the town buzzes with

activity. The harbour there saw large fish landings in the 1980s and 1990s, and fish exports from there generated a great deal of foreign exchange for the country.

There is only one community (caste) that controls the fishery there, and their members are the owners of the trawlers, the dominant fishing craft. There are over 2,500 trawlers (32-45 feet long) in just one harbour. These boats have no modern equipment, not even a global positioning system (GPS). The boatowners themselves do not go to sea, and several of them are illiterate. The majority of the workers on the boats are migrants who come to the area for the nine-month trawling season. Throughout this period, they live on the boats, as their fishing trips are long, between nine to 11 days, with one day at the most in the harbour for offloading fish and loading ice and provisions, before they return for the next trip. While they get wages, they remain invisible workers who have absolutely no other rights.

As mentioned earlier, the fishery in this area was booming until about three years ago when overfishing resulted in falling catch per unit effort. But what has been the impact? Some of the boatowners certainly did make money, constructed big houses and were able to educate their children, and some even moved into other businesses. But the life of the workers on board the trawlers is pitiable, and so is the life for women in the community.



The town receives water for a few hours, once in two days. It is the women's burden to fetch and store water. Some women have to walk one kilometre to fetch water, or pay for it. The city has absolutely no drainage system so all wastewater runs on the streets. There is no organized sewage disposal system either. Children use the open drains and the pigs act as scavengers. Most of the sewage flows into the canal and into the harbour.

It is also worth noting that as fishing has become more capital-intensive, the practice of dowry ('gifts' in cash or kind given by the girl's parents at the time of marriage) has become more common. The women become the medium through which capital transfers are made at the time of marriage. Parents of girls who cannot afford a dowry remain unmarried. The community sometimes arranges collective marriage ceremonies to cut down marriage costs. The female sex ratio in this town has also fallen: In 2001, there were only 953 females to 1000 males in the population and, worse still, only 913 females to 1000 males in the 0-6 age group. Female foeticide has been reported from some parts of India. One wonders whether this is happening here too.

As surprising, in this otherwise prosperous town, there are still a large number of people who cannot afford to send their children to school. Around 26 per cent of children between 6 and 16 years do not attend school. Our study reveals that despite development improving gross incomes, it does not translate into a better life for people in the community at large and for women, in particular. The role of the State in providing basic infrastructure and social services is pitifully absent. Ironically, this State happens to be one of the most economically advanced in India. As women, we need to look more closely at the impact of present-day development on women, in particular, and begin to dream of another development paradigm that respects both life and livelihood.

*Nalini's e-mail: tvn\_nalinin@sancharnet.in*

## FROM AFRICA/Sénégal

### Women as leaders

by Aliou Sall of CREDETIP, Sénégal

The CNPS (Collectif National des Pêcheurs Artisans du Sénégal), established in 1987, is a movement born of the artisanal fishing communities in Sénégal. It comprises fishermen and women fishworkers—artisanal fish processors and fishmongers. Through an internal struggle in CNPS, women have today come to occupy roles and responsibilities they did not have at the beginning of the movement. The process of their empowerment and the strategies they used need to be acknowledged for two main reasons:

First, it highlights the fact that the women's representation in CNPS did not come from a strategy aimed at opportunistically 'feminising' the decision-making process. In many cases, in order to get funds more easily from their Northern partners, movements, organizations and, sometimes, governments, make a show of publicly 'involving' women but without really wanting them to participate in the decision-making process.

Secondly, in this way, women's actions can be considered as 'a movement inside a movement'. Since the beginning, CNPS has been internally revolutionised by women—a women's movement within a social movement of the fisheries sector. While at one level, women have struggled inside the movement to get access to decision-making processes, at another level, they have dynamised the movement and have facilitated a thematic evolution of CNPS, raising vital issues to be integrated into the national agenda of the movement.

The movement has become more political as a result of women's demands. CNPS has evolved thematically and now takes a wider view to include issues like the resource crisis, fisheries access agreements, the problems of tourism and the land law regime.

In an African context, still dominated by the idea of 'projects' and oriented towards short-term demands, this is an innovative approach. Unlike co-operatives and more recently GIEs (Economic Interests Groups) that have come up in the Senegalese fishery sector,

CNPS has a longer-term political perspective, thanks to the women's movement. Since 1992, women have taken an active part in the debate on fisheries access agreements. This is a historical event in the sense that women, whose work is traditionally confined to tasks in the post-harvest fisheries sector, were not seen to have an interest in the debate on fisheries resources. For the Senegalese government and for a lot of Senegalese, this debate was seen to be a debate for intellectuals or ecologists only. The CNPS was often accused of being manipulated by environmental organizations like Greenpeace. This was a strategy used by the government to make CNPS lose its credibility. But it was also a way for public authorities to deny the existence of a resource problem.

Women have helped focus attention on fisheries access agreements. It was the CNPS' women's cell's meeting in Hann in 1992 that first proposed the idea of boycotting the funds available as financial compensation from fisheries access agreements between Senegal and third countries. The last agreement signed between Sénégal and the European Union has been an opportunity for women to demonstrate their militancy and their strong will to fight against the access of foreign fleets to Senegalese resources. Their protest against the content of this agreement reinforced CNPS' credibility and also widened the social visibility of CNPS, thanks to the public debate on the agreement. The campaign led by women against this agreement allowed the usually marginalized artisanal fisheries sector to become the focus of a wide public debate.

Similarly, the issues arising from the development of tourism in coastal areas have progressively found their place on the agenda of CNPS, as a result of the action of women. This debate on access to land for fishing communities, 'sandwiched' between tourist complexes and polluting industries in coastal areas, has also given to CNPS its political dimension. The fact that this issue was brought to the forefront by women in the movement surprised a lot of observers of Senegalese sociocultural realities. Even women, traditionally marginalized within the fishery sector, are often not aware of the importance of their role. Most of the time, women fish processors are considered as 'housewives' or 'unemployed' (these are the terms used on Senegalese identity cards).

Since the sexual division of labour in the artisanal fisheries sector has given to women the role of processing and selling fish, this makes them the 'natural enemies' of tourism. Women are the first to be exposed to the threats of tourism and the occupation of the coastal zone. The conflict between tourism and fisheries permanently exposes them to the threat of being thrown out of their working places on the beach.

The negative impacts of the development of tourist villages in the Petite Côte region in Sénégal and, more recently, tourist camps in the region of Saint Louis (see next write-up), make it imperative for women fish processors to go beyond their traditional issues of concern, such as access to credit or infrastructural needs for their activities. The fight is not only to defend their source of revenue. It is also a fight for their status. Fish processing is also a way of 'social survival'. Thanks to the revenue from their activities, they participate in social and economic life—in fishing villages, women actively share the family's financial responsibilities.

In 1990, for the first time, women from CNPS questioned the tax system that paralyses the processed fish trade. They requested that the issue be put on the CNPS Congress' agenda in 1991 and 1994. The commonly highlighted problems in fish trade were earlier restricted to access to credit or limits to trade due to transport difficulties. CNPS then began to realize that taxes constituted administrative barriers for the development of the processed fish trade. A study was made with ICSF support, followed by a seminar for fisherpeople in Kayar. Representatives from the administration, from the finance department and from the department of fisheries, were invited to this seminar. CNPS thought it important to associate public authorities because it was aware that this issue was also a political one. This was one of the more practical initiatives taken by CNPS. Today, most of these taxes do not exist any more.

All these issues have been put on CNPS' agenda as a result of women's requests, which shows that their level of mobilisation is higher than that of men. How can that be explained? I think that, being more exposed than men to the consequences of public policies, women feel the need to react more.

Women have been involved in CNPS right from the time it was created. This would be usual in a sector

where women pre-finance fishing activities and where they play such an important role in post-harvest activities. But despite that, and the fact that they have politicised the movement through their requests, they were not involved in decision-making processes. For 7-8 years (from 1987 to 1994), there were women's cells in villages and a national executive committee of women. But during the CNPS Congress in 1994, they demanded to be part of the National Executive Committee of CNPS, where only fishermen were represented. That was made effective at the next general assembly in 1995.

Since then, they have taken an increasingly active role in campaigns and in lobbying outside the country. The general assembly held in 1998 brought together a larger number of women's representatives. Though they are now in the CNPS Executive Committee, they have decided to retain their local cells. If these cells were earlier seen as a way of putting women in a 'ghetto', this is not the case any more. On the contrary, the local cells have become a source of getting better empowered in the sense that the women can still discuss internal matters but, at the same time, are able to keep networking with a movement to which they have belonged for more than 11 years.

## From Africa/ Uganda

### Fishing pioneers

*A dynamic group of women take to fishing in Lake Victoria*

by Margaret Nakato, a member of the Katosi Women's Fishing Group

We, the Katosi Women's Fishing Group, are a pioneering group of women in the region, engaged in fishing. We are 25 women who came together with the aim of improving our general socioeconomic situation. We use a locally built boat, with a 25 HP engine, and fishing nets of a mesh size recommended in Uganda to avoid catching young fish. We do fishing as a group activity, and, from the profits, we have created a Revolving Loan Fund that is a source of loans for the women members of the group.

It has not been easy for us to fish, as the men here tend to regard fishing as a profitable activity only for men. The group was met with resistance and a lack of cooperation from the community in the beginning, and we had to work with those men who were willing to help us reduce the resistance. Despite this, there are areas that continue to be 'out of bounds' for us. There is an island on Lake Victoria, which, according to custom, should not be visited by women, even though this island is a great strategic place to go fishing in some seasons. Our group has not ventured there, as this has been a tradition for a long time.

The men who support us work as our employees, or as suppliers of petrol and fishing nets, on credit. The man who is the chief buyer of our catch has also been very supportive of our cause, and this has given us more independence, rather than having to depend on our husbands and other men for support.

We fish in the lake Victoria. The Nile perch is the main catch, though tilapia, lung fish and a few other species are also caught. The Nile perch is mainly for export, while the other species are usually consumed locally. The fishing period is not continuous, as we catch more fish during the dark days of the month and almost none when the moon is bright.

Earlier, the fishing activity was almost eliminated due to a ban on fishing, imposed because of the illegal use of poison by some people in the community, eager to

reap easy profits. The spread of water hyacinth had led to a rapid decline in the fish population in the lake. It was at that time of fish scarcity that some fishermen began to use poison to catch fish. The members of our group were more oriented towards eradicating the weed, since it was affecting the whole landing site and thus the whole community. Fortunately, the government intervened to introduce a weevil that fed on the weed and, consequently, there has been a decline in the coverage of the weed, especially at Katosi Landing Site.

Since, with the exception of fishing, this area has no employment or income opportunities, the whole community suffered intensively as a result of the ban. Though the ban has since been lifted, the industry has not completely revived and is still limping.

Since our daily catch is still small due to limited equipment, it is sold to our chief buyer, who has a big boat with a freezer installed. The chief buyer patrols the lake, looking for fish from small boats like ours, and has the capacity to stay on the lake till the maximum tonnage is reached. This fish is then supplied to the fish-processing industries that are located at a distance of some 45 kms, in the capital city of Kampala.

We are thinking of going into fish processing since it is more profitable. Fish smoking and other forms of fish processing were activities local women engaged in earlier. However, due to the rise in the demand of fresh fish by fish-processing factories, women processors were forced out of business and are no longer in this activity. They took to activities, such as food vending, selling of secondhand clothes, selling fresh vegetables, local brewing, tailoring, running drug shops, poultry farming, etc. As we have been giving loans to women, we have found that women often do the same type of business, leading to duplication and low sales.

We think a processing factory will be a major achievement for the women in the area and a source of employment. Our plans include building a freezer boat and then building a fish-processing factory so that we can process the fish for export, instead of selling it raw. If our dream is realized, our project is going to be a pioneering one in the whole country. The factory will be owned jointly by the women of the group. It will enable the women in the area to enter international trade, create employment and will answer our campaign for industrialization. The fish-processing factories presently in Uganda are mostly owned by foreign investors.



## From Africa/ Benin

### I will pay you one day...

*Women fish processors are hesitant to supply fish on credit to wholesalers, as discussions during a meeting with women fish processors in Benin revealed.*

**By the Union of Professionals in the Artisanal Fishery of Benin (UNIPPA-BENIN, translated by Lucien Dehy, General Secretary of ID Pêche**

In a meeting organized in January by ID Pêche with the support of UNIPPA-BENIN, delegates from women's groups and fishermen groups met at Nicoué-Condji in the sub-prefecture of Grand-Popo, about 100 kms from Cotonou. Also participating in this meeting were representative of the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF) and of the Centre de Recherches pour le Développement des Technologies Intermediaires de Peche (CREDETIP), Senegal.

One of the issues discussed with the women fish processors present there was the Processed Fish Fair to be held in Dakar, Senegal, in June 2001. In this connection, there was a discussion on various aspects of fish trade in the region.

Women processors were asked about whether they supply fish on credit to wholesale traders. Sale on credit is rare they said. According to them, it was common for traders to visit fishing camps, to get supplies of smoked and fermented, salted and dried fish. Often the traders may only pay for a part of their purchases. In the camps, processing women are used to that and they may not hesitate to provide credit for up to 15 days.

Unfortunately, some fish traders then do not honour their commitments. When this happens they avoid the camps and generally disappear from the markets frequented by the processors. This devious behaviour puts the processing women, with little capital at their disposal, in a precarious position. When the processing women catch up with the traders, it is with great passion that the debt is reclaimed.

Even as the women were describing this scene, one of them burst into a song, and the others joined her. The song, it seems, is one which fish traders sing when confronted by women processors demanding their payment:

Through a mutual and private arrangement,  
you agreed to sell to me on credit  
There was no witness  
Through a mutual and private arrangement,  
You provided me a loan  
There were no indiscreet ears  
Today in the centre of the market  
You yell in a high and loud voice  
That I'm an insolvent debtor  
You yell high and loud  
That Chérie is in debt  
But debt is not theft  
I will pay you  
Owing you is not stealing from you  
I will pay you  
I will pay you one day



*(Lucien Dehy can be contacted at [ldehy@yahoo.fr](mailto:ldehy@yahoo.fr))*

*(Lucien Dehy can be contacted at [ldehy@yahoo.fr](mailto:ldehy@yahoo.fr))*

## From Africa/ Mozambique

### Proud of their achievements

*An enterprising group of women from a remote island in Mozambique, get together to increase their income*

**By Nalini Nayak, a member of ICSEF, in consultation with the Institute for the Development of Small-Scale Fisheries (IDPPE), Mozambique**

Tucked away in the lush mangroves, an hour's boat ride from Angoche, in Mozambique, lies the little island of Mituban. With the impression that one is sailing through a water forest, one alights in the water, wades through the younger mangroves and steps on to land as if alighting on another planet. Walking a little further, one realizes that one is in a fairly populous little village, with majestic coconut palms and neatly thatched huts scattered all over. The first little fence is the playground of a rather large school, again with mud walls and thatched roof. People are gathered in the shade of a large cashew tree. In the majority are the women, who then talk about their work.

This is an exclusively Muslim village. The men have been hunting crabs using their small canoes and little spears and their hands. Selling these crabs to mainland merchants brings them the cash they need to buy food. But, for the most part, this little island is self-sufficient, with potters who make the utensils, carpenters who make the furniture from mangrove wood, people who thatch their own houses and make rope from the coconut fibre. They grow their own vegetables and rice in the marshes when the salinity in the water falls. People seem to be dependent on the mainland mainly for medical assistance and higher-level schooling.

It is on this little island, that the women fishers have a collective. The origins of this group are ambiguous but from what the women say, it happened in mid-1998 when a couple from an NGO called PENDANA visited the island and interacted with the women. They suggested that the women could earn money through shrimp capture and sale. This couple brought in some small nylon gill-nets and insulated boxes and suggested that the women work in pairs, each pair using one net to catch shrimp. As 32 women were initially interested, 16 groups were formed. All went well and the couple came regularly to collect the shrimp that they took to sell to the mainland. After two months, the women began asking for their money and the couple kept

putting it off. This went on for six full months. The couple then disappeared and the women were left high and dry.

The local fishing community in Angoche, which was in the process of organizing through the Nampula Artisanal Fisheries Project, a project initiated by IDPPE, heard about the plight of these women. The enthusiastic secretary of the APPA (the newly created Fishermen's Association), then tried to do all he could to get these women their due. The fisheries association helped the women's group to elaborate a project proposal, that was then submitted to the office of the First Lady through the District Office. The project was approved and a grant was made available for the purchase of a motor boat for this group. Once the women had a boat of their own, they were able to take their shrimp to sell directly and money started coming in. Enthused by this success, other women joined the group, which has now doubled to 64 members.

Each pair records the quantity of shrimp caught, and the women collectively decide on who goes to sell the catch. Two percent of the income from the sale is deposited in a common fund maintained by the secretary of the group. Each woman has a book in which her contributions are recorded. Interestingly, after being cheated in the initial stages, the women do not trust anybody with their money, not even a bank. So they handle it themselves and they have a fairly large sum stored away somewhere. Now they also have a loan from the APPA with which they have bought more nets for their members. The group now owns two boats, one freezer and a generator.

This is indeed an interesting and enthusiastic group of women who feel proud of their achievements. All these women earlier gathered seafood for their own consumption. Being so far away from civilization as it were, they managed with what they had. Their men still do not own any boats or gear but continue to hunt crab and gather fuel from the mangroves. Being distrustful of outside assistance, this little group is determined to learn by trial and error. Their freezer is not yet functional and to operate and manage it will entail additional costs and skills that the women themselves do not have at present.

*(Nalini can be contacted at [nalinin@md5.vsnl.net.in](mailto:nalinin@md5.vsnl.net.in) and IDPPE at [lopes@idppe.co.za](mailto:lopes@idppe.co.za))*

## From Africa/ Senegal

### Talking shop

#### *A report of the Workshop on Problems and Prospects for Developing Artisanal Fish Trade in West Africa*

The *Workshop on Problems and Prospects for Developing Artisanal Fish Trade in West Africa* was held from 30 May to 1 June 2001, followed by the *West African Processed Fish Fair* on 2 and 3 June 2001.

These events were organized by ICSF in collaboration with the Collectif National des Pecheurs Artisanaux du Senegal (CNPS) and the Centre de Recherches pour le Developpement des Technologies Intermediaires de Pêche (CREDETIP). They were supported by the FAO-DFID Sustainable Fisheries Livelihood Project (SFLP). The objectives were as follows:

To enable artisanal fish processors and traders to:

- identify common problems in relation to fish processing and trade at the regional level;
- make their problem visible to, and to influence, policy-makers and the general public;
- exchange fish processing technologies and establish better trade networks;
- learn about support services (information, credit and technology resources) available within the region.

A total of 64 participants from 13 countries in the West African region, that is Senegal, Gambia, Guinea Conakry, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Mali, Guinea Bissau, Ivory Coast, Togo, Benin, Nigeria, Burkina Faso and Mauritania, participated in the workshop. Participants included representatives of artisanal fishworker, fish processor and trader organizations, and of governmental and non-governmental organizations working with, and providing support to, artisanal fishing communities in the region.

Also participating in these events were representatives from the SFLP, the DFID, UK, the FAO Regional Office for Africa as well as fisheries departments officials from countries of the region. Also represented were organizations working with fishworkers from Mozambique and France.

The workshop provided the space for women fish processors and traders, together with their supporters, to discuss some of the issues affecting their livelihoods, in a focused way. According to the delegates from Mauritania, artisanal fish processing was a relatively new activity in their country. They highlighted the lack of road infrastructure in Mauritania that made it difficult to transport fish products. They also drew attention to the massive presence of foreign trawlers along Mauritania's coasts, and the negative impact on fish resources.

The delegates from Senegal, among other things, spoke of the need to sensitize decision-makers to respond better to the expectations of women traders. They pointed to several problems faced by women processors and traders in Senegal, including lack of infrastructure and equipment for fish processing and product storage; declining access to land for processing sites at beaches, with the development of tourism; administrative obstacles due to numerous local taxes and harassment by the police; and competition faced by the domestic artisanal sector from foreign fleets, following the fisheries access agreements signed between Senegal and the European Union.

The delegate from Sierra Leone spoke of the negative impact that political and social instability in her country had had on social and economic life, and on artisanal fish processing and trading activities. She expressed the hope that the current period of peace would last.

The delegate from Guinea Conakry drew attention to several problems faced by women processors and traders in her area, including inadequate supplies of firewood; high customs duties; high cost of product transportation; and political instability that made it difficult to access several markets in the region.

A delegate from Nigeria spoke with great passion about high post-harvest losses in the riverine fisheries of her area due to extreme paucity of financial means and inadequate equipment for processing and storage.

Participants from Cote d'Ivoire drew attention to the progressive depletion of fish resources and the difficulties in procuring fish for processing. While processors with access to capital were able to purchase fish from the harbour, most women could not afford this. The efforts of women processors to ensure supplies by advancing money to fishermen were not always successful, as the tendency was for fishermen to sell the fish elsewhere if they got a better price. Women also pointed to problems due to customs duties and local taxes: many processors prefer to stay in the village and sell to wholesalers at low prices rather than negotiate the various checkpoints encountered on the way to the market.

Participants from Ghana, Togo and Benin spoke of the depletion of fish resources, largely a consequence of trawling activities in inshore areas, and the impact on the artisanal capture and processing sector.

They also pointed to the high cost of procuring fish to process and the fact that even though many of them pre-financed fishing trips, there was no guaranteed access to fish caught. They also referred to difficulties in obtaining credit.

Participants discussed ways that their problems could be dealt with. It was noteworthy that discussions focused not only what governments or other organizations could do to support their work, but also what they needed to do themselves. They spelt out their own responsibilities in this process.

It was evident at the workshop that, given the right support and policy environment, these dynamic women can develop stronger linkages with each other, giving a boost not only to intra-regional trade, but also to regional food security, diversified and sustainable livelihoods in the artisanal fisheries sector and to regional integration.

### **We need support not charity**

Several policymakers participated in the session on the third day of the workshop. Dr. N'Diaga Gueye, Director of Fisheries, Senegal, while congratulating the organizers and participants of the workshop, dwelt at length on the future of the fish processing sector. Making a case for the modernization of the sector,

he said that one cannot have one foot in the middle ages and another in the third millennium. He stressed that the children of women fish processors must not feel that they are condemned to live in the same conditions as their parents and must be sent to school. "If I had the money to invest, I would not put it into dryers or drying areas, but I would set up schools for the children", he commented.

In response, Ms. Thérèse Senghor, a fish processor and a member of the women's wing of CNPS, Senegal stressed that women fish processors were not unaware of the importance of schooling for their children. Underlining the need to support the work of women fish processors and traders, she said it was, in fact, their work as fish processors that enabled them to earn money for schooling their children in a dignified way and not through charity.

## Africa/ Senegal

### Support our Trade

#### *Statement from the Workshop on Problems and Prospects for Developing Artisanal Fish Trade in West Africa*

Fish is important for food security in the West African region and artisanal fish processors and traders contribute in important ways to a better distribution of fish within the region.

Fish processing and trading at the artisanal level are of great social, cultural and economic significance in the region.

Fish processing and trading activities provide employment and income to hundreds of thousands of people, especially women, and are crucial to sustaining livelihoods within fishing communities in the region.

Recognizing this, we, the representatives of fishworker organizations and NGOs from 12 countries of the West African region—Senegal, Gambia, Sierra Leone, Mauritania, Burkina Faso, Guinea Conakry, Guinea Bissau, Ivory Coast, Benin, Togo, Ghana and Nigeria—participating in the above workshop, commit to work together to sustain and promote artisanal fish processing and trading activities within the region.

To achieve this we are aware that participatory action is required at the level of fishing communities and professional organizations, at the level of NGOs that work to support fishing communities, as well as at the national, regional and international levels.

We call upon governments as well as sub-regional, regional and multilateral organizations to support fish processing and trading activities in the following ways.

#### 1. Fish trade

a) Facilitate the speedy implementation of Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) programmes that aim to promote intra-regional trade, especially those that relate to:

- reducing and simplifying complex customs and trade formalities;
- eliminating taxes imposed on artisanally processed fish products traded within the region;
- minimizing difficulties in trade arising from the use of different currencies within the region and working towards a common currency;

Publicize these measures through the media, through notices put up at checkpoints and at government offices;

b) Reduce the number of customs and police checkpoints and stop the harassment of women traders;

c) Improve transport facilities within the region by: constructing proper roads connecting fishing and fish processing centres to important markets in the region; improving and renovating existing rail routes and building new rail routes; facilitating the availability of cargo vessels for transporting processed fish within the region, both along sea and river routes;

d) Assist associations of women traders to obtain and operate their own vehicles for fish transport;

e) Create and support banks providing micro-credit, and make credit available at low rates of interest to women processors and traders;

f) Facilitate the dissemination of information on markets, prices, and trade regulations through local radio and other mass media, and improve telecommunication infrastructure in the region;

g) Use market taxes to improve facilities within markets, to provide shelter and access to vending space, to improve sanitation and water supply, and to create storage space for fish products;

h) Create central markets for processed fish within each country.

#### 2. Fish processing

a) Recognize the right of processors from fishing communities to processing sites on beaches through appropriate arrangements such as land titles, to prevent their displacement through activities like tourism;

b) Ensure amenities like storage facilities, water, sanitation and power supply at processing sites, as well as childcare facilities;

- c) Provide training in improved methods of fish processing, packaging and storage, to ensure better product quality;
- d) Promote appropriate technology for greater fuel efficiency, in ways that reduce the health hazards faced by women processors;
- e) Facilitate access to land to be managed by women processors as woodlots for fuel supplies;
- f) Facilitate availability of credit at low rates of interest to women processors.

### **3. Access to fish supplies**

a) Given that artisanal fish processing activities in the region are centrally dependent on artisanal capture fisheries and a sustainable resource base, to protect the interests of the artisanal capture sector and improve the fish resource base in the following ways:

- Implement current fisheries legislation, put in place effective monitoring, control and surveillance measures, restrict destructive trawling activities and regulate the indiscriminate use of monofilament nets, ring seines and beach seines, especially in the inshore zone;

- Reduce the number of foreign vessels operating under fisheries access agreements and other arrangements, especially those targeting pelagic species, and ensure that these vessels observe the terms and conditions of the agreement, and do not engage in piracy and other illegal practices;

- Use mass media to develop awareness among fishing communities about fisheries management measures, and to facilitate training and exchange programmes on these issues.

b) Ensure adequate and appropriate infrastructure at landing sites, including insulated boxes, refrigeration and storage facilities, to reduce wastage and post-harvest losses.

We recognize the need for local and regional level organization, and commit to work together on these issues. We call upon governments, sub-regional, regional and multilateral organizations as well as NGOs to support us in this process.

**Africa/ Senegal****The tireless one**

*A poem prepared for the West African Fair for  
Artisanally Processed Fish*

**By Ibrahima Lakil Diakite, Ministry of Fisheries  
and Aquaculture, Guinea Conakry**

You are the tireless one  
Who feeds our people and doesn't count the cost  
You are the woman  
Who comes home late in the joy-filled evenings;  
Listen, woman of the landing site  
Listen, you crafter of our hopes  
Woman from the muddy ground  
Struggling in the bad weather  
Offer me a basket filled with *bonga*<sup>1</sup>  
Give me those pelagic fish  
that give sweat flavours  
to the peanut sauce  
and to the palm oil.

Amazon from the jetties  
Your breast is filled with hope  
Like a sailing-boat at sea  
Woman who comes home late in the evening  
and watches all night  
over the smoking grills  
Woman smoker with fiery hair  
Woman of the *poto-potos*<sup>2</sup>  
You carry within you  
Lakes with the names of Princesses and Queens  
Your body exudes the sweet smell  
Of the fish smoked by your sweat  
Woman smoker,  
I'll write your name in red-letters, make you a knot  
of joy.

Woman,  
How many mouths have you fed  
With the milk from your breasts  
And with the beads of sweat from your brow?  
What joy for the town  
and village folk of this beautiful country.  
What joy for the fishermen  
And for the consumers!

Listen,  
*Piroguier*<sup>3</sup> hoping for a better tomorrow,  
Do you know how fond this great people are  
Of the *konkoé*<sup>4</sup> from the improved *banda*<sup>5</sup>?  
Pray for the woman smoker

Who labours on the jetties  
Watching the horizon  
in search of the fishermen's arrival  
Listen to the *flouf flouf* of the pelagics  
Joy is dawning  
On the ocean of hope.

Listen  
Listen, *piroguier*  
The smoke reddened grills  
The *banda* engulfed in smoke  
is the precious creation  
Of this woman, the author of our life  
whose body exhales  
All the perfumes of the earth.

<sup>1</sup> Bonga shad (*Ethmalosa*)

<sup>2</sup> Coastal marshes

<sup>3</sup> Canoe-man

<sup>4</sup> Sea catfish (*Arius*)

<sup>5</sup> Oven for smoking fish

## Africa/ Tanzania

### Women are Capable

*Participation of women in the planning stages of fishery projects along the coastal region of Tanzania, has led to the success of these projects*

**This piece, by Catherine Chando, is based on her Master's thesis titled *Gender Roles in Fishery Planning and Projects: A case study of coastal region in Tanzania completed in 2002***

As a civil servant working in the fisheries bureaucracy and as a Master's student in fisheries management, I have often wondered why women's position in fisheries seems to be so important within the household economy and so marginal in fisheries politics. Their contributions to industry output are poorly registered and recognized. Women have been identified as producers, assistants to fishermen, processors—predominantly involved in post-harvest activities—traders, and prominent actors in activities that are not directly related to fisheries but are essential for family and community welfare. However, the focus on the work of men very often overshadows the economic role of women in fishing communities. This leads to a relative neglect of their needs and interests. Fisheries policies and programmes have, as a consequence, focused mainly on the needs and interests of men, ignoring the fact that women are engaged in fisheries.

Interested as I am in gender aspects of fisheries, I wanted to take a closer look at women's participation in project planning. I consider such participation as an important aspect of women's empowerment. Participation in the planning process gives women an opportunity to influence aims and strategies and to discuss different alternatives given their situation.

This article focuses on the roles played by women in the planning of fisheries projects in the coastal region of Tanzania, more specifically in the districts of Bagamoyo and Mafia.

I visited some fisheries projects in the Bagamoyo area and in Mafia Island. In the Bagamoyo projects, both women and men were not involved in the planning process; the projects were initiated and planned from outside—by the staff of the fisheries department, the community development officer, or by a seaweed farming company—so I will leave out this example.

The project in Mafia Island Marine Park (MIMP) represents, in many ways, a contrast to many projects I know. At Mafia women are now engaged in seaweed farming, factory work and shell collection. In this way they have shown that it is possible to find alternatives to the dynamite fishing that male fishers had been engaged in, almost ruining fish stocks in the process. The government and communities have worked together to counter the practice of dynamiting and to safeguard biodiversity.

The big difference here was women's involvement in the planning process. From the very beginning the ideology and the structure of the project included women. They were included at the national level when planning for the Park was initiated. When the plans for the Park were elaborated, they were members of the staff and were represented in committees and boards. In addition, there were also positions in the village that favoured women, for example, development officers and gender officer. Women were also called upon as community members to participate in the planning meetings initiated in each village.

Involvement in planning does not mean that all women participate. But it gives them a chance to come up with their priorities and strategies at an early stage. If they want to, they can use this opportunity in their favour. This means that women's inclusion from the very beginning of a project is of great importance.

The example from Mafia shows that, through a project, women in fishing communities can play an important role in sustainable management of resources. The projects at Mafia managed to mobilize women; they were leaders of the groups and they were active participants. The success in stopping the practice of dynamiting could also be due to women's involvement in meetings planning for the establishment of the park—one could say that discussion /planning started at the household level. This was a positive outcome in the villages of Jibondo and Juani in Mafia.

A closer observation of women's participation shows that women were more active and easier to mobilize in the projects compared to the men, and that a majority of the groups comprised women.



I also observed that:

- Women were participating in income generating activities outside fisheries and were contributing to their family incomes from the profits coming out of their group activities.
- Women, and some men, acquired and developed skills, particularly in conservation, by practicing seaweed farming.
- Women from villages in the two districts studied, exerted some influence on women's groups in neighbouring villages directly benefited by these projects.
- The women, having gained a better socio-economic status, found it easier to share their own experiences and learnings with the rest of the women and men. They thus motivated others, particularly men, to participate in group activities.

#### ***Lesson learned and recommendations***

When women participated from day one in formulating the aims of the project—including, for example, increasing women's incomes, enabling them to make a better living, especially for their households—they managed to create a female orientation already in the planning phase. This female orientation seems to have impacted on the implementation and the activities carried out under the project, which in some cases also resulted in social change.

My findings also showed that there were an interrelation between participation in the planning process and level of education. At Mafia many women had comparatively higher levels of education.

The Mafia projects gave women experience in project planning, decision-making and in collaborating with external partners. In this way they have obtained knowledge and skills that might not only give them better economic living conditions, but also enable them to take care of their fisheries resources in a better way. They have also developed skills that can enable them to initiate new projects and take control over their own lives.

The fact that women are able to plan their own projects, therefore, seems to be an important factor that empowers women. The best results were seen in Mafia where women were brought into planning positions. Women held job positions aimed at assisting women to progress. The organizational structure of the Mafia Island Marine Park (MIMP), for example, created

chances for women to be present at all phases of planning and implementation. The position of the gender officer at the park created a greater awareness, and men in the island were able to accept the mobility of their wives beyond their households, in a context where, given the prevailing Arabic culture, women tend to be confined to the household.

My experience from Mafia area is that if women are more involved in planning and leadership, problems of both women and men of many fishing communities can be solved.

*Catherine can be contacted at [catherinechando@hotmail.com](mailto:catherinechando@hotmail.com)*

## Africa/ South Africa

### On the brink

*Traditional fishing communities in South Africa are struggling to find a secure future in the sector*

**By Jackie Sunde of the Masifundise Development Organization, South Africa**

Coastal communities in South Africa have a very long history of harvesting marine resources such as fish, shellfish and rock lobster or *kreef* for their livelihoods. It is estimated that 30,000 subsistence or artisanal fishing people depend on these resources to survive and another 30,000 are employed seasonally in the fishing industry. South Africa exports a large quantity of fish (about 40 per cent) to countries in the North and this makes fishing a highly profitable industry from a commercial perspective.

In most communities men have traditionally been the ones to go to sea whilst women have played significant roles in shore-based activities: making and repairing nets, preparing bait and processing and selling fish. Along some areas of the coast, women collect mussels and other shellfish off the rocks. Women are the primary seasonal workers in the fish processing factories along the Cape West Coast. Of late, they are also playing an increasing role in the administration and representation of fishing associations on the West Coast, where women chair at least three associations. Here they play critical roles in assisting fisher people apply for permits and quotas and in lobbying the Department of Marine and Coastal Management (MCM), the government department responsible for fisheries management.

The fishing industry has been shaped considerably by the discriminatory legislation and practices during the white-dominated apartheid regime. Black people were excluded from getting quotas in their own right and had to work for white fishermen or companies. White-owned fishing companies flourished. Gradually the larger companies acquired smaller companies and extended their control. A handful of powerful white-owned companies came to dominate the industry. The influx control laws, job reservation, and Group Areas Act further excluded Black communities from getting full access to the sea and its resources.

After the election of South Africa's first democratic government in 1994, efforts to transform the fishing

industry by introducing policies ensuring equitable access to marine resources, were initiated. This was in the face of considerable pressure from large companies fearful of losing control over the industry.

The Individual Transferable Quotas (ITQ) system was introduced. Although quotas were not new, this scheme was to enable people from previously disadvantaged communities to apply for quotas to fish. Other policies included giving incentives to companies that could show that they were transforming their employment practices to provide more opportunities for Black and women workers. The new system intended to allocate quotas to companies of different sizes and, in this way, to enable a certain amount of smaller 'new entrants' to establish companies.

However, despite these policies, some communities and people who have fished all their lives, have been left without equitable access to fisheries resources. There appear to be several reasons for this:

*Corruption:* The fishing industry has a history of corruption, with influential people using their connections to ensure that their friends and families benefited from quota allocations. Allocations were also made for political purposes. Allocations were made to certain Coloured communities and leaders but not others. Later, in 2000, the government tried to introduce systems to ensure a more equitable distribution. However, a lot of mistrust remains, especially since many people who have never fished before have received quotas, whilst the access of many real, *bona fide* fishing people who have fished for years and depended on fishing for survival, has declined.

*High costs:* A big problem for fishing communities is the cost and complex procedures involved in applying for a quota. The criteria used to decide quota allocations are also seen as problematic.

*Paper quotas:* A further problem is that of 'paper quotas'. Because of the high value of quotas, many new entrants who were allocated quotas sold them to other fishing companies. This has enabled these fishing companies, even overseas-owned companies, to increase their power and control over the industry.

*Failure to prioritize bona fide fisher people:* The government has decided that, in the case of certain

high-value species of fish and shellfish, quotas for these species will be allocated only to larger enterprises operating as businesses and not to small, subsistence fishing groups, thereby depriving the latter of access to these resources.



*Impact of global trade:* Pressures from South Africa's trading partners in the North, such as from the countries of the European Union, coupled with the government's current export-oriented economic policy, have affected decisions about quota allocations, ostensibly in order to promote investment in the industry. These policies are being implemented at the expense of the income and food security of local fishing communities.

Local fishing communities are thus facing social and economic crises as a result of the restricted access to fishing resources. Many fisher people who used to be active now sit at home. In other cases, the limited quota allocations mean that households have a greatly reduced seasonal income. In certain cases people turn to poaching (catching fish without a license/ quota) as a means of short-term survival. They are attracted by the large sums of money that are paid for protected species. In some instances, local people poach in return for payment in drugs. Powerful drug cartels use the lucrative trade in valuable marine resources as a way of obtaining finance.

In communities where poaching is rife, problems, such as drugs and gangsterism, are on the increase. Linked to the high levels of poverty, gangsterism and drug abuse, is an increase in rape, sexual abuse and trafficking in women and children.

For communities that do not poach, the economic future is precarious. Given the seasonal nature of incomes, households find it difficult to pay their house rents and there is increasing food insecurity and poverty. Fishing communities are relatively excluded from economic development in their regions and have expressed their frustration at the lack of information on alternative economic initiatives, for example, on how to access the tourism market.

**Africa/ South Africa****Why Deny Us the Right to Live?**

*Demands of South African fishing communities at the Fisher People's Forum organized from 24 to 27 August 2002, as part of the Civil Society Forum prior to the World Summit on Social Development (WSSD)*

---

- Access and rights to the sea and marine resources through transformation of national fisheries policy;
- Preferential rights for *bona fide* fisher people;
- Challenging unfair global trade and finance policies that affect fisheries;
- Provision of fishworker's rights through the extension of the Basic Conditions of Employment Act and other labour protection and benefits, including safety regulations to cover subsistence and small-scale fishers;
- Access to means of sustaining families and livelihoods in the off-season;
- Provision of subsidies to subsistence, artisanal, small-scale and limited commercial fishers, given that currently it is the big companies that get petrol subsidies and tax breaks but not small-scale fishers;
- Provision of infrastructure such as jetties and slipways, adequate roads and access to finance for equipment, cold storage facilities and markets;
- Participation in the management of marine resources;
- Organization of fisher people so that they can be adequately represented to ensure that their issues are addressed;
- Democratization of the fishing industry;
- Visibility of women in the fishing industry.

**Africa/ South Africa****“If you strike a woman, you strike a rock”**

*Several women leaders are emerging within the social movement of fisher people in South Africa*

**Based on interviews by Jackie Sunde of the Masifundise Development Organization, South Africa**

There is an old saying in South Africa that comes from the liberation struggle, “Wathint’ Abafazi! Wa thint Imbokotho!” that is, “if you strike a woman, you strike a rock”. Now, eight years after the election of the first democratic government in South Africa, and despite having one of the most progressive constitutions in the world, the strength and courage of black women living in fishing and coastal villages in this country is again being tested.

Notwithstanding their recently gained rights, very few women living in these areas have access to the sea; they have no representation within the national fisheries management programme and only a minority have gained quotas through the notoriously corrupt Individual Transferable Quota (ITQ) system. It is in this context that several women leaders have emerged within the social movement of fisher people, including Solene Smith and Naomi Cloete.

Solene lives in Langebaan, a small coastal village on the West Coast of South Africa. She was born in the nearby district of Hopefield on a farm where her parents worked. On leaving school, Solene went to work at the Langebaanweg Airport Base as a cleaner. For the first twelve years of her working life, Solene worked from five in the morning until seven at night. She was forced to wake up every day at 3 am in order to walk to work and get there on time at 5 am.

Solene worked extremely hard. When asked how she managed, she says, “I just had to be strong...you just had to do what you were told...” Her love for people enabled her to develop good relationships with her colleagues and she soon developed a reputation for being able to identify their strengths and assist her employer in making recommendations regarding their training needs and job descriptions. After twelve years, her hard work and leadership potential were recognized,

and she was promoted to the position of supervisor. When she was 21 Solene married Edward Smith, a fisherman from Langebaan and came to live in Langebaan. Edward’s father was also a fisherman and the family had a long history of fishing, as well as of tragedy, at sea. Edward had lost a brother, a brother-in-law, and a nephew in an accident at sea and two other brothers in another accident. Solene has three children of her own, two foster children, and three grandchildren.

In 2000 Solene decided to resign. She says that over the years, especially after the democratic elections in 1994, she had become aware of her rights and she realized that she was being treated badly at work. She took a retrenchment package and turned her attention to her community. She feels that she has always been a community-oriented person. She assisted the local fisher community with their applications for subsistence permits and she began to help them to form the Langebaan Visser’s Assosiasie and to apply for limited commercial permits.

In October 2000 she was elected as the Treasurer for the Association, a position that she still holds. The South African fishing policy marginalizes small-scale fishers, allocating them extremely small, unsustainable quotas. The 35 members of the Association were only awarded 7 permits for 420 kg of West Coast Rock Lobster. This has subsequently been increased to 500 kg. This provides an income that is considerably lower than the poverty level.

Despite living on a resource-rich coastline, the Langebaan fishers are unable to access these resources. They have no jetty or slipway and are restricted to a tiny area within the lagoon due to the control that the South African Navy and the Nature Conservation authorities have over the lagoon. The still predominantly white, wealthy tourist industry is given priority over the local fishers. In fact, many of the local fishers were removed from their homes along the beach during the apartheid era and allocated smaller houses some distance from the beach. Strict laws control the cleaning of fish on the beach and hamper their access to the sea. The plots along the beach have been developed by wealthy holiday-makers, many of whom do not stay in these houses for a substantial portion of the year.

Solene has become a leading activist in the struggle for the rights of *bona fide* fisher people in South Africa. She has played a particularly important role in asserting women's rights and the need for gender equality in the industry. Through her lobbying the Association has agreed that there should be one woman involved in each permit and there are now five women within the permit groups. She says that although in the beginning men might not have agreed, now they see this as important. What has also helped is that they know that this is one of the criteria used by the government when awarding quotas and hence they are eager to support this provision. In the long term, they would like to get a much bigger quota and have more women involved.

Solene says women play a very important role in the fishing industry. However, very few women have the safety training that will enable them to go to sea—only one woman wants to go to sea at this stage. The others, however, play a critical role. They are involved in preparing and repairing the nets—a skill they have learnt over the years—and in baiting operations. Solene herself gets up to help the men in her family prepare for sea. Often this is at 1 am in the morning. She worries about the crew. She says it worries her, for example, if someone goes to sea drunk as “you can lose lives if someone goes to sea drunk”.

Substance abuse is a real problem in her community. Several of the permit holders are on drugs. Solene is trying to get a social work community programme going that will try to highlight the dangers and support drug users in giving up their dependence. She notes that it is against the law to go to sea under the influence of drugs or alcohol. Why are drugs and alcohol such a problem? Solene believes that this can be traced directly to the new fishing policy. In the old days the youth could go to sea and earn a living. Now most of them are unemployed, they sit in poverty. “They will do anything to feel happy... there are no grants to assist them outside of the fishing season and the money they get from their current quota is very little...”

Solene believes in women's contribution. She says, “I would like us women to know that we are not less worthy, we don't have to keep quiet. We can uplift ourselves...I want to encourage women to get what we want, to organize and mobilize to help ourselves. We are strong enough in all respects: business, politics, everything...the things we need are there.”

With regard to the World Summit on Sustainable Development, Solene says that what she would really like to see is the fisher communities forming a steering committee—involving all areas from all countries and linked together at the world level. She says it should not just come from the local level. “If we can get this in place, a structure that can talk for everyone, my dream is that in ten years time fisher people themselves will be in Marine and Coastal Management (MCM). This dream is within our reach, it is possible if we stand together. We can achieve this, if we stand and work together.”



Like Solene, Naomi Cloete lives in a small historical fishing village on the coast. Naomi was born in Paternoster where her family has been involved in the fishing industry for generations. Her family lived on a farm adjacent to the beach, in small cottages built by her grandfather. During the apartheid era this farm was registered in the name of a white farmer and Naomi's family lost control of the farm. They were forced to move from the farm and those members of the family who refused to move were finally evicted from the farm in 1999.

In accordance with the constitutional provisions of the country, Naomi's relatives lodged land claims through the Land Restitution process but to date their claim has not been settled. On the contrary, their claim has been ‘mislaidd’ by the department. They have faced a great deal of harassment from the white farmer who has subsequently sub-divided the farm and sold off the land to developers for tourist accommodation.

Naomi is the Chairperson of the local Paternoster Visser's Association. The association comprises 69 local fishers who have a small, unsustainable quota that they have been allocated for four years. The management and administration of this quota is very challenging and causes a great deal of conflict amongst the members. Naomi has had to learn many skills and plays a central role, not just in the on-going administration of the organization, but also in the emotional and psychological support and maintenance of the crew. She describes days when she has scanned the stormy horizons, fearing that one of her crew members was lost at sea.

The local small-scale fishers have no breakwater or slipway, few of them have had training in safety at sea, and their boats are small wooden *bakkis*'. Naomi, and nine other women from the area, have applied for quotas on four occasions, spending a great deal of money on each application but to no avail. These women do not know why they have not succeeded in obtaining access to the sea. They are determined to fight for their access to marine resources. Naomi recalls the hope that the *bona fide* fishers had after the general election in 1994, their belief that they would now be able to access the sea in their own right. Although dismayed that the new government has not awarded them priority rights as historical fishers, these women are determined to fight for this right and to tackle the unequal transformation of the fishing industry in this country.

*Jackie Sunde can be contacted at [jackie@tcoe.org.za](mailto:jackie@tcoe.org.za)*

## Africa/ Tanzania

### What next?

*Women are constantly struggling to retain a role in the export-oriented fisheries of Lake Victoria*

**By Modesta Medard, Researcher at the Tanzania Fisheries Research Institute, Mwanza, Tanzania. This article is based on her M Phil dissertation.**

Fisheries globalization is transforming the structure of markets and, with this, gender relationships. Social, political and economic processes now operate locally *and* globally. Changes in Lake Victoria's fisheries and fishing communities, from primary reliance on local markets, equipment and sources of capital, to reliance on export markets, external equipment suppliers and external sources of funding have affected, and have been mediated by, gender relations.

Lake Victoria, the second largest fresh water lake in the world, is shared between three countries—Tanzania, Uganda and Kenya. The lake accounts for an estimated 60 per cent of Tanzanian inland fish production. Fish and fisheries products from Lake Victoria are a significant source of food for Tanzania. They also contribute to the country's foreign exchange coffers. These fisheries provide income and employment to over 32,000 full-time fishers while an estimated 500,000 people are employed, formally and informally, in fisheries-related activities.

In the Kagera Region in northwest of Tanzania, historically fish was primarily consumed fresh, except for some sales to distant markets of sun-dried or smoked fish. The sexual division of labour varied from place to place, depending on the ethnic origin of the group. Women in the eastern portion of Lake Victoria were more likely to participate in fish trading, than those in the central and western portions. Local culture generally prohibited women from being away from their homes, limiting their ability to trade fish. The dominant means of transport were travel on foot and by bicycle tending to limit fish traders to local markets.

Since the 1980s, the Nile perch fishery has attracted tremendous investment. It has become one of the most important economic activities in the area. Industrial fish processing factories and fishing camps generate revenue for communities in the regions surrounding Lake Victoria. Recent research on the Tanzanian sector of Lake Victoria indicates some of the problems that small-scale fish traders and processors have faced in attempting to benefit from the export-oriented Nile perch fishery that developed in the 1980s.

Irrespective of gender, the two dominant problems they confront are those of transport and the availability of adequate funds. However, both quantitative and qualitative data indicate that most fish suppliers in the Nile perch fishing industry are men. In the year 2000, male suppliers made up 84 per cent of those providing raw material to the processing sector, compared to 16 per cent women suppliers.

In addition, men largely control the new technologies associated with the Nile perch fishery. Fish factory owners attribute the dominance of male fish suppliers over females to men having access to more of the capital needed to buy collector boats, provide seed money and hire labourers. Other factors they point to include the fact that men are better able to travel frequently, have better access to business collateral, and are reported to be more aggressive than women in persuading owners to grant them loans and in asking for advances for fish procurement payments.

There are important differences between men and women in terms of the way they engage in the Tanzanian Lake Victoria fish trade. Women, more than men, combine fish trade with other types of work. A majority of women (57 per cent) participate only in fish trading, but 43 per cent combine fish trading with other business activities. In contrast, on the Tanzanian side, 74 per cent of men participate only in fish trading while 24 per cent combine fish trading and other business. The high percentage of women who combine fish trading with other business as compared to their male counterparts may indicate women's greater vulnerability and greater income insecurity within fisheries-related activities.



In contrast to the fish supply sector, women made up a majority of those purchasing and processing the waste from the fish plants in the first three years of factory development in Tanzania. Nile perch fish frames (skeletons), locally known as *punk*, were considered waste and factories had to pay to dispose of them. To eliminate this cost, factories began selling them to local processors. Women were the first group to look for Nile perch by-products in factory doorways. This business started in 1993, one year after fish processing firms invested in Tanzania. A study carried out in *punk* processing camps indicated that 70 per cent of *punk* dealers were women.

In six operational Nile perch processing industries on the Tanzanian side of the lake, about 67 per cent of those buying and utilizing by-products from the fish processing industries were women. The women collected fish frames in troughs, baskets, hand drawn carts, and wheelbarrows and took them to the processing camps.

By 1997, 4 to 7 tons of fresh fish frames cost Tshs. 60,000-90,000.0 (US \$75-112.50) wholesale. After processing (smoking and sun drying), the processed *punk* could be sold for Tshs. 100,000-120,000.00 (US \$125-150). Single and married women used the revenue from this activity to build houses, feed their families, buy clothing, pay school fees and for medical care.

Over time, however, the Nile perch processing factories improved their filleting process so that no meat content was left on the frames. This meant the *punk* community could not get enough fish frames for human consumption. In response, some women started to grind *punkies* in locally made mortars and feed them to their chickens.

Additional, more recent changes in this sector have further eroded the capacity of these women to generate livelihoods from fish frames. In 1996/97 processed *punk* for animal feed was commercialized resulting in new investments in local fishmeal factories. The major markets for processed fish frames were Shinyanga, Tabora, Dodoma, Morogoro, Singida, Mwanza, Mara and in some parts of Kagera region. The main markets for fishmeal products were Dar Es Salaam, Arusha, Mwanza, Morogoro, Dodoma and neighbouring countries such as Zambia and Kenya.

In 1998, higher standards for hygiene in fish processing required by European Union export requirements encouraged Nile perch factory owners to seek wholesale buyers for their by-products. This helped ensure the factory doorways would be quickly cleared and reduced the risk of both human and by-product waste congestion. However, when the factory owners started selling their fish frames to wholesalers, many women were forced out of the trade. Most could not compete with the men buying these products for animal feed as well as human consumption. The multiple demand led to high procurement costs which women could not manage.

The strong export orientation of the Nile perch industry and limited opportunities for women to derive employment and incomes from the sector have encouraged some to focus on purchasing juvenile Nile perch harvested in illegal gear. The minimum size for legally harvested Nile perch is half a kilogram. Purchasing this fish requires access to sufficient capital to compete with the factory agents, the main buyers of this fish type. These factory agents are not allowed to purchase juvenile Nile perch of less than half a kilogram.

Because legally harvested fish has become more expensive for the small traders who serve the local markets, because small fish is cheaper, and because falling incomes among local consumers limit the price they can pay for fish, the women traders have resorted to buying fish harvested in illegal, small-mesh gear to sell to industrial fish collectors.

However, marketing this fish provides a precarious source of income for small traders. Fish less than half a kilogram caught in beach seines and undersized gillnets may be sold to industrial agents because they can offer higher prices.

Some women fish traders have resorted to staying in the beach seine fishing camps at night so that they can get priority access to the available catch. Others have dropped out of the fish trade and moved to trading in other goods. If illegal gear is eliminated, the surviving women traders and processors could lose their access to fish.

Globalization has opened up new opportunities for some women but it has also undermined many women's economic independence and increased the challenges

they face in supporting themselves and their families. It has done this by contributing to environmental change, undermining their access to fish for processing and trading, enhancing competition and theft within fishing and trading, and ghettoising women in poorer paid occupations within industrial fish processing as contingent, vulnerable workers.

Modesta can be contacted at [\*modentara@hotmail.com\*](mailto:modentara@hotmail.com) or [\*modesta\\_medard@yahoo.co.uk\*](mailto:modesta_medard@yahoo.co.uk)

## Africa/ Mozambique

### A more central role

*The women in the Bay of Maputo are at the heart of the local fisheries economy. However, despite their vital economic role they have not yet been given their rightful place in local fisheries management.*

**By Rouja Johnstone, Consultant on Gender in Artisanal Fisheries**

The Bay of Maputo is an example of how modern urban life in Mozambique has influenced the local artisanal fisheries communities and has contributed to an increasing recognition of the role women play in the local economy. Due to the proximity of city markets and a growing demand for fish products, fisheries is good business for many local men and women.

The Bay of Maputo has five main fishing centres—at Costa do Sol, Muntanhane, Catembe, Matola and Inhaca Island. In all of these, both men and women are engaged in fishing or fish marketing. The majority of the women collect crustaceans and inter-tidal bivalves, which are destined for the city markets and door-to-door selling as well as for family consumption.

As a result of their successful economic activities and interest in reinvesting their savings into artisanal fisheries, more and more women are now boatowners, forming about 25 per cent of all boatowners. They employ local fishermen and thus create a job market that is dynamic and also perceived to be fair.

Most women who own boats, fish or trade at the beach, are part of a complex chain of intermediaries (*maguevas*) and form an important socioeconomic network that supplies the city with fresh fish. Some of these women have developed partnerships amongst themselves whilst others work on their own but all benefit from the close proximity of the urban market economy.

The economic activities of women fish traders are dependent on the successful harvest by local fishermen as well as their interest in doing business together. In the case of Inhaca Island for example, fishermen claim that they prefer to do business with the local women, as they see them as trustworthy and reliable partners, whose activities ultimately benefit their own local communities.

The existing complementary division of labour and responsibilities is an important element of the life of artisanal fisheries communities. The socioeconomic links that underpin it are informal and often based on traditional or family relationships.

Thus, for this balance to be preserved and prosperity to be sustainable, these factors have to be taken into careful consideration in any development intervention. For example, project interventions that encourage the private sector to wholesale fishery products directly from the fishermen, have had a negative impact on women's economic niche, resulting in loss of livelihood.

Despite their economic contribution, women are not formally organized or represented in fisher associations or co-management committees. They are not yet recognized as important players in the artisanal fisheries sector and are often not consulted in the decision-making process.

Their exclusion from the formal organs of local management is in sharp contrast with their social and economic contribution and it reflects a traditionalist and outdated form of community-based management further supported by the nature of government and other external interventions that overlook the issue of gender.

At the formal level of community organization, women are still poorly represented or invisible, while at the informal day-to-day level, in many of the fishing communities relations between men and women have changed.

Due to their increasing economic power and the need for a joint effort in providing for the family, women need to become more visibly involved in public life, and their dynamic and complex role in fisheries recognized.

This lack of involvement does not always stem from the attitudes of the fishing community but is also a characteristic of outside interventions by NGOs and government institutions. The main objective of these is to promote sustainable development and support the organization, and effective functioning of, local management bodies. However, government interventions in formalizing and strengthening these management bodies largely disregard the gender division of labour and overlook the crucial role women play in fisheries.

In conclusion, based on the observations made regarding the fishing activities and community organization in the Bay of Maputo, there is an urgent need for a gender debate and the elaboration of a gender strategy that could guide sector interventions and which, above all, ensures the promotion of a sustainable and equitable development.

This will benefit the community as a whole and should further strengthen existing socioeconomic realities. Women can no longer be marginalized in the decision-making process and now need to take on a more central role in existing management structures.

*Rouja Johnstone can be contacted at [roujaj@hotmail.com](mailto:roujaj@hotmail.com)*

## Africa/ South Africa

### “Small fry”

*A report of the Fisher People’s Human Rights Hearings in Western Cape, South Africa held in August 2003.*

**By Jackie Sunde, contract researcher for Masifundise Development Organization, South Africa**

Over the past ten years, since the first free and democratic elections were held in South Africa, considerable changes have been made to the policy and legislation governing people’s access to, and use of, marine resources. Prior to this, large, white commercial fishing interests had dominated the fishing industry and marine economy. Living on the edge of this highly capitalized, export-oriented fishing industry, and trying to make a livelihood, were thousands of black and coloured small-scale, traditional fishers, some of whom fished for subsistence, but most of whom fished in order to make a very modest income, in addition to putting fish, their staple food, on the family dining table. Most of the fishers were men; however, women played a central role in the pre- and post- production processes. Some of the fishers worked alone as independent contractors—working on a share basis on other people’s boats. A very limited number owned their own small boats. Many of them traditionally harvested a number of different species in order to supplement their livelihoods throughout the seasons.

Common to all of these was the fact that in 1994, they were ‘small fry’ in a very competitive sea and that prior to this period, there had been no fisheries management system that regulated their fishing activities or promoted their development. However, because of the racially discriminatory laws of the time, they were not allocated fishing quotas for high-value species although some of them were able to obtain permits for line-fishing and beach-nets. Consequently, many of them who did catch the more valuable species such as rock lobster and abalone, were often harassed and prosecuted for fishing illegally.

When Masifundise Development Organization, an independent non-governmental organization (NGO), began working in the coastal towns and villages on the western coast of South Africa in 1999, it was these groups of artisanal and subsistence fishers who came

to the organization’s attention. Despite the introduction by that time of new legislation to promote equity and transformation in the industry, these fishing communities appeared to be experiencing increasing difficulties in accessing fishing rights, resulting in deepening poverty. In the subsequent four years, Masifundise received numerous reports of fisher’s being excluded from the new rights regime. In some cases, they were denied access to the historical rights that they had previously enjoyed and they reported a lack of access to information and justice.



From the anecdotal evidence given to field workers during their weekly visits to these villages, coupled with the presentations made by many fisher people at the Fisher Forum at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002, it appeared that the new fishing rights allocation policy, whilst undoubtedly bringing about a degree of transformation in certain aspects of the industry, was continuing to prioritize the access rights of medium- and large-scale commercial interests at the expense of small-scale fishers, many of whom are traditional, *bona fide* fishers.

In order to document these allegations and to provide an opportunity for fisher people to voice their concerns, Masifundise, together with the South African Artisanal Fisher Association, a voluntary community-based fishing association, decided to host *Fisher People’s Human Rights Hearings* in the Western Cape on 13 and 14 August 2003. The hearings aimed to gather information about the situation facing small-scale,

traditional fishers, to document alleged violations of their human rights, and to use this information to lobby for the rights of these fishers and the introduction of a just and appropriate policy. Central to the objectives was the intention of understanding how the situation had an impact on the social circumstances of these communities.

For support the organization approached the South African Human Rights Commission, a statutory body, as well as the Anglican Church. Both of these institutions, together with several other NGOs, pledged their support for the Hearings. Masifundise fieldworkers embarked on a preparatory process, travelling from village to village, inviting communities to select a spokesperson to come and speak out at the Hearings. The Hearings were held over two days—the first took place in the city of Cape Town, adjacent to a historically significant fishing harbour and the second, 130 km along the south coast, in the heart of the area where a considerable amount of poaching of abalone has taken place. A press conference was held two days prior to the event, which elicited considerable press coverage. In addition to the 22 community speakers, staff transcribed individual stories of fishers throughout the day. Communities were encouraged to send male and female representatives—however, only five of the speakers were women.

Three keynote speakers were invited to provide background information and to ‘set the scene’ for the hearings. These included Andy Johnston, a fishing activist who participated in the policy development process, Nick de Villiers, a lawyer from the Legal Resources Centre, who has undertaken research into the rights protecting subsistence and artisanal fishers and Moenieba Isaacs, a researcher who grew up in a fishing village and has recently completed her doctoral thesis on transformation in the South African fishing industry. The input on the international and national legal instruments that provide protection for small-scale fishers was most important in raising awareness about the number of legislation as well as policies that can be used to defend rights of fishers to access marine resources, to sustainable livelihoods and to food security.

### One sea, many issues

The information presented by men and women fishers from coastal communities confirmed the allegations that the current fishing rights allocation policy has a negative impact on the social, economic, cultural and ecological integrity of the small-scale sector and the communities that depend on it. The following complaints were voiced regarding the new policy and its implementation process:

- Lack of adequate access to information on how to apply for fishing rights and the exorbitant cost of the application for fishing rights
- The exclusion of many *bona fide* fishers in the rights allocation process and the allocation of economically unsustainable quotas
- Lack of clear criteria for promoting equitable transformation in the allocation of quotas to previously disadvantaged persons
- Inappropriateness of the Individual Transferable Quota (ITQ) system as a policy mechanism for accessing rights within the small-scale sector and for the types of fishing undertaken by this constituency
- Failure of the government to consult traditional fishers and to acknowledge the value of indigenous knowledge when making decisions about stocks and allowable catches
- Failure to recognize that traditional methods and gears used by the small-scale sector are, in most instances, more sustainable than those used by large fishing companies
- Overfishing and dumping by big trawlers and government failure to monitor and control this
- Poor labour conditions and the fact that there are no provisions for protecting the small-scale fishing sector in national labour legislation
- Lack of alternative livelihood options for traditional fisher communities, even where setting of Total Allowable Catch (TACs) has limited their access to resources
- Lack of integrated coastal development planning and the marginalization of small, rural and historically disadvantaged coastal communities from many political, economic and social initiatives.

From the stories told, it appears that the impact of the new policy is mediated by numerous factors, including

race, gender, education level, the sectors in which fishers have worked, geographical location and their prior access to resources and information. Rural coastal communities, with more limited resources, experience enormous difficulties in accessing information as well as in resisting the dominance of local elites, who might control the financing, processing and marketing opportunities.

### **The gendered identity of a ‘fisher’**

Whilst many of the problems identified affect both men and women small-scale fishers, irrespective of the exact nature of their engagement in the industry, the particular gender relations operating in most of these communities means that women bear the burden of this impact in very specific ways. The historical gendered division of labour and resultant exclusion of women from many aspects of this industry was most apparent at the Fishing Hearings. Whilst it was recognized that women play a significant role in the organization of communities and in the post-harvest processes, men have dominated this industry, and gendered stereotypes regarding the typical ‘fisherman’ prevailed in the discourse. Although there were men and women speakers, men predominated and tended to talk about ‘fishermen’ and the impact of the policy on women remained largely hidden. Despite this, notable exceptions were heard:

“We must actually speak about the ‘fisherfolk’, because the fisherman goes and catches the fish, but the woman still has to work that fish. She’s got to clean it, and cut it up, or whatever. In my mum’s days, they didn’t wear gumboots. They, they didn’t even have aprons in those days. They didn’t wear gloves or anything. If you could just realize to stand on your feet from two o’clock in the morning right through till eight o’clock, behind the belt, it has an impact on your legs. Our old people... raised the industry, the fishing industry to what it is today. They used to stand in their own clothing and their own shoes tonight and they get home. The shoes have to dry out. I remember my mum had one petticoat. You may laugh but she’s my mum, the one and only. She’s got to wash her dress, her one and only dress, and it’s got to get dry after fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, seventeen hours of standing behind that belt. We’ve got to recognize the women as well” (Mr. Salie Cyster, Stanford).

Women’s reproductive labour was indirectly acknowledged through several references to the fact

that it is often women who have to deal with the consequences of not having sufficient income to feed and clothe their families and to pay for their children’s schooling. In fishing communities the burden of food insecurity is carried largely by the women.

### **The economic impact on women**

Over and over again, speakers from each community emphasized the enormous economic impact that the lack of adequate access to the sea was having on their economic circumstances. “The government slogan is a better life for all, but, at this stage, we are just poorer and poorer” (Speaker, St Helena Bay).

As many of the women work in the fish processing plants, the allocation of rights to particular communities is critical to the promotion of women’s economic survival as well as to maintaining the viability of entire communities. As noted by Ernest from Struisbaai:

“We are creating jobs for people working in the factory. If we don’t catch fish, (the factory owner) can close his factory, because there is no fish. So if we go out to sea the people can start working from half past seven in the morning until the evening”.

The number of people in a local community who benefit from access rights was also highlighted by Joao Simoes from Kalk Bay:

“When we go to sea and get fish, we come to the harbour to sell it. At the harbour the fish gets thrown from the boat onto the quay; then that’s when other people employed come in. You get the people that bid a fish for you, then you get the bidders themselves that buy the fish, then you get the fish cleaners that clean the fish for the people that are buying the fish, and then we get the money ...50 per cent must go to the boat and 50 per cent comes to us...”

The lack of access to the sea, either through the permit system or the quota system has left many communities facing food shortages and a real lack of food security. For many of the subsistence fishers this means no food on the table at night.

The link between poverty and lack of access to other services such as housing and clinic services in many rural coastal villages was emphasized. Several

speakers noted that growth in the tourism industry often had a negative impact on the fishing community. The benefits of the growing tourism industry along the coast are not necessarily being passed on to the small-scale fishers.

“Langebaan, is now a holiday resort. Fisher people are dying a slow death. We used to pull nets in the past, but that was taken away from us. Now, the holidaymaker comes. You don’t even know whether that person has a permit or not, but he is catching so much fish that he is selling the fish to the fish shop so that I go and buy his fish from the shop, whereas I used do it myself” (Norton Dowries).

### The social impact on women

“I’ve been hurt twice in my life time. The first time was in the sixties when District Six was declared a whites-only area, and the second heartache has just arrived now with the fishing industry...” (Stan Dickson, Gansbaai)

For many of these coloured and black fishers who were discriminated against during the apartheid regime in South Africa, the introduction of the new rights allocation system feels like a second dispossession. The social impact has been very extensive and it has hit men, women and children, albeit differently. The social impact is inextricably linked to the economic impact. Facing rent arrears and electricity cut-offs and unable to feed their children, fishermen and women and their families are facing enormous pressures. Given their roles as the primary caregivers in the household, women often carry an additional responsibility in this regard.

“It is a big worry for me that when you walk down the street or you drive down the street, I see many of our people’s homes are dark and it really hurts our hearts. Many people have small children and they have to go and look for candles or a little bit of oil ...so that they can have some form of light” (Daphne Coraizen, Paternoster).

These social pressures have impacted on the psychological health of fishers. One fisher said: “I am a fisherman, but we have been destroyed...everything has been taken from us. We have been sitting at home for four or five weeks...my problems are so big, I cannot take it anymore.” (Ernerst Hammer, Struisbaai).

Another said: “It’s not right...I have had enough...Do they want us to commit suicide? Do they want us to shoot ourselves?” (Stan Dickson, Gansbaai).

The impact on women, of having a male partner at home for a long period of time, suffering from stress, cannot be underestimated. This was most aptly reflected by Minnie Blauw, who comes from a fishing family:

“When a father loses his right to make a living, such a right being given to the rich companies, that man is being legislatively abused, and such abuse filters through to the wife and children. In the end, women and children are being economically abused ...and that is a contradiction in the strong principles of government.”



Fishers reported an increase in conflict amongst their communities, often arising as a result of the tensions over the allocation of quotas. Responsibility for managing the conflict often rests on the shoulders of community leaders and members of the fishing committees, who feel ill equipped to deal with it.



“People are asking, ‘Why is it that those of us who live right by the river or the sea can’t catch fish like we did in the past?’ and the committee has to explain to these people exactly what the situation is and what the government is expecting from the people about how they are managing that resource. People become difficult. They become angry, and they become angry at the committee members. We are just trying to explain the policies and we don’t always have the necessary capacities to explain these policies to the ordinary persons out there.” (Speaker from Papendorp).

In most communities, women are actively involved in the committees. The pressures placed on the leaders raise important questions regarding the viability of a co-management approach, being insisted on by the fisheries authorities, in a context such as this, where the policy itself and the exclusion of many of these communities from adequate access lead to increased conflict at the community level.

Many of the fishers made reference to the fact that the current policy has forced them to become poachers or that they may have to poach in future. This has critical implications for the sustainability of the resources as well as for the social and economic life of a community. As one fisher said:

“Of course, we have to poach. We have to steal crayfish to stay alive. What else are we supposed to do? We’ve got no rights. They’ve been taken away from us but we still have to put bread on the table, and we take part in crime to put food on our table for our families. We are, actually, forced to do that.” (West Coast).

In some communities, the poachers use children as runners and lookouts. The increase in poaching has attracted outside crime syndicates and, in some areas, there is a close link between poaching, gangsterism, drugs and violence.

The Fisher People’s Human Rights Hearings provided an opportunity for men and women fishers from coastal communities to voice their frustrations and to highlight the negative impact of the current fishing policy on their social and economic circumstances. The Hearings have enabled Masifundise to document the specific nature of this impact and this information will now be used for a number of advocacy activities, including launching a legal challenge against the Minister of Environmental Affairs and lobbying the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee responsible for Environmental Affairs.

*Jackie Sunde can be contacted at [suntel@netactive.co.za](mailto:suntel@netactive.co.za)*

## Africa/ Benin

### Room to Manoeuvre

*A recent workshop in Africa explored the coping strategies being adopted by women of fisheries-dependent households*

**By Elizabeth Bennett of IDDRA, UK Ltd and Kofo Olomu, SFLP, Cotonou**

Despite the many studies that have been conducted in African fisheries, much of the work performed by women and the social space they occupy, has remained invisible. This is because most studies concentrate on production (often the primary goal of national fisheries policies), a typically male activity, leaving women out of the picture. Research is also often gender-blind, and researchers simply do not see that women play a role in fishing livelihoods. But perhaps one of the biggest reasons that women remain invisible is that women do not count: data for fisheries rarely distinguishes between male and female activity.

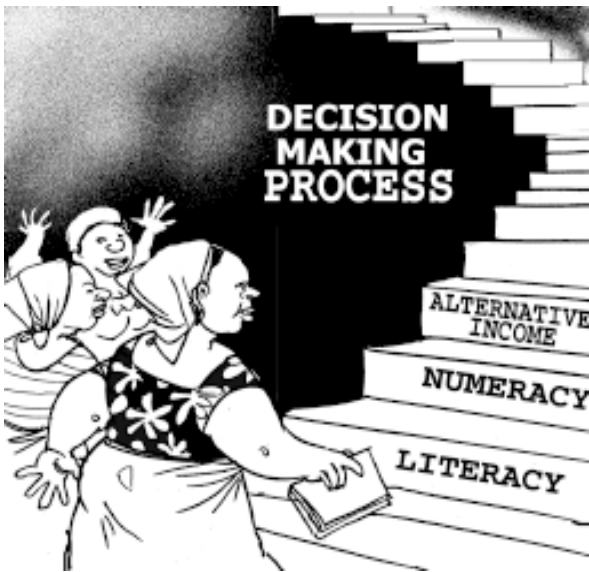
Mindful of these problems, and keen to throw the spotlight on women in fishing communities, a workshop was held in Cotonou, Benin in West Africa in December 2003. The workshop, titled *Room to Manoeuvre: Gender and Coping Strategies in the Fisheries Sector*, was funded by the European Commission and was organized by IDDRA UK and the Sustainable Fisheries Livelihoods Programme (SFLP), based in Cotonou. The workshop brought together 14 participants from Europe (France, Madeira) and Africa (Guinea, the Gambia, Benin, Niger, Nigeria, Sao Tome and Principe, and Tanzania). Participants represented fisheries organizations, universities, research, administration, development, and non-governmental organizations.

The workshop had two objectives: first, to highlight the roles and social space occupied by women in the fisheries sector; and, second, because so little is known about how female roles are changing, to explore how these women formed coping strategies to deal with the changes that are affecting the sector.

There is little denying that fishing is a precarious occupation and success is often dictated by elements beyond the control of the community. But it would appear that the present generation believes it is facing more challenges of greater magnitude than their

forebears. These challenges come not just from smaller catches and increased competition for fish, but from worsening social and economic conditions, increased globalization, environmental problems such as pollution, floods, drought and coastal erosion, and HIV/AIDS that is particularly affecting communities in West Africa. These challenges are not unique to Africa, nor are they unique to fishing. They are problems that surface in all continents and are associated with poverty in many other sectors too.

So how are women in fishing-dependent communities in West Africa coping with these challenges? Through a series of presentations and discussions, the workshop found that they have adopted a wide variety of methods of meeting these new challenges. Women are using traditional ways of generating alternative income through micro-enterprise ventures (beer brewing and small-scale aquaculture, for example) but, more interestingly, they are seeking to improve their knowledge base so that they can run their businesses better. They are taking up the literacy and numeracy skills training being offered by NGOs and, not only are they using these skills to improve their income generation, but to gain improved access to the fisheries management decision-making process. Despite the critical link between the catching sector and the processing sector, women rarely have any input to the management process. Above all, women are seeking ways to strengthen their support institutions: to ensure that their organizations are able to run effectively and help them in times of need. As we might expect, credit schemes are being widely used to ease the burden of dips in income, but it was argued that men are in greater need of access to credit than women.



Although there are clearly several coping strategies in operation, many West African communities come up against structural and financial barriers—like limited access to credit and lack of institutional support for women’s organizations—which prevent these strategies working effectively. To help solve this problem, the workshop concluded that there was an acute need for improved institutions. Organizations are often an important entry point for development initiatives, and the degree of capacity of the organizations will have a likely impact on the success of any development initiatives and their uptake. Institutions are often ignored in development projects, but the workshop showed that, in fact, many benefits could be derived from strengthening this vital set of structures within communities.

Further information on the workshop can be found in the SFLP Bulletin: [www.sflp.org/eng/007/pub1/index.html](http://www.sflp.org/eng/007/pub1/index.html).

*Kofo Olomu can be contacted at [kofo.olomu@sflp-pmedp.firstnet.bj](mailto:kofo.olomu@sflp-pmedp.firstnet.bj), and Elizabeth Bennett at [Bennett@iddra.org](mailto:Bennett@iddra.org)*

**Africa / Uganda****Hopes amidst the nightmare**

*During a recent tour of France, Margaret Nakato, leader of the Katosi Women Fishing and Development Association (KWFDA) in Uganda, met consumers, Breton fishermen and NGOs as well as Herbert Sauper, who wrote and directed Darwin's Nightmare, the vivid and controversial documentary film on the Nile Perch fisheries in Kenya. In this interview, conducted on 18 October 2005, Margaret discusses the film and the importance of networking among the fishworkers' organizations of the South.*

**By Alain le Sann of the *Collectif Pêche et Développement*, and a member of ICSF**

**You have viewed *Darwin's Nightmare* with the members of your co-operative. Would you say it's a true picture of current conditions over there?**

Generally, yes. It shows clearly that the wealth generated by the Nile Perch fisheries has not percolated to the local communities. It remains largely in the hands of Europeans, plant owners and the government. In Uganda, the fishing sector is a major contributor to the gross domestic product—accounting for nearly 20 per cent. In Katosi, we catch Nile Perch too, but there is a difference between Katosi and Mwanza in Kenya: here you will not find abandoned children roaming the streets. The incidence of AIDS among fishermen is double the national average. It seems the anti-HIV campaigns have been less successful here.

**The film shows that women are particularly marginalized in the development of Nile Perch exports. What do you think?**

That's quite true. Before the Nile Perch boom and exports to Europe, women processors would smoke the fish and sell it on the local market and in neighbouring countries like the Congo. That provided food and livelihoods. Today many smoking ovens are idle and more find it difficult to include fish in their



diets. Fishermen prefer to sell to exporters. The spread of the Nile Perch has also reduced the number of species traditionally consumed locally. Women processors have to resort to juvenile species for their trade, and consequently, face penalties from the authorities. That is why we pressed the women to refrain from using undersized fish and turn instead to alternatives activities.

**Some European countries are suggesting a boycott of the Nile Perch. What is your view?**

That's an important demand, which needs thorough debate. Personally, I'm rather guarded about the move. The Nile Perch remains a major resource for the countries that border Lake Victoria. It would be difficult to suddenly do without it. One should instead aim at a more fair trade that would bring decent returns to the fishermen and allow them to have a bigger say in management matters. If, after proper consideration and debate, the fishermen and their communities decide to call for a boycott, why not?! As long as they ponder over all aspects and options... It's for them to decide their course of action.

As for us, we try to make families less dependent on fishing by encouraging the women to venture into new areas such as handicrafts, agriculture and trading. The level of pollution in the lake is already high and its

resources may well decline further. To diversify occupations, we need adequate funding and support. The European Union is providing some help to upgrade the processing plants to EU standards. Why not also help the fishermen and their families to improve their lot?

**Tell us about the actions undertaken by your organization.**

We have established credit schemes to start revenue-generating activities. We currently have a membership of 198 women. We were operating several boats, but because of low returns from fishing, we now have only two. We now promote cattle rearing and vanilla cultivation. We would like to expand aquaculture and we have constructed tanks to distribute clean water, for which people pay a small fee.

**You are the vice-president of the World Forum of Fishworkers. Does that serve you in the field?**

Yes, of course. To organize our people to compete with processors, we have to be informed about fish prices and distribution networks, about WTO and EU regulations. We have to exchange notes with fisherfolk from other countries. We have to be active stakeholders in resource management, and in the programmes set up by the government, for example, the beach management units.

Today the threat of privatization of the resource is looming. Fisherfolk all over the world face such problems. Thanks to our international network, we were able to view *Darwin's Nightmare* and show it to members of our group. There are questions asked about the Nile Perch chain, here in Europe and at home in Africa. It is important that fishworkers around Lake Victoria can react and express their views. They have done that in the video we made after together viewing *Darwin's Nightmare*.

*Alain le Sann can be contacted at  
ad.lesann@wanadoo.fr*

## FROM THE PACIFIC

### What's 'fishing'?

**The way fishing is defined in the Pacific islands often omits women's role**

**by Lyn Lambeth, Community Fisheries Officer, Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC), New Caledonia**

The SPC Women's Fisheries Development Project, now the Community Fisheries Project, was set up in 1991 at the request of Pacific Community member governments, to provide assistance and support to women in the fisheries sector. It was recognized that the needs of women had often been overlooked in development projects undertaken in this region. Pacific island women have traditionally been involved in fisheries activities, in the collection and processing of seafood for family consumption and small-scale income generation, but little has been done to document their activities and identify their potential for development or to understand the problems of overharvesting.

This lack is not necessarily the result of 'men's development' as opposed to 'women's development'. It is more a result of the nature of the fishing areas and the type of development involved—traditionally in the Pacific islands, men have fished with boats offshore, while women have concentrated their activities on the inshore areas, collecting or gleaning a number of species from the reef and inshore areas. Pacific island States have been keen to encourage the development of offshore fishing activities, to generate income and to reduce the pressure on inshore marine resources, and have naturally targeted the people most involved in this type of fishing—men.

The lack of recognition and support of women's roles in fisheries has been further highlighted by confusion over the meaning of the term 'fisheries'. Many local languages in the Pacific islands have different words for different types of fishing. The idea that fishing predominantly involves men going fishing in boats (therefore overlooking a huge range of inshore marine resource use) is common throughout the world, but is especially strong in the Pacific where different words may exist for the various types of fishing. For example, there may be numerous words for the different types of 'men's fishing', such as trolling or bottom-fishing and separate words for 'women's fishing', such

as collecting clams or sea cucumbers, etc. The English term 'fisheries' is often translated and understood as meaning 'men's fishing'. This affects the way the fisheries sector is supported, and the manner in which the management and conservation of marine resources is approached.

The work of the Community Fisheries Section includes research and assessment of those involved in subsistence and artisanal fisheries. Based on this, further development support is provided. This support may be given by means of national and regional training activities as well as the provision of resource materials such as manuals, bulletins and videos.

Recommendations that have resulted from the national assessments include improving information services for small-scale fishermen and women, increasing the involvement of women in the work of the government fisheries agency, improving training for small-scale fishermen and women, and increasing education and public awareness of the importance of fishing communities to the overall health and well-being of the country.

The SPC Community Fisheries Section also produces, in collaboration with the SPC Information Section, a twice-yearly bulletin, 'Women in Fisheries'. This includes news of interest concerning fishing communities around the region. This bulletin, along with other SPC bulletins is now available on-line (<http://www.spc.org.nc/coastfish/>).

## Pacific Islands

### A sea of options

*Sea plants offer a promising option for women in coastal communities to develop small businesses*

**By Irene Novaczek, a Canadian marine biologist and community development facilitator who has been working in the South Pacific since 1999.**

Marine plants have been used as medicine, especially in Asian countries, for centuries. The high degree to which sea plants are used as food by Japanese people is believed to contribute to the relatively low incidence of heart disease and some cancers in that country. In 1999, while travelling around the Pacific Islands, I noted that in that region, sea plants are not used as medicine by the herbalists who provide many rural health care services. Outside of Fiji, where half a dozen species are eaten and sold in the market, there is also relatively little use of sea plants as food. Although in other parts of the world seaweeds are prized as valuable organic fertilizers for home gardens, this use is also not evident in the Pacific.

As a marine scientist with a doctorate in marine botany, I have become convinced that to ignore the value of marine plants is to miss out on many opportunities for sustainable community development. According to recent scientific findings, many diseases and conditions may be prevented or alleviated through the use of these plants. One can expect different sea plant preparations to be useful for basic home first-aid (constipation, diarrhoea, cuts and burns). There are also published studies that show that sea-plant extracts can be used as preventive medicine for heart disease, cancer, high blood pressure, obesity, diabetes and viral infections, and can strengthen the immune system generally. There is folkloric information on use of sea plant extracts for lung conditions, colds and flu, and sexual dysfunction. Some sea plant extracts have potential for prevention and/or treatment of some viral infections (dengue, HIV, herpes) and parasites (malaria). Others have been clinically proven as effective ingredients in skincare products. Finally, sea plants are a source of vitamins and minerals, especially micronutrients.

Marine plants would, therefore, appear to be a valuable resource, especially for food on atolls, where agriculture is difficult, and for preventive health care on small

islands, where access to Western medicine is limited. Small businesses based on the careful harvesting and value-added processing of marine plants is a development option that has received scant attention, yet has great potential both for domestic and export markets. There is a vibrant and expanding international market for marine plants as health food and also as ingredients in fine cosmetics and health spa treatments. Although exporting sea plant products may be uneconomic for many small Pacific Island businesses, there are clearly opportunities to provide products and services to tourists, thus “exporting” the products without having to worry about transportation costs and trade restrictions.

In 2001-2003, I worked in the Pacific region developing and delivering training workshops on the use of sea plants for food, agriculture enhancement, medicine and income generation. Village people, NGO staff and government staff were introduced to the various uses of sea plants in the course of two workshops in 2001. In 2002, three booklets were published. *Sea Plants* is an overview of how to find, harvest and use marine plants. *A Guide to the Common Edible and Medicinal Sea Plants of the Pacific Islands* provides pictures, descriptions and other information on 34 genera of tropical seaweeds. *Sea Vegetable Recipes for the Pacific Islands* includes recipes for a wide array of sweet and savoury dishes that can be used for family food or market products.

Next, a workshop was developed with the explicit aim of providing information, skills and support to selected women who might develop small businesses. Seven trainees flew in from PNG, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Samoa and Kiribati to work with several Fijian trainees and me at USP. Most of the trainees were traditional healers. One was a seaweed farmer and one already had a small business in herbal cosmetics. The response of these women to information on sea plants was strong and positive.

Alice Athy in Vanuatu now has a vibrant business, with natural therapy clinics in Port Vila and Santo, employing more than 10 people. Liviana Madanavatu now has a successful small business in Suva, Fiji, selling sea-plant based cosmetics, tonics and other preparations. Minnie

Bate in PNG has developed a sea-plant product line to add to her existing herbal business. Some of my trainees are still in the early stages of business development; most require follow-up assistance.

These preliminary efforts have proven that women who have the entrepreneurial spark can be effectively trained to develop or diversify small businesses using underutilized sea plant resources. The start-up capital requirements are minimal and the women report positive satisfaction with being able to produce and sell products that are beneficial to people's health. Because women are the primary fishers in shallow waters where sea plants grow, expansion of these businesses will also benefit women in rural communities who can harvest, clean and dry a range of local sea-plant resources and gain income by supplying herbalists and other female entrepreneurs.



I have found that workshops targeting women in villages, fisheries officers and NGO staff have borne fewer tangible results in terms of stimulating local economic development or improved healthcare. NGO and government field workers will not pass on information unless they have a budgeted programme that allows them to develop training programmes. Also, most people do not have the energy and ambition required to be an entrepreneur, or the gift to be a healer. However, with follow-up assistance from NGO's and government extension officers, coastal villagers could benefit from diversification of their food sources, home remedies for simple ailments, and from the use of sea plants to improve the yields from gardens.

Communities engaged in seaweed cultivation for export should also look at their options for capitalizing on this resource through local processing and use, for example, the manufacture of cosmetics, health products and agricultural aids.

*Irene Novaczek can be contacted at [inovaczek@upei.ca](mailto:inovaczek@upei.ca)*



## Europe/Netherlands

### A village built with fish...

*In Urk, the well-known fishing village of the Netherlands, a woman talks of her twenty-six years as a worker in the fish processing industry.*

**By Cornelia Quist, a member of the ICSF and contact person of the Women in Fisheries Network of the Netherlands.**

Our village is built with fish. We are a fishing community in heart and soul. With the largest fishing fleet of the Netherlands and also the biggest auction, we naturally also have an extensive fish-processing sector. In our village we only process fresh fish for consumption.

Most of the fish processing plants are small-scale. The very small ones have around 15 workers, while the others have 30 to 40 workers. The few large enterprises have around 250 workers. During the 26 years that I work now in the fish-processing sector, I have mostly worked in the small-scale plants. But presently I work in a large fish processing plant, which has much better working conditions.

The small-scale fish processing sector mainly does the primary level of processing, meaning they clean, strip and debone the fish. The large-scale enterprises, which are the chief buyers of the fish from the small-scale sector, process the fish further as high quality frozen fish in consumer packaging for supermarket chains. They have the capital and infrastructure to buy fresh fish from other domestic and international auctions. The small-scale enterprises are very dependent on the large-scale sector for both the supply and demand of fish and this is the main reason of the vulnerability of the small-scale sector of our village.

Working in the fish processing plants has a low status in the rest of the society, but not in Urk. Practically all the women of our village have worked for at least a couple of years in fish processing. Women here generally have no aspirations for higher education. As soon as they are 15 or 16 years, women begin to work in the fish processing plants as stand-by workers. Their first motivation is to save money for their wedding and to furnish their house. The piece-rate system and the possibility of long working days, give young women, who still have the physical strength for this, an opportunity to earn a lot of money in a short period of time.

They can only hold on to this stressful working life for three or four years. After that they get all kind of physical complaints. But the young women also do not work any longer than this, as they marry here at a young age and have kids soon thereafter.

Married women also work as stand-by workers, but generally only for a few hours per day. These women primarily work to buy extra things for the household or for some 'pocket money' as they call it. As we all know each other in this village, the fish processing enterprise just calls a few women when there is a good fish supply and a need for labour, and these women, in a short while, recruit other women.

There are not many women like me, who see their work in the processing industry as a real job and as a major livelihood activity. This is understandable because the working conditions are very hard. When I worked in the small plants, it happened quite often that we were sent home, because there was no fish supply. And in particular I, being unmarried, suffered from this more, because it was always the unmarried women who were sent home first. We also were only given temporary contracts and we had no regular wages.

I know that this situation still has not changed. I also have not seen a real wage increase in the last 15 years. The work is physically very demanding, monotonous and stressful. The absence through sickness is high. There are no chances for any promotion.

No, this is not the same for the men workers. There are also men, who do the same type of work as the women, but we can see that men are more often regular workers with a permanent labour contract. This is because men are considered as the breadwinners. Because they are regular workers, there are better chances for them to get a wage increase, a promotion and to undergo training. All the workers who operate machines are men, all the foremen are men, all the higher positions are occupied by men. This is why we women get no ear from our superiors when we have complaints. These men say that our complaints are 'typical women's moaning'.

In the fish processing plants of Urk, the workers are not, in general, members of the trade union. If you are a member, the chances are high that you will be boycotted in getting employment. But the trade unions are also not really trying to get a foothold in Urk. I once

have tried to get the support of the trade union, when again only unmarried women were sent out of their jobs. But there was no response from the union. The fish processing industry is one of the rare industries in our country with no collective labour agreement.

But in the large processing plants, the working conditions have improved. In the company where I work at present, we have a worker's council since 1998, where we can go with our complaints. But as women we still feel many barriers to open our mouth, as there are still only men in the management.

Although the large processing plants have mechanized a great deal of the work, there is still a big need for human labour in the processing of fresh fish. Women are still the major labour source for the menial type of jobs in the sector, certainly here in Urk. But I think that the labour supply for the fish processing industry may become a problem in Urk in the near future. Although our community still has conservative ideas about women, we can also see here that more and more women today have aspirations to obtain better education and better jobs. Besides that, there is more competition from other industries in our region, which offer better working conditions and better wages.

The people of Urk are known for being hard workers and therefore very much in demand. I have heard that in other places there are more migrant workers now entering the fish-processing sector, because Dutch workers are not willing to do these types of jobs. I don't know if this will happen in Urk, because we are still a very closed community.

If the fish processing industry wants to keep its local labour force, it will have to adjust the labour conditions and listen to women's needs. We can see this already happening in the large processing plants. But most probably this will be at the cost of the small-scale sector.

*(Cornelie Quist can be contacted at:  
[cornelie.quist@wolmail.nl](mailto:cornelie.quist@wolmail.nl))*

## Europe/ Belgium

### Information is Strength

*Women from fishing communities and women supporters from Spain, France, Holland and Norway met in Brussels from 19 to 22 November 2001 to exchange experiences and to discuss the review process of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP)*

**By Brian O’Riordan, Secretary of ICSF’s Brussels office**

*Without women in fisheries, there will be no fish in the sea.* The strap line of ICSF’s Women in Fisheries (WIF) programme underscores the importance of the role and place of women—as wives, workers, business partners, in decision making, in fishworkers’ organizations, as spokespersons etc. And unless their role and place in fisheries are recognized, and the space for women in fishworker organizations is respected, the prospects for coastal fishing communities and the



In the European context, fishing communities as such are fast disappearing. The introduction to the European Commission’s Green Paper on the future of the Common Fisheries Policy (the Green Paper) paints a dismal picture. “As far as conservation is concerned, many stocks at present are outside safe biological limits... If current trends continue, many stocks will collapse”. It goes on to note that: “The fisheries sector is characterised by economic fragility... this is reflected in poor profitability and steadily declining

*employment. In the future the Community fisheries sector will have to be significantly smaller than it is today, if it is to survive.”*

Alarmingly, in all the 41 pages of the Green Paper, there is only one reference to women. In a short section entitled “Addressing other social issues” (Section 5.7.1., page 35), the Green Paper notes that: “Apart from providing sustainable employment in the fisheries sector and assisting in the conversion of fish workers to other sectors, where necessary, the Community still needs to address other social issues, such as improving the physical safety of fishing vessels and regulating working conditions in the sector including working hours, in order to minimise safety risks.... **The Community is also concerned to ensure that the substantial role played by women in the fisheries sector is recognized and enhanced.** But what is the role played by women in Europe? The European Commission (the Commission) will publish a study report early in 2002 that should throw some more light, and include some proposals on the future role for women in European fisheries. Meanwhile the annex to the Green Paper (Volume II, in the Report on the Economic and Social Situation of the Coastal Regions), notes that: “An estimated 84,000 jobs... were held by women... in 1998. Even in fishing... women hold about 6% of the jobs. Female participation is recorded in harvesting of bivalve molluscs in Spain and Portugal, in an on-shore capacity in fishing enterprises in Belgium and Spain, and in gear repair and preparation in Greece. Women also hold the majority of jobs in fish processing... and also fill an estimated 30% of the 47,000 jobs in aquaculture...”

Despite this recognized importance, women have been noticeably absent from the decision-making processes and in the consultation process on the future of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP). In preparing for the CFP review, the previous Fisheries Commissioner, Emma Bonino, had announced that: “...it is only through an open dialogue involving every group concerned with fisheries in the community - from the industry itself to environmental organizations, consumers, scientists and public authorities - that we can contribute to building the common fisheries policy of tomorrow”. And that: “...it would be wrong for the review of the common fisheries policy in 2002 to be limited to a few aspects of the Community rules in force. Instead... the aim should be to enable

*fishing to remain... an activity that is in keeping with economic requirements and the environment and provide employment and development opportunities for the people and regions that are dependent on it."*

However, the consultation process has made it clear that the European institutions see fisheries primarily as a technical subject, and as an industrial sector. Other considerations (artisanal fisheries, participation, social issues, quality of employment, etc) have been afforded much less importance, ignored, or rejected as irrelevant. Thus, in a special meeting of the Commission's Advisory Committee on Fisheries and Aquaculture (ACFA) on fishery management issues, when the Development NGO spokesperson, Mme Danièle le Sauce, the wife of a fisherman, raised the issue of women's participation, and concerns about employment and future prospects, she was told to keep to the point!

Against this background, ICSF invited women from fishing communities and women supporters from Spain, France, Holland and Norway to come to Brussels, to meet and exchange experiences, to discuss the review process of the CFP and to meet with the EU institutions. The idea of holding such a meeting had been mooted for some time as a way of revitalising networks and relationships between women in fisheries in Europe.

There was also a particular advantage to holding such a meeting at this time: the meeting was organized to coincide with a hearing in the European Parliament on the Review of the Common Fisheries Policy, where the Parliamentary Fisheries Committee would present their response to the Green Paper. There was also to be a meeting of an ACFA Working Group, where the development NGOs had requested an additional agenda item on women in fisheries, ahead of the publication of the Commission report on this subject. Finally, the 'Green Paper Process' on the review of the CFP would be finalised at the end of 2001. There was therefore an opportunity to make a final contribution to the process through the parliamentary hearing and the ACFA meeting.

Women participants were invited in their personal capacity, but also as members of fishing communities, fishworker organizations and as women directly involved in their fisheries sectors. Specifically, the objectives of the 4-day meeting (19 to 22 November) were:

- To have a reflection between women fishworkers and women supporters on the role of women in EU fisheries, and the space and possibilities available/desirable for women fishworkers and women from small-scale fisheries in the new Common Fisheries Policy (post 2002);
- To increase understanding about European decision-making and consultative processes, with particular regard to the review and reformulation of the CFP;
- To make an input to the European Parliament and Commission decision-making processes on future policies concerning women in fisheries.

A particular concern highlighted by the women was the lack of information available at the grass roots on the decision-making processes, particularly in a form that was accessible to them. They also commented that it was often the women who were more literate than the men in fishing communities, and thus women played an important role in reading and explaining official reports, briefings and other information to their husbands and partners. All complained that such information as was available to them on the review of the CFP was not in a very user-friendly form.

The main conclusions of the meeting were that there was a need for more regular exchanges, particularly on how women could get better organized. They also highlighted the need for:

- Greater participation of women from fishing communities in the decision making processes;
- A more focussed discussion on how they could influence policy making in their favour;
- More formal arrangements that would enable women to network and exchange on a more regular and sustainable basis.

*Brian O'Riordan can be contacted at [icsfbrussels@yucom.be](mailto:icsfbrussels@yucom.be)*

## Europe/ Belgium

### Empowering Fishing Communities

*'Issues of Concern for Women in European Fisheries', an intervention at the Fisheries Committee Meeting in the European Parliament on 20 November 2001, made on behalf of women participants from several European countries by Danièle le Sauce, Femmes du Littoral de Bretagne, France.*

At the end of 2002 the European Union (EU) will have a new 'Common Fisheries Policy' (CFP). In the Green Paper on the future of the common fisheries policy that prepares for this reform, the European Commission has noted that: "*the substantial role played by women in the fisheries sector should be recognized and enhanced*". But what does this mean in a context where European fisheries are in crisis and where communities, men and women, are having to face up to ever more serious difficulties in their daily lives?

A few women from fishing communities in several European countries, including France, Spain, Norway, and Holland, invited to Brussels by the ICSF—the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers, yesterday (19 November) had a chance to exchange their points of view. In all cases, the role and place of women is indisputable. They reflected on the space provided and the possibilities existing for them in the CFP. Some of them—the French and the Dutch—have already responded to the Green Paper process by sending their contributions to the European Community.

Today, in this parliamentary hearing, they would like the following issues to be taken up:

1. The role and work of women in communities (preparation of fishing gears, shellfish harvesting, trade, business management, relations with the banks and suppliers etc) should be recognized;
2. Access to professionally recognized training (labour law, trade union law, the environment, management of resources and businesses, languages etc) should be provided;
3. Women should be integrated into official and professional organizations;
4. Exchanges and meeting between women from different countries in Europe should be facilitated;
5. The need for renewing the artisanal fleet to sustain the sector in the longer term should be promoted;
6. The means necessary for assuring optimal on-board safety standards should be allocated;
7. Resources should be managed through promoting scientifically and professionally tested selective fishing gears. Every initiative undertaken in this area should be recognized, and implementing and authorizing their use should be facilitated;
8. A more effective European system for fishing vessel control and surveillance should be established. A programme of harmonization should be launched simultaneously in all countries, leaving no space for different interpretations. Clear and very precise texts should be produced;
9. The fishing way of life should be valorized by investing all the necessary means and by providing part time or full time training;
10. An effective partnership should be established between scientists and fishermen that takes full account of the experiences and initiatives of professionals;
11. All the means necessary should be invested so that never again do we have to suffer pollution from a shipwreck, such as the Erika. Fishermen are more the victims rather than the cause. They suffer as well from land-based pollution: nitrates, industrial and urban pollution—all highly damaging;
12. Fishermen should be involved in environmental projects and their implementation, as the primary guardians and guarantors of the coast.

In conclusion, current fishery management systems and associated practices do not place any importance on the particular problems or interests of women. But the time is now ripe to reconsider the role of coastal communities and the people (men and women) who depend on each other and who mutually support each other to defend their interests. A community-based approach should be adopted that recognizes the importance of each and every actor (man and woman) in order to empower communities in the negotiations with political and economic powers.

The place of women and their modes of organizing are highly diverse country-wise, but recognizing their role will contribute to the establishment of fisheries policies that are less aggressive and more sustainable. The sea should be reserved for artisanal fishing activities (taking into account their rightful place) to enable coastal and maritime populations to live there.

The European women, representing their communities, who have prepared this intervention, would like to express their solidarity with communities in other

countries around the world who also suffer from the impact of government policies that favour the interests of industrial fisheries.

*Contact Daniele at [daniele.le.sauce@wanadoo.fr](mailto:daniele.le.sauce@wanadoo.fr)*

## Europe/ Belgium

### Needed: A sea change

*Intervention of the Spanish delegation, comprising Ms. Carmen Pechero Cacho of Asociación Galega de Mariscadoras (AGAMAR) and Ms. Isabel Otero of Estela do Mar, in the European Parliament, Fisheries Committee Meeting, 20 November 2001*

AGAMAR is an organization representing the *mariscadoras* (women shellfish harvesters) of the Galician region in North Spain. Till last year there were 12,000 members, 90 per cent of whom were women who gathered shellfish on foot. However, nearly 50 per cent left the sector due to changes in the social security system. Contributions have been substantially increased, and most people cannot afford to pay. Whilst the work is full time, there are only 6-9 months of the year where an income is possible. The other months involve such unpaid work as cleaning the shellfish, maintaining the equipment, cleaning the beaches etc. This means that earnings over the year are low, but the work itself constitutes a full time job. Weather conditions in the last 12 months, combined with industrial and urban pollution, have also had a devastating impact on the fishery for shellfish. This also contributed to women leaving the sector.

*Estela do Mar* is an organization of fishermen's wives who work to defend the rights of fishermen to safe and fair working conditions, and to reconcile life at sea with life at home. Literally *Estella do Mar* means "Wake of the Sea", i.e. the trace that the vessel leaves behind it. Whilst the right of Spanish fishermen to work is recognized, their rights to a fair salary and basic standards of safety and working conditions are not. In recent years despite huge investments of EU monies for modernizing the Spanish fishing fleet, with many improvements in fishing capacity, navigational capability and quality of on-board storage, living and working conditions of the crew are as bad as they were 20 years ago.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Good Morning!

To begin with, perhaps we should explain why we, two women, from *Estela do Mar* and from the Galician Association of Women Shellfish Harvesters (AGAMAR), are here. We are sorry to say that our presence has nothing to do with any information sent to us by the Committee to inform us that this meeting was taking place.

We are women directly involved with work at sea, in shellfish harvesting and in defending the rights and quality of the living and working conditions of fishermen. We belong to women's organizations that are concerned with fisheries. But neither of us received any notification at all through the formal channels that, here in Brussels, discussions would be taking place on fisheries and its many associated problems, amongst which are several that concern us in our lives as shellfish harvesters and as wives of fishermen.

Somehow the information flows emanating from the Committee have been hijacked, so that news about issues that affect us, does not reach us. Luckily for us, an NGO, the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF), informed us, and it is thanks to them that we are here.

So the first point that the Committee needs to take on board is that the information it produces does not reach us. Immediate action must, therefore, be taken to remedy this situation as it affects our rights to receive information on issues that directly affect our lives as women from coastal communities.

But we don't want to waste time with complaints, but rather to get on to the issues that we want to communicate to the Committee. We would like to tell you, first of all, about our perceptions and about the afflictions we suffer as women shellfish harvesters.

The situation facing women shellfish harvesters in Galicia, Spain is becoming increasingly critical. In the last year and a half, 6000 women shellfish harvesters have had to give up their work. The withdrawal of the administration, the costs of social security, the pollution of the *rias* (estuaries), and bad weather have been a disaster for the sector.

It is a sector where 90 per cent of us are women who gather shellfish on foot. We lack information, adequate training, guidance and the specific support required to sustain a professional sector. We lack information, and of course the possibility to participate in decision-making processes that directly affect our lives as fishworkers.



A social focus is lacking and a sea change is needed: information must be channelled directly to fishworkers, and frameworks for participation and aid must be established that favour us directly. Mechanisms must be established *in situ* to verify that genuine communication is taking place.

As wives of fishermen and fishworkers, we also demand that the Committee adopts a social focus. Labour laws and fishworkers rights must be respected and complied with, and substantial improvements made in their on-board living conditions. We need a social focus to the policy objectives of the Committee, and control mechanisms in place to ensure that these policies are really implemented.

European aid should be made conditional on respecting the working rights of fishworkers, with monies being used to improve their on-board living conditions. Aid monies should not be used up on technical and commercial aspects, putting aside workers' rights and their on-board living conditions for another day.

In brief, mechanisms for informing, communicating and participating must be improved. An environmental focus is needed to defend the sustainability and healthy quality of our resources. And a paradigm shift is required to favour the rights and interests of those (men and women) who work at sea.

Many thanks.



## Europe / Netherlands

### Our First Steps

*The Women in Fisheries Network of the Netherlands has now been in existence for one year. How did it go? What were the highlights? And what were the limitations?*

**By Cornelia Quist, a member of ICSF and contact person for VinVis (the Women in Fisheries Network of the Netherlands)**

Last June the women in fisheries network of the Netherlands completed one year. It has not been an easy process, but we feel that the network has overcome its main 'teething troubles'. So we have given our network a name. She is called VinVis, which is an abbreviation of *Vrouwen in de Visserij* (Women in Fisheries), but also the name of a large beautiful whale, which holds a symbolic meaning.

#### *How did we begin?*

In April 2000 some of us met during a symposium about the needs and aspirations of wives of fishermen in the Netherlands. Here the results of a survey by the research department of the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries were presented to the fishing community and the government. It was revealed that a large majority of fishermen's wives are involved in fisheries activities themselves and that the fisheries and the family enterprise gave a very important meaning to their lives. Nevertheless their role was still an informal one and women were not participating in formal fishery organizations. It was felt that this was the reason for the preservation of traditional gender relations in the fisheries and the continuing weak social position of the wives of Dutch fishermen.

Despite the good attendance at the symposium and the lively discussions (*see Yemaya no 4, August 2000*), there was no follow-up organized, either by the government or by fisher organizations. So it was the women from fishing communities that met during the symposium and wanted to continue the discussion, who took the initiative to meet again. On 22 June we had our first meeting at the fish auction of Urk, where it was decided to form the Network. After this meeting many more followed. Initially these were held at the fish auctions of the various fishery regions of our country. Of late, we have held our meetings at the offices of our two national fisher(men) organizations.

#### *Who is in our network?*

In our network there are wives of boat owners and crew from all important fishery regions of our country, representing all the different sectors fishing in Dutch waters. These women are involved in a range of activities in the family fishing enterprise, such as administration, responding to the concerns of the crew, contacting and dealing with banks, insurance companies, auctions, etc., cleaning, supplying groceries, and more. Some of the women are co-owners of the enterprise, together with their husbands. Some women have jobs, mostly in shops or as house help. The network is open for all women who feel concerned about the future of the fisheries and the fishing community and want to be actively involved in influencing present developments in a process of positive change.

#### *What do we do?*

We discuss and study a large variety of fisheries issues, such as concerns of the crew, fisheries management, fish trade, fisher organizations, and fisheries policies and politics. We exchange information and experiences about the different fisheries sectors. We also discuss the role and position of women in fisheries. We participate (and speak at) public meetings and maintain contacts with organizations that influence policy-making and with the media. We also aspire to build contacts with fishermen's wives in other European countries.

#### *What have been the highlights?*

- We have visited various fish auctions in our country and learned about present developments in Dutch fish trade.
- We have had meetings with each of the two Dutch national fishermen's organizations to discuss with them the objectives of our Network and the support we wish to receive from them.
- During the North Sea Crisis of February/March 2001 we sent letters to our Minister of Fisheries, Members of Parliament and the press about the negative effects of closing large parts of our fishing grounds in the North Sea for our community. We also gave our first public speech during a large fishermen's meeting in Urk (*see Samudra no 28, April 2001*).
- We have participated in several public meetings concerning (the future of) Dutch fisheries, organized by the government or by fisher organizations and voiced the concerns of fishing

families. We hold the opinion that in fisheries policy *the focus should be shifted from the fishing boat to the people on the fishing boat.*

Our public participation has been well received so far.

- We studied together the Green Paper for the Common Fisheries Policy of the European Union. This helped us to have in-depth discussions about present developments in fisheries as well as the role of women in fisheries and to develop our own vision. We sent our response to the EU Fishery Commission and the EU Parliament. We distributed our response to governmental, fisher, environmental and various other organizations concerned with the future of European Fisheries. We also had an exchange with fishermen's wives of other European countries regarding the Green Paper and, in particular, on the prospects in it for the women of the fishing communities.



*What have been our limitations so far?*

- Although we are from the same country, we face problems as a result of differences in culture, class and age. There are differences in perceptions and attitudes, which sometimes leads to miscommunication. There are also differences in knowledge and experiences about fisheries. In

spite of this we have succeeded in staying together and to be open and respectful of each other. We try to build open and transparent relationships, where friendship is more important than status.

- Generally speaking our fishing communities are still very conservative in their perceptions about the role and status of women. Women, therefore, feel reluctant to join our network. All the women who have joined our network have the support of their husbands and also of their parents and in-laws.
- Although we receive support from both national fisher organizations we still feel that they want to patronize us. Initially our plan was to work closely with the two organizations. However, we now keep some distance because we feel they are not yet open to our concerns and ideas. By holding our meetings in their offices though, we do keep the door open to them.
- As we have decided to function as a network and not form a separate women's organization, we have no funds or institutional means. We also lack organizational experience. We depend on each one's personal capacity to contribute and we sometimes make use of the institutional resources of other organizations. This creates limitations, but also creates the opportunity for network building. It encourages the active participation of each one of us as we cannot depend on an office. Of course we readily make use of modern communication technology, such as the internet, that has become broadly accessible these days.

Those who want to get in touch with us and/or want to receive a copy of our objectives and our reaction to the Green Paper on the Common Fisheries Policy of the European Union, please send an e-mail to [cornelie.quist@wolmail.nl](mailto:cornelie.quist@wolmail.nl)

## Europe / Netherlands

### Challenging stereotypes

*VinVis, the Women in Fisheries Network of the Netherlands, has been in existence for two years now. Time again to report on the process of finding a common orientation...*

**By Cornelia Quist, a member of ICSF and contact person for *VinVis*.**

Last year I reported how some of us, who had met during a symposium on the needs and aspirations of wives of fishermen, had formed a women in fisheries network of the Netherlands. We had called it *VinVis* (see *Yemaya* No.4, August 2000 and *Yemaya* No.8, December 2001). In the first year of our existence we had been struggling to find a common orientation and, at the same time, to fight responses of cynicism, paternalism, or just ignorance from the fisher community itself.

Last June *VinVis* completed its second year of existence. We feel it has been a very good year, a year of stabilizing and gaining recognition. And a year of exploring our role in fisheries. At present we welcome new women to our network at every meeting.

One important event that helped the *VinVis* network find its orientation and direction, was the role women of the network played during the cod crisis in early 2001. At that time the Dutch fishing community was disproportionately affected by the decision of the European Union to close large parts of the fishing grounds in the North Sea to protect the codfish from depletion (see *Samudra* No.28, April 2001). Government and public opinion was strongly influenced by the environmental lobby and there was little sympathy for the plight of the Dutch fishermen. The women of *VinVis* felt that their first priority was to protect the future of the Dutch fisher community that suffered from internal divisions, a poor public image and a lack of perspective about the future.

Another event that facilitated this process of orientation was the launching of the so-called Green Paper by the European Union to review its Common Fisheries Policy. All stakeholders were invited to respond to this. The women of *VinVis* studied and discussed the Green Paper together and were the first from the Dutch fisher community to come up with a response. This act

encouraged a group of young fishermen, among them the husbands of the *VinVis* women, also to respond. Both these responses were later adopted by the national Dutch Fishermen's Union and found broad support among the Dutch fisher community.

In November 2001, a symposium was organized by the Dutch fishermen's organization with the title "What is your opinion about the future of the Dutch cutter-fishery". Normally only fishermen would participate in such meetings, but, at the request of *VinVis*, the wives of fishermen were also invited. Many, both men and women, responded to the invitation. It was clear that there was a broadly felt need in the community to reflect about the future. Discussions were very constructive and both men and women expressed great concern about social and environmental issues and their willingness to work for a fishery with a future. After a long time the 'community feeling' was back again. And, for the first time, wives of fishermen were accepted as partners in a fisheries discussion.

This new visibility gained by the wives of fishermen was the reason why *VinVis* was approached by the media. We knew that we had to be very careful. We first gave an interview to the national fisheries paper. An article in this paper, which is found on the table of every fisher household, was seen as an opportunity to explain our mission to the community. When we asked to see the draft article, we were alarmed to read the typical woman-stereotype jargon in the article. Fortunately, the journalist was cooperative and after about three or four revisions (!), we finally felt it could be published.

When other media persons approached *VinVis*, we discovered that whilst the journalist of the fisheries paper had seen women of fisher households as plain housewives, the other journalists were only interested in hearing about women who go fishing out at sea. This meeting with the media led to an animated discussion amongst us about the kind of role/ image of women of fisher households we wanted to show to the public. This again facilitated a reflection and awareness process among the women of *VinVis*.

In exploring women's roles in fisheries, the women of *VinVis* became more aware of the value of their contribution, and of their potential. The women

continued to approach the Dutch fishermen's organizations, expressing their sincere interest and concern about the future of the Dutch fisher community. As a result, they were invited frequently for meetings and given information. *VinVis* also got a special niche on the website of the national fishermen's organizations and in the national fisheries paper. Women of *VinVis* regularly write the column "Diary of a fisherman's wife". It looks as if women have finally got into the world of the fishermen. Wives of fishermen are more and more mentioned in reports and documents as a group that deserves to be heard. And more and more women speak up.



The women of *VinVis* took up a role, which was new for the community. They began participating in public meetings on issues that affect the future of Dutch fisheries. In these meetings they met with officials of various Ministries, with environmental activists, with other stakeholders using coastal resources. They were confronted with different ideas and perspectives. Quite often, the women of *VinVis* were the only spokespersons of their community at these meetings. As long as they went as a group, they felt encouraged. In this way, opportunities were created for issues

important to their community to become part of the socio-political dialogue and for women to broaden their own perspective.

Through the ICSF *VinVis* was introduced to other fisherwomen's organizations in Europe. They learned about fisheries and, in particular, about the role of fisherwomen in other European countries. On 20 November 2001, they collectively presented a list with issues of concern to women in European fisheries to the European parliament (see *Yemaya*, No 8). This was a unique event.

The recognition that the women of *VinVis* have received in their role as advocates of the fisher community and the appreciation they receive for this from the community, has strengthened their self-confidence. They do not, any more, hide their ambition to gain knowledge and skills and even a more equal partnership in the fishing enterprise. They feel less inhibited now to raise issues in the community, that are controversial but need to be addressed for the sake of the future of the community, such as the relationship between boat-owners and crew, (un)sustainable fishing practices and internal divisions within the community. They also feel less reluctant now to publicly confront men of their community who tend to stereotype women, and they can even expect the support of other men in this. The *VinVis* network has proved to be an important base on which women of fisher communities have been given the opportunity to develop skills, knowledge and insights. Crucial for its existence has been the finding of a common orientation and the opportunity to set its own agenda and priorities.

*Those who want to get in touch with us, please send an email to [cornelie.quist@wolmail.nl](mailto:cornelie.quist@wolmail.nl)*

## European Union

### A new world ?

*Woman's roles in European fisheries are finally given attention, but there is still a long way to go to give women the recognition they deserve*

**By Cornelia Quist, a member of ICSF and contact person for VinVis**

A two-day conference to discuss ways to enhance the role of women in the fisheries sector of Europe under the newly reformed Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) was held on 23 and 24 January 2003 in Brussels. It was the first time in its history that the European Commission (EC) organized a conference on this subject. The conference was also unique in that a majority of the women participants came from fishercommunities themselves.

“This is a new world”, were the first words that escaped from the mouth of Commissioner Franz Fischler, responsible for Agriculture, Fisheries and Rural Development, when he was confronted with the around 150 women that were gathered for the conference. The women were from the fisheries sector of all the Member States of the EU. There was also a small delegation from Norway and Iceland, which are not EU members.

Launching the conference, Commissioner Franz Fischler said that women's roles remain little known, let alone understood. He said: “Recent statistics show that you participate actively in fish processing, in the marketing of fish products, in aquaculture and also in fishing. Around 84,000 women are employed in these sectors, representing 22 per cent of all employment in the fishing industry.”

“Woman's activities in the family and in the industry support sides of fisheries are usually unpaid and often unrecognized. These activities become especially crucial in times of crisis when you are the key to keeping communities and families together. This is why we must take into account the role of women in studies and management decisions concerning the fishing industry.”

Mr Fischler reminded the participants that encouraging stakeholder participation in the European Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) is one of the crucial aspects of the CFP reform adopted by the European Council last

December. The new CFP includes long-term management goals in fisheries, limits fishing effort, proposes to end by 2004 all public aid for the renewal of the fleet, and proposes more harmonized controls across the EU. These changes will benefit the industry and the coastal areas concerned, said Mr Fischler.

Ms. Rosa Miguelez Ramos, the vice-chairperson of the Fisheries Committee of the European Parliament, was the second to address the conference. She said that despite the fact that women have always worked and made their contribution to the sector, the family, and the community, they always have been invisible and unrecognized. It is time, she said, to change this situation by giving women access to decision-making, formal education, training and inputs for economic activities. She regretted that this conference was only organised after the CFP reform was adopted by the European Parliament and that women from the fisheries sector were not given a larger role in the CFP. She concluded that the Commission should now show it is serious about women's participation and that one way of doing this is by encouraging women's networking at the European level.

The first day of the Conference was dedicated to the *Study on the role of women in the fisheries sector* carried out for the European Commission by the consultancy group Macalister Elliot and Partners Ltd (see [http://europa.eu.int/comm/fisheries/doc\\_et\\_publ/pub\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/fisheries/doc_et_publ/pub_en.htm)). The results of this study were presented by Mr Jorgen Holmquist, Director, EU Directorate General for Fisheries. He said that the study gave a surprisingly homogenous picture of the role and position of women in fisheries in all member states of the EU. It showed that women's occupational participation in fisheries is the highest in the fish processing industry and thereafter, to a lesser extent, in aquaculture. The occupational participation of women in capture fisheries was shown to be very little everywhere. The study revealed that woman's role in capture fisheries is, in particular, that of the collaborating spouse, who is involved in activities such as bookkeeping and keeping contact with the auction, bank, and authorities. It also showed that the biggest obstacles for women to participate professionally in fisheries activities are the responsibility for childcare, none or limited access to decision-making within fisher organisations or trade unions and lack of prospects for better jobs or career in the sector. It showed clearly that woman's work in fisheries is generally unpaid or underpaid.

Mr Holmquist then invited the women participants to give their reactions, to which the women responded in large number. Here follows an impression of the responses:

- Many women commented that the study does not reflect what women's roles really are. They said that the study was mainly based on rather poor benchmark data and very little on interviews with women in fisheries. Women were also critical that, in general, the study was rather pessimistic and that no success stories of women's involvement in fisheries were included.
- Women also said that the approach of the study limited women's role in fisheries to women's work in the sector only. They pointed out that women generally also play a very important role in communication and social cohesion within the fishercommunity. Without woman's support, there is no future for coastal fisheries-dependent communities. More attention should have been given to women's potential roles as representatives of the interests of the sector and the community.
- Women also commented that women's roles in areas concerning safety and crew affairs were not sufficiently highlighted.
- Women from the inland fisheries sector were critical that their role was not given any attention in the study. In this sector, more women are seen in fish capture, they said.
- Women from the fish processing sector of Brittany (France) were alarmed that the study recommended that women workers be helped to exit the fish processing industry for jobs with better prospects. They said that fish processing is mostly an old artisanal profession and that if this profession disappears, these artisanal skills also would be lost. They wondered why the recommendation was not to upgrade this work by improving the working conditions and the image of the work.
- Many women expressed their concern about the decline of small-scale fisheries, which had led to the disintegration of their communities as a result of economic distress, social problems and exodus of populations. They also were worried

about the poor public image that exists about fisheries and they queried how the profession can be made more attractive. Women questioned why policy-makers are almost solely concerned with the technical and ecological aspects of fisheries and so little with the social and economic aspects.

- Women more than once called attention to the big environmental polluters of the sea. They said that the 'polluter pays' principle should be practiced and that fisherfamilies, who are the victim of serious environmental pollution, should be compensated. The practice of paying compensation years after an environmental disaster should be changed and immediate compensation should be provided.
- Women felt that it is of great importance for them to get access to organizations in fisheries (from local co-operatives to national organizations) and to be given a chance to participate in decision-making. It was suggested that women also should get representation in the Regional Advisory Councils that will be installed under the newly reformed Common Fisheries Policy (CFP).

Holmquist replied that he shared most of the concerns that were expressed by the women participants. He admitted that the study of women's roles in fisheries is incomplete, but said that it should be seen as a starting point to call attention to women's roles and to create spaces for women in fisheries.

On the second day of the conference the participants were given information on financial support available under various EU programmes of relevance to them. Unfortunately, there were an overload of presentations and too little opportunity for questions and discussion. It also became clear that access to these programmes remains dependent on the willingness and initiative of the national governments of the EU Member States. And it has been the experience that most of these national governments are not aware of the opportunities to support women in fisheries or do not see the importance of it.

Reports of some projects that targeted women under an EU-funded programme for small-scale coastal fisheries development, were also presented. Some of these projects developed women's co-operatives or

business and support networks. Some trained women in computer literacy, bookkeeping and marketing skills. Although these projects had proven to be successful, they were, in general, experimental in nature.

The attention of the participants picked up again when Holmquist began his concluding speech with the following observations:

- The CFP has an impact not only on those at sea, but also on those on land. It is, therefore, important not to leave out women anymore;
- It is clear that women lack access to information, training and resources;
- The Directorate General of Fisheries commits itself to actively supporting women's networking at the European level. To start with, initiatives will include a website and a mailbox;
- DG Fisheries will review working conditions in the fisheries sector and look into how to improve the image of the sector;
- DG Fisheries will pay more attention to the socio-economic aspects of fisheries;
- DG Fisheries is willing to promote the participation of women in the Regional Advisory Councils;
- Environmental pollution of the sea is an equally important concern for the EU Commission. They are, however, restricted in implementing stricter regulations and sanctions, because the Member States put other interests first;
- DG Fisheries will look into how to upgrade the study of women's roles in fisheries and how to follow up on this conference;
- Pressure will be exerted on Member States to pay better attention to the interests of women in fisheries, both at the local level as well as at the regional level.

*Cornelie's e-mail: [cornelie.quist@wolmail.nl](mailto:cornelie.quist@wolmail.nl)*

## European Union/ Spain

### I collected oil from beaches...

*An eyewitness account of the impact of the oil spill caused by the sinking of Prestige, on Galician coastal communities*

**Statement to the European Advisory Committee on Fisheries and Aquaculture (ACFA) by Cristina López Rodríguez, ECODESARROLLO GAIA, on 16 December 2002**

Good Afternoon.

I come from Galicia, where for the last month I have been travelling along the entire coast from the mouth of the river Fo to the mouth of the river Miño.

I collected oil from beaches as a volunteer. I witnessed the desperation of fishermen who were gathering the oil on the sea with their bare hands.

I saw women discovering with their rakes that under the layers of oil there was a layer of sand, and, lower still, another layer of oil.

I witnessed directly the black tide. I attended meetings, discussions, demonstrations, gatherings of silent protest, and actions to claim rights. The Galician people have not thrown in the towel, but they need help.

I met with women whose work ties them directly to the sea—the shellfish gatherers—and with women whose work is indirectly related to the sea—fishermen's wives, net makers, and women in general. I spoke with women in the ports, in their houses, on the beaches, in the street.

There is enormous gloom and mind-boggling uncertainty about the future. Disgust and fear are widespread. But it does not seem to me that this is causing people to give up. They must move on.

In areas where fishing is banned support is being provided. Where there is no ban, the situation is even more difficult because fish is difficult to sell.

It is all very well to talk about plans to rehabilitate the environment, and about regeneration to speed up biological processes (about cleaning up, plantations, seeding etc.) or about plans to promote Galician seafood or about compensation.

But there is no work for shellfish gatherers. Young people are having to look for work far from home. That the Galician fishery sector is facing a widespread crisis is not in doubt.

It is obvious that we have on our hands a major social crisis, impacting on the Galician population in general, and on women in particular. It is affecting women who are shellfish gatherers, women whose work depends on fishing, women in general from the fishing community and women who sustain the family structure in the Galician fishing communities

We must insist that the role of women in Galicia, now more than ever, is made plain to see. Now that they have to overcome a new obstacle. Now that they see the structure of their lives and the structure and cohesion that holds their families together, falling apart. We are facing a major social impact that must be dealt with.

What is needed now is an exhaustive study on the current situation in Galicia—a social report produced with a gender perspective. That makes visible the needs, proposals and opinions of women who live both directly and indirectly from the sea. That takes into account proposals to increase the measures provided to meet social needs.

Even if the environmental damage has already been done, now is the time to deal with the social problems that we are becoming aware of through the drama we are living in.

Now is the moment to recognize the role of women and to provide them with the support measures needed to mitigate these deplorable events.

*Cristina can be contacted at: [sircotim@teleline.es](mailto:sircotim@teleline.es)*



## European Union/ Netherlands

### Penalized for what?

*The shrimp fisher community of the Netherlands face problems in the initiatives they have undertaken for a better life and an environmentally sound fisheries*

**By Mariet Groen, wife of a shrimp fisherman and member of VinVis, the Women in Fisheries Network of the Netherlands**

As I write this, we are facing a big crisis. The price for shrimp is crashing and, at the same time, there is a weekly destruction of thousands of kilograms of small-size shrimps, because of an oversupply in the market. Many of the shrimp fishing enterprises will not survive. My husband is now fishing seven days a week, but our earnings are so low that we hardly have money left for our daily needs. This morning, when I wanted to pay for my groceries, I discovered I had no money left. I felt so embarrassed. How could this happen in a wealthy country like the Netherlands?

Shrimp fishing is one of the traditional Dutch fishery sectors, accounting for about 20 per cent of the Dutch cutter fleet. In the north of our country, in particular, coastal villages depend on this fishery. The shrimp fishery is predominantly a small-scale sector activity and typically family-based, where women play an important role. Women are mostly responsible for bookkeeping, dealing with banks, and auctions. Some women also go fishing with their husbands.

Some years ago, we faced a similar situation as today. Due to the low prices for shrimp, fishers tried to catch as much as possible, in order to survive. A battle for the survival of the fittest was going on. The cold stores of the traders were completely filled and there was no option but to convert the shrimp harvest into fishmeal. This is one of the worst things that can happen to a fisherman, because a real fisherman fishes to feed the population. It was then that we concluded that this situation should not continue. Shrimp fishers from Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands organized into producers' organizations, and discussed voluntary regulation of the shrimp capture. They decided autonomously to reduce the number of fishing days and to cap the supply of shrimp. With this 'trilateral' agreement, they approached the two trading companies that dominated the European shrimp market and came

to a deal about the quantity of supply and a minimum price. The two trading companies would certainly benefit from the deal, because they were now guaranteed supply.

With the exception of one producer organization, all shrimp fishers complied with the agreement. The prices went up and the incomes of the fisher families improved. The fishermen could now come home over the weekends to spend time with their families. After years, my husband, the children and I could go together on a holiday again. Fishermen could now invest in the maintenance of their boats, and young fishermen were again eligible for bank loans to start on their own. Of course, there were still good and bad years, but, in general, we could make a good living from the shrimp fishery. Cold stores were no longer filled to the ceiling with shrimp, there were no bulk-purchase prices, nor destruction of shrimp harvest. Also, our initiatives were praised by environmental organizations.

Alas, all this came to an end. By mid-January this year, the anti-cartel Authority of the Netherlands decided to penalize the shrimp sector, because of our agreement and deal with the trading companies. They said that for years our practice had been putting the consumers at a disadvantage. The fines were exorbitant: Euro 4 mn for the fishermen and Euro 9.7 mn for the traders. We were totally surprised, because of all the approval we had been given until now. We had been working in line with the EU policy, which regards market supply regulation for the benefit of controlled fishing practices as one of the most important roles of the producer's organizations. We also felt it was unjust because small-scale fishermen were being treated like big telecom and oil companies.

The first response of our fishermen was to blockade the fishing port of Lauwersoog, which has the largest shrimp fishing fleet of Europe. The idea was to turn the attention of the government to our cause. Through our women in fisheries network, VinVis, a colleague fisherman's wife and I took the opportunity to hand over a letter to EU-Commissioner Fishler during the Women in Fisheries Conference last January. In this letter, we explained about our problem and asked for help. Fishler promised us a reply, which we received some weeks later. In his reply, Fishler said that the Commission would investigate the matter.

In the Netherlands, we women have worked in close co-operation with fishermen's leaders to approach

politicians and government officials to mobilize support for our cause. Many journalists visited our house too. We were ill at ease, because we had no experience with the media. Sometimes we felt misled when some journalist twisted our story, only looking for sensational news. Often we felt more miserable, because it was very depressing to recount our problems over and over again.

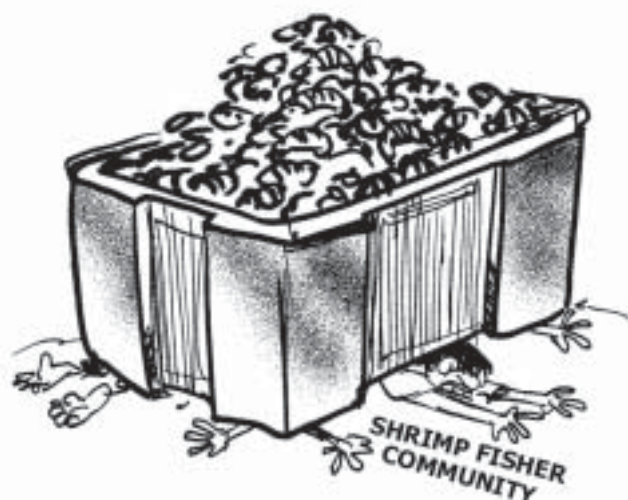
While we were busy with our advocacy campaign on the land, our husbands went to sea fishing. They had to, because of the huge loans that had to be repaid. As shrimp prices collapsed, our husbands had to go for longer fishing trips. We had no family life anymore. Some fishermen ended up with catches that were seven times larger than the quantity of the trilateral agreement. Within a short period, the cold stores of the traders were completely filled and they stopped buying shrimp from the open market, relying instead only on their contract fishers.

After some weeks, the smaller inshore fishers, including my husband, could not harvest anymore. We women went to the bank again and again to ask for new loans or for postponement of repayment. Our husbands were filled with negative energy and our community began to fall apart. Relationships among the fishermen became very tense, because of fierce competition for the resources, and there were acts of aggression against some of the fishermen who were not seen to be in solidarity.

I feel very privileged to live with my husband and children in our very beautiful old fishing village that has a very long historical bond with the sea. Everybody in our village and our region has, in one way or the other, some relationship with fisheries and the sea. That is why I hope that unity will return for the sake of preserving a future for our children and our community. Recently, I was elected as a board member of our local fishermen's organization. I regard my first mission as bringing back unity among the shrimp fisher community and finding support for our cause. I also want to have a family life again. I feel strengthened by the support of our women in fisheries network, VinVis. Also when I am down, I can always call on someone in the network to talk to.

We are now almost six months into the crisis. Thanks to our campaign and the support of the Dutch Fishermen's Organization, our case is being discussed in the national and European parliaments. Everyone now speaks about the importance of our shrimp fisheries for employment, and for historical and social reasons. We hope for a solution, but, for many of us, it may be too late. We try not to lose hope for better times.

*Mariet Groen can be contacted at [m\\_groen\\_01@hotmail.com](mailto:m_groen_01@hotmail.com)*



## Europe/ Spain

### Shaking up traditions

*A women's association from El Pamar, Valencia, Spain is challenging the age-old patrilineal system, in which only the male offspring of fishermen inherit rights to fish*

**By Carmen Serrano Soler, The Women's Association of Tyrius, El Palmar, Valencia, Spain**

El Palmar is a small place, with 850 inhabitants, under the administration of the provincial capital, Valencia. It is located on an island in Lake Albufera of Valencia. Forty years ago, it had no overland access. Communication was by boat, and this was the only way to travel to the outside world. From the beginning, the inhabitants subsisted mainly on fishing in the lake. They belonged to the Comú of Fishermen, which has its origins in the Gremial movements at the turn of the 11th century.

For their own benefit and for geographical reasons, a "fishermen's community" was formed, charged with protecting the fishery and the interests of the fishermen members. This began to operate independently from the Comú of Fishermen. Only men could participate in the organization and share the benefits generated by it, and these rights were passed on to male children. Daughters were excluded from any inheritance rights related to the fishery. The interest of fathers was to find a fisherman to marry their daughters off to, so as to be able to continue the community custom. The marriage of a daughter to a forester, or a non-fisherman, was accepted only with reservations.

Thus functioned the organization of fishermen until 1994. That was when the only women's association in the area decided to propose to the fishermen's community the possibility of adopting changes in the constitutional rules. They were asked to consider the possibility of allowing their daughters equal rights to their sons to inherit, enjoy, and pass on fishing rights.

It is hard to understand the reasons for maintaining age-old customs that deny women's participation, especially in a place like Valencia, at such a short distance from the capital. This was what prompted our women's association to claim some of our constitutional rights that we were—and are still—entitled to.

Women had never formed part of any public entity, until the founding of the Housewives Association of

Tyrius in El Palmar. Several activities were organized through this association to improve the situation of women and to escape from the subservience to husbands or fathers. These included training courses, cultural visits, trips and conferences. Women could only operate in private and not in public. They could not even go to the city alone, or go into a bar, as this was not considered acceptable. It was only in religious *cofradiás* that women were given positions of responsibility for organizing social activities in the community. The time had come to raise the possibility of changing this situation of sexual discrimination that women had to put up with. And this was how the contest between men and women started.

We tried to change tradition, imposed by the force of custom and submission. We have been condemned as rebels by the closed society of El Palmar for daring to bring before the courts the local culture that has been passed on from generation to generation. We had shown evidence to the outside world of the local ethnocentricity, which is considered to be above justice and the Constitution.

We had tried to remedy the sexual discrimination that denies daughters the right to inherit fishing rights, either to use them or to pass them on. Above all, it is only the male children of fishermen who may become part of the fishermen's community of El Palmar. This excludes daughters and their children, if they marry outside the community. It does not matter if a fisherman's wife is a local or an outsider, because the only way that fishing rights may be inherited is through the father.

The rest of the local community has denounced the social changes proposed by us. Our women's association had taken the case to the local tribunals, and, despite having won the court case, until today, July 2003, the judgement, dating October 1998, has still not been fully complied with.

Those of us who have tried to advance the struggle for equal rights have been injured by other women, like ourselves, who have defended the male territory of the fishermen's community. Ironically, even though it is they who stand to gain from our achievements, they are preventing us from enabling them to benefit from equal rights.

We felt that we could use the women's organization, which had now been consolidated, to begin to claim our rights as human beings, as laid down in the Constitution. The restriction on inheriting fishing rights also affected the sons of women who, although they were cousins of fishermen, had no rights to fish because their fathers' were not fishers. We felt that we should act to change such discrimination. And so we did. Our first step was to seek dialogue and consensus. But that proved useless. Having a dialogue with women was not acceptable. The second step was to make an act of conciliation; this proposal was also rejected. And, finally, we instigated legal proceedings on the grounds of sexual discrimination. We won on all legal counts in our country.

Our proceedings have not been free of incidents. All kinds of restrictions were imposed on us to force our acquiescence to the fishermen's community. Demands that were impossible to fulfill, expulsion of fishermen who supported the position of the women petitioners, street demonstrations to have us thrown out of the community, graffiti, insults... we were subjected to a degree of social ostracism hard to imagine. We were being isolated from the social milieu in which we were born and raised. This also affected our closest family members, fathers and children. Even our friends suffered due to their friendship with us.

Men assert that fishing is only a man's work, and women should look after those aspects needed to carry it out. Even daughters and wives defended this male worldview.

The most unexpected response came from the very women for whom our petition was intended. In 1999, they formed a women's association parallel to our own, with the single objective of attacking us and defending the position of the fishermen. Those belonging to this collective were actually those who stood to benefit from the gains we had achieved. People who were prepared to make a written apology, atoning for defending our position, were forgiven and were allowed to become part of the fishermen community. The most grievous injuries came, and continue to come, from women defending either their husbands or the fishermen community. The most regrettable aspect is that, at the local level, the authorities were closer to the other group's position than to ours.

People were afraid to approach us, for fear of being attacked by the opposite side. They were afraid of being on the receiving end of the rejection that we were daily subjected to. Fear, repression and lack of information were ideally suited to keep the rest of us subjugated to those who shouted the loudest. Women who dared to raise their voices were silenced or castigated. Most worrying was that these reactions did not come only from the older generation. Even the younger generation, included schoolgoing boys and girls, accepted and copied the behaviour of their fathers or mothers. We were made unwelcome and prevented from entering certain public places.



We sometimes ask ourselves if it is still necessary for a group of people to go through what we have suffered to succeed in getting fair treatment. It may be incomprehensible, but the specificity of situations requires cases to be analyzed separately. And what comes out of a situation may be totally unexpected. We are women who have pushed for changes. We brought to justice a hierarchical social organization that marginalized a group of people, and we are paying a very high price for that.

Despite everything, we believe that it has been worth the trouble to shake to its foundations an institution with outdated customs, and to open its eyes so that it can look at itself in today's context. It reassures us to know that people in different places, entities and institutions recognize what we have done. We are encouraged to know that people in many diverse walks of life share our opinions. We have been awarded very important distinctions, prizes, recognition... all this for the struggle that our association took up. But our neighbours neither accept nor recognize the work that we initiated, and what we achieved through an association of women.

(This article has been summarized from the presentation made by Carmen Serrano Soler at a recent workshop organized by the European-level FEMME network in Vaasa, Finland. It has been reproduced with permission from the author.)

*Carmen Serrano Soler can be contacted at [carserso@teleline.es](mailto:carserso@teleline.es)*

**Europe/ France****A winner of battles and hearts**

*A portrait of Jeannette, a fishworker whose life is characterized by buoyancy*

by Roger Cougot, a retired Ouest-France Daily journalist

Lorient, Brittany. No medal, no official address, but warm feelings aplenty and a flurry of friendly greetings. In early 2004, in a corner of the Keroman fishing harbour, where the mist of economic doldrums lingers on, a party is going on to honour a fishworker, one of those women who in the mid-1970s (so long ago!) toiled to raise the local fish trade to uncommon heights.

In those days, fish landings reached 70,000 tonnes a year, three times more than the present figure. At the auctions, there was fish galore to rejoice the traders, loads of *Breiz pesked* (Breton fish) that kept very busy the women who sorted and processed the seafood in the merchants' shops. Jeannette was one such woman.

She is now an 80-year old girlish-looking lady. Most of her lifetime was taken over by the fish trade, and solidly anchored in the cold environment of Keroman, where conditions of work are still reminiscent of 19th century sweatshops. Hands and feet were forever cold, and there was due coldness as well in the trading arrangements, where business was business. Into this atmosphere, Jeannette tried to bring in a measure of warm-heartedness. Quietly and relentlessly, she battled for human dignity and social justice, for added humaneness in that bloody occupation where "the fish always commands".

And that is why her friends threw a party to honour the lady, the fishworker who was never awarded any medal but got covered with fish scales instead. Yet Jeannette maintains her buoyancy.

She was born on 10 January 1924 at Pontivy, in the hinterland, 50 km from the coast. And there was little motivation for her to head for the seashore, except that her grandfather used to board a ship at Roscoff in northern Brittany and cross over to England to sell onions, a 'Johnny' as such people were nicknamed by the British. In 1948, Jeanne Le Tinier, the young lady, born *dans les terres* (in the hinterland) into a family of well-to-do ironmongers, headed for the busy town of Lorient, where the population was coping with the

aftermath of the war bombings, and many were living in spartan wooden cabins.

Just like the river Blavet that flows through her hometown, Jeannette did not take a straight course to the sea. But right from the start, she was bent on working with the lowly (*le milieu populaire*) and engaging in social activism. For a while, she worked with a mothers' help organization, but was soon miffed with the paternalistic approach of its higher-class leaders who hired labour for the sake of charity instead of abiding by the principles of social justice. Jeannette then got a job in a cannery that processed beans, peas and fish. That was before the 'delocalization' spree, when, on the Breton coast, processing plants still needed seasonal workers.

In 1955, Jeannette moved further towards the seashore and the quays of Keroman, where she remained as an *employée de marée* (woman fishworker) until her retirement in 1980, and long afterwards to help those still at work. Throughout her lifetime at the harbour, she stubbornly tried to bring about some improvement in that environment. She joined the union and took part in all its initiatives, however humble and low-key or tense and highly conflicting. But all protest was finally squashed, because at the Keroman harbour the "fish rules", which calls for ten-hour working days at minimum wages!

Later, in 1977, Jeannette joined the sorters and dockers in a protracted battle at the SOPROMER processing plant, which was a precursor of the imminent crisis in the industrial fisheries in Lorient. Though technical inputs (partly financed by the producers, including individual fishermen who paid professional fees) were adequate, the private interests of fish merchants and the appetite for short-term profits prevailed over the need to protect jobs.

Jeannette would extend her care to the women working in the newly established department stores, attempting to develop a true working class culture at the local centre, trying to create a workers' culture among fishworkers, metal workers and employees of all kinds. She extended small gestures at her place of work too: Jeannette must have been the only woman who allowed herself a *pause casse-croûte* (tea break), which at that time was meant exclusively for men.

Jeannette believed—and still does—that something can be done to improve the lot of every woman, of every



person, in spite of all the odds, despite the dirty tricks from bosses and colleagues who, unfortunately, would not mind treading on your feet to suck up to the *petits chefs* (supervisors) for uncertain gains.

In the end, the battles of Jeannette and other women did bear some fruit. After years of waiting, a collective labour agreement has come to life, but, not surprisingly, its implementation remains rather uncertain. Most importantly, there is something less visible, albeit very real: that flicker of hope, that tiny thread of gold, as Jeannette would say, namely, the virtue of human solidarity. For the sake of human dignity, even in times of real hardship and conflict, Jeannette remained buoyant and smiling. Her friends who gathered at that birthday party in a corner of the Keroman fishing harbour would have had no trouble picking the message of a lifetime: *gardez la pêche*, in other words, “conserve your buoyancy”.

*Roger Cougot can be contacted c/o Pêche et Développement ([peche.dev@wanadoo.fr](mailto:peche.dev@wanadoo.fr))*

## European Union/ The Netherlands

### **Bouncing back**

*Women in the fishing community of Wieringen have revived the local economy by creating a local fresh-fish market*

**By Wilma Koster, a member of *VinVis*, the Women in Fisheries Network of the Netherlands**

Our fishing community of Wieringen, a former island at the top of the Netherlands, has a long history of fishing. In the past, sailing boats were used, but today we have mechanized boats. Our community uses primarily small-scale boats (below 300 hp), and the main commercial species we catch are shrimp, plaice, sole, shellfish and nephrops.

We sell our fish and shrimps through the auction, which is obligatory in our country, and every day, have to wait and watch for the price the commercial agent will bid. Most of the time, we do not receive a good or fair price for fish that is first-class and caught the day before. The reason is that it is sold in the same market alongside the catches of the big boats.

Since we are wives of fishermen, we know how important it is to get a good price for our fish. We raise our children, do a lot of work ashore for our fishing enterprise, and sometimes also have to join our husbands on fishing trips when they need an extra hand. It is, therefore, not very encouraging that despite so much hard work, the prices for our fish are low. This was one of the major reasons why the business in our community was dying and the fisheries was no longer an attractive proposition for the younger generation.

When our mayor called a meeting to discuss what could be done to revive our local economy, we seized the opportunity to talk about the need to create a local fish market where we could sell our best fresh fish. As this proposal was accepted, we took the challenge and set to work to see that it would be a success. It was very important that the whole community got involved. Through our involvement with *VinVis* (the Women in Fisheries Network of the Netherlands), we particularly encouraged other women of our community to join us in this initiative.

A local working group was formed and its first task was to make a detailed study of the needs and the possibilities. Based on the outcome of this study, we made a plan. The aim of the fresh-fish market was to promote the consumption of fresh fish caught by our local fishing boats, and also to promote our local economy to make sure that the whole community would benefit. Since we were confident that our plan would work, the mayor gave us the investment money from Provincial and European Union (EU) funds to organize the market. This was a loan to the local working group.

In the summer of 2004, when the tourists came to our village—which is a very beautiful area in the north of the Netherlands—we launched the fresh-fish market, to be held every Saturday. In order not to violate government regulations, we obeyed the rules, and our fishermen took their fish first to the regulated auction. There, our group bought the fish, always bidding higher than the rest. In this way, our fisher husbands got more money than they usually would get in the auction. We then brought the fish to our market and sold it for a price that was acceptable for the consumer as well.

Besides selling fresh fish, we also informed the public about how and where the fish are caught. We also organized cooking demonstrations. Nowadays, consumers mostly buy fish in the big supermarkets, already processed into ready-to-eat products, which only have to be put in the microwave. If we want to make the consumer buy more of our local fresh fish, we must teach them how to clean and prepare the fish. We, therefore, held cooking demonstrations, let the people taste our seafood dishes, and distributed flyers with the recipes of the fish that we cooked that day. We also launched a website where we gave weekly updates about the catch of the day to be sold in the market, fish recipes, cultural programmes, and so on.

And, mind you, it worked wonderfully! The word spread and every Saturday we had many tourists, locals and buyers from restaurants coming to our village. People bought our fish, ate and enjoyed it. People visited our fishing boats and met with the fishermen. They listened to our songs and folk stories. They also visited our local shops and restaurants and some of those that were otherwise closing down, bounced back to life. The whole community benefited from the fresh-fish market.





In the first year, our work for the fresh-fish market had been voluntary. The extra money we earned was used to pay back our investment loan. Now that the market has proved its success and has come to stay, some of us will earn some money for the work in the market. We also plan to expand the market with other local products from our region, such as ecologically friendly farm products.

While we are very happy and proud of our achievement, we must say it has been hard but collective work. It brought us together in the community, and if things continue to go the way they do at present, then our children will also be proud to continue to fish, and, more than ever, our community will continue to survive.

But we also want to tell you that EU marketing regulations are not there to help small producers like us. They are there only to strangle us to death. The sanitary regulations that they impose upon us are unreal and even unnecessary. They make us feel guilty of poisoning the customer. Why should we, who live off the fishing, want to kill our customers? And why do customers believe that fish that comes in a packet from a big company is 'pure'? Such packaged fish is often cleaned by workers in Third World countries, who are paid really low wages. So it is 'pure' and cheap.

We think such marketing regulations are made only to benefit the big companies, which are interested only in maximizing profits, while our governments should actually be concerned about safeguarding the

livelihoods of the coastal fishers and small communities here at home.

*Wilma Koster can be contacted at [W.kosterw@quicknet.nl](mailto:W.kosterw@quicknet.nl)*

## Europe/Norway

### Women, men and fishing quotas

*The professionalization of the coastal fishing fleet and the introduction of fish quotas have further marginalized women in the fishing industry of Norway*

by Siri Gerrard of the Department of Planning and Community Studies, University of Tromsø, Norway

In most Western industrialized countries, fishing is considered a male profession; for, in most cases, both fishers and fishing boatowners are men. Yet, the existence and contributions of female fishers are not in doubt; feminist researchers, particularly, have documented women's fishing-related activities that ensure good harvest and the viability of fishing households in many communities. A continuing feature of these female activities is that they are mostly supportive of fishermen's activities, and remain unpaid, unregistered, unrecognized and invisible outside local communities. Unseen work is generally uncoun- ted, unrewarded and outside the realm of public planning and action; in Norway and other Nordic welfare countries, social rights and opportunities are connected exclusively to paid and statistically visible work. Thus, cases abound of mismatch between fisherwomen's work and their public welfare rights, such as sickness allowance, wages, and unemployment and pension benefits.

The introduction of the fishing quota system in 1990, following a nine-and-half month cod moratorium in the northern part of Norway, has had tremendous impact on the livelihoods of fisherfolk. In this article, I intend to focus on the gender dimension of this quota system.

Before addressing the relationship between gender and fishing quotas, it is perhaps important to begin with an outline of gender distribution in the Norwegian fishing industry. In 2004, while 281 women and 12,396 men were registered as full-time fishers, 114 women and 2,795 men were fishing on part-time basis. In 1990, there were 554 women and 19,921 men as full-time fishers, and 112 women and 6,931

men as part-time fishers. In a sense, while the number of full-time women fishers decreased by 50 per cent, there was stability in the population of part-time fishers. Full-time male fishers decreased by nearly 38 per cent in relation to an almost 60 per cent decrease in part-time male fishers. Several reasons could be adduced for these downward trends. But there seems to be a direct correlation between the quota system and the number of fishers; the women and/or men, who have left the fishing, were not replaced.

Since the quota system was introduced, the quantity of fish landed has varied from year to year. For 2006, the total allowable catch (TAC) of cod was 240,000 tonnes. Such TAC is shared among the coastal fleet and the ocean-going boats according to a fixed percentage, which is often challenged, especially by the coastal fishers.

Norway operates a system of non-transferable boat quotas. This means that quotas cannot be sold; fishing quotas follow the boat. Full-time fishers, who have been registered for a year or more, can buy a boat with a quota that belongs to a category referred to as Group 1. Part-time fishers too can buy boats in Group 2. Since the available fish for the entire fleet in Group 2 is fixed, fishers are required to cease fishing when they exhaust their quotas, unless they live in the most fishery-dependent areas of Tromsø and Finnmark in northern Norway. In principle, the quantity of fish available to boats in Group 2 is less than in Group 1.



In 1990, when the quota system was introduced, boats in Group 1 had quotas for cod, haddock and saithe, the most valuable fish species in northern Norway. The length of fishing boats was also relevant in deciding the size of the quota. This model has since been changed; registered full-time fishers can now simultaneously buy and own several boats with quotas. They can also rent a quota or a boat with a quota, and rent out a quota or a boat with a quota. In both 2005 and 2006, boats smaller than 10 m in Group 1 were able to harvest more cod in relation to boats between 10 m and 15 m in size. The reason is that many boats in Group 1, smaller than 10 m, were scrapped. Quotas of such scrapped boats were then transferred to the remaining similar-sized boats in Group 1.

Since fishing quotas are related to boat ownership, gender is a relevant tool for comparison.

In 2005, throughout Norway, 161 women and 7,386 men were registered as owning boats smaller than 28 m, with an owner share of more than 49.99 per cent. In Group 1, women owned 11 of the registered boats, compared to 2,417 boats for men.

It is particularly interesting to compare the data trend with previous years. In 1994, 192 boats out of a total of 16,216 were registered in the name of women. Fifteen boats with quotas were registered in the name of full-time female fishers, compared to 3,382 for men, while 148 women and 3,774 men owned boats with quotas in Group 2.

Furthermore, from 1994 to 2005, there was an absolute decrease in boat-owning women and men in both Groups 1 and 2. In terms of percentage, however, the decrease in male owners was considerably higher. Also, the heavy gender imbalance in ownership of boats and quotas persisted. The right to fish, which, before 1990, was open to both women and men, has now practically become men's preserve. These findings clearly indicate that women own and control a limited share of fishing quotas in Norway, a country that is otherwise considered a symbol of gender equality.

Many mutually reinforcing reasons possibly underlie these glaring gender imbalances. But I will propose

only a couple of assumptions or hypotheses for further discussion or research:

- The price of boats increased when male fishers started buying boats with quotas, creating difficulties for both new male and female fishers.
- Lack of experience and capital poses problems for potential female fishers.
- The quota system has strengthened male dominance in fishing.
- Both gender neutrality and insensitivity in fishery policy have undermined women's ability to buy, own and register boats, and their general involvement in fishing.

In sum, women, who perform unpaid fishing-related tasks are hardly recognized and registered as fishers. There are also indications that the 'market', 'advanced technology' and male fishers have taken over most of women's practical tasks. This is particularly evident in cases where fishers have converted privately owned boats and quotas into private limited companies - a fairly recent ownership model for small-scale fishing boats in northern Norway. Few of these limited-liability companies related to boats below 15 m in size, have women on their governing boards. In cases where women have fisher-husbands, they still continue as discussion partners, motivators and in other statistically invisible roles, which clearly represent work without any formal rights and benefits.

These tendencies show that professionalization of the coastal fishing fleet and the commodification of fishing rights through the quota system, have not benefited women. I agree thus with researchers who hold the view that the quota system reflects a hegemonic model, which is reminiscent of the "recent international neoliberal consensus". This model advocates a market-based restructuring of economic and environmental policies, as well as the medium of social communication and life. In countries where the quota system has been adopted, there have been serious consequences not only for female fishers and fishing-related women, but also for male fishers, whose numbers are showing a heavy decrease.

*Siri Gerrard can be contacted at [sirig@sv.uit.no](mailto:sirig@sv.uit.no)*

**Europe/France****Wedded to the sea**

*This is an interview with Lilianne Carriou, President of the Local Fisheries Committee of Lorient-Etel, France*

**This interview by Fanny Brun of Pêche et Développement has been translated by Brian O’Riordan of ICSF’s Brussels office**

“I don’t originally come from a fishing community”, says Lilianne. “I married a fisherman, and, in so doing, I became wedded to the sea. Getting used to the world of sailors has been far from easy, filled as it is with such uncertainty. To start with, as I worked outside the sector, it seemed quite archaic to me. I did not understand much about it, and it was difficult to adapt to it. But there was no alternative: either I had to adapt or spend every day in tears. So, I adapted.

My husband started out as a small-scale fisher with a small boat of 10 m. After some years, he acquired a 16-m boat, then a 17.5-m one. Today, he operates a 20.6-m vessel. But he has never changed from being a net fisherman. He has remained true to his convictions, and never changed his profession.

*The great crisis in the 1990s*

It was thanks to the great fishing crisis of the 1990s that I really discovered my husband’s profession. That way of life, along with the whole sector, was in jeopardy. It was then that I became painfully aware



that the profession was in the process of disappearing. It was really a major concern. I learned that the families from the port of Lorient, whether in small boats or others, were facing great difficulties. None of us saw the crisis coming; all of us were caught by surprise. I took part in agitations with men and women from the Lorient district, and later in neighbouring areas, as the movement snowballed. There was quite an outburst.

*I have always been a social activist*

When your children are young, you get involved as a parent in school and sporting associations. So my involvement with organizations goes back a long way. To start with, I did not get involved with the fisheries sector because I did not understand it.

Later, quite rightly, I wanted to learn about it. My husband had explained to me at great length about fisheries issues, and I wanted to deepen my discussions with him. And it’s a fact that, as a couple, it was a very difficult discussion, because we were not at all on the same wavelength. But it helped us to grow and to develop together. We have both always respected our commitments to each other as well as our differences, and that helped us to be open about a dialogue. When the fishery crisis hit, I decided to join up with the women, and joined a course on how to manage a fishing enterprises.

I continued with this struggle because I was convinced that women had a role to play in the fisheries sector. It was really far too much of a man’s world. So I joined the regional women’s association, where I was the President for a number of years. Thanks to that women’s association, we were able to develop, gain official recognition for our status, address issues of safety and psychological counselling, and other matters that men had never really given much thought to.

I feel that a major change has come about in recent years. While it’s true that the fisheries sector has always presented difficulties, I feel that we have progressed well. And I think it must be said that this is thanks to women. Today, amongst the new generation, shipowners and crew are well aware that women contribute significantly to the business.

*President of the Local Fisheries Committee*

Even today, I sometimes ask myself how I came to

be in the Local Fisheries Committee. One of the demands made by the women was the right to join professional organizations. We had demanded to be eligible as collaborating spouses for membership, and to hold office in professional organizations for the 2002 elections. That was not an easy process, and doors were shut in our faces all along the way. Finally, there was a glimmer of hope, as a small opening appeared for collaborating spouses and even, at last, for other women too. But then, again, why not? One must act quickly, as events take place. Not many women ultimately made it to the organizations, but the way was open to us. That was something really important.

Nevertheless, we had to ask our husbands about standing in for them. Personally, that made me very embarrassed. Undoubtedly, my husband was the professional. But I would have preferred us to be referred to as “Mr and Mrs”, rather than me as a wife standing in for a certain mister, because he was not there. In the end, that was not possible; it had to be either, or. So I asked my husband whether he wanted to hold office in the organization. He said it was not possible for him; that he could not do everything, and be everywhere. There was the boat and the business to look after, they had to function. So I asked him if I could take his place. He said that I should do as I please.

This was how I gained entry, and was able to vote. In the end, it must be admitted that the men did open the doors for me. I was not there by chance. When they proposed various posts to me, I took all of them up. Following the recent retirement of the President of the Local Committee, I was elected President. I was very surprised indeed. I felt that a proper fisherman would make a better representative. But they all said they were struggling to manage their affairs and that they needed to be represented in this sector, so they elected me.

I am living through a great adventure. Like in a pregnancy, I have been in this job for nine months now... I could not have imagined what was going to happen. I have been caught with my back to the wall, because no sooner had I arrived, everything started to happen, what with Total Allowable Catches (TACs), quotas, controls, fuel costs... It's not possible that more things could have happened to us at the same time, it's a very difficult year.

All of us are in the same mess, whether as fishermen, fish merchants, fishmongers, processors, we are all links in the same chain today, and I believe that we must really stick together, if we are to progress in this sector. There is no other way—if a link in the chain breaks, we will all be set adrift.

I am here because I have faith. I want to believe that this sector is going to pull through. That will not be without pain, but there is every chance of succeeding if we keep united. I have been astounded to see how well the professionals have responded. I think that they have adapted to the changing situation, with each passing day. I have rarely witnessed a situation where people have adapted so quickly to what is happening. In today's fishery, there are more constraints than opportunities, but I am very impressed with their behaviour. What's more, in Lorient, many young people still want to invest despite the worrying situation. As for us, we must back them up; it's our duty.

*Fanny Brun can be contacted at:  
peche.dev@wanadoo.fr*

**ILO/Labour****Gender Focus**

*This piece excerpts the references to women/gender in discussions in the Committee on the Fisheries Sector on the agenda item on labour standards in the fishing sector at the recently held International Labour Conference. It has been compiled by the ICSF Secretariat.*

The fifth item on the agenda of the 92<sup>nd</sup> session of the International Labour Conference (ILC), held in June 2004, was on “Work in the fishing sector: A discussion with a view to the Adoption of a Comprehensive Standard (a Convention supplemented by a Recommendation)”.

The new standard was discussed with a view to revising the seven existing ILO instruments applicable to the fishing sector—five Conventions and two Recommendations. It is worth noting that these ILO fishing labour standards were adopted a long time ago, in 1920, 1959 and 1966, and are not, therefore, reflective of the changes that have since taken place in fishing operations. Moreover, the level of ratifications of these instruments has been low.

The Conclusions adopted by the Committee on the Fisheries Sector at the ILC aim to reach, for the first time, the majority of the world’s fishers, including those on board small fishing vessels, including on rivers and inland waters. They also aim to provide protection to the self-employed, including to those who are paid in a share of the catch. They are to apply to all fishers and fishing vessels engaged in commercial fishing operations, defined as all fishing operations, including fishing operations on rivers and inland waters, with the exception of subsistence fishing and recreational fishing.

Certain categories of fishers and fishing vessels may be exempted from the requirements of the Convention, where the application is considered to be impracticable. However, such exclusions could occur only after consultation with the representative organizations of fishing vessel owners and fishers. The proposed standards also aim to include issues related to occupational safety and health, and social security—issues that have not so far been addressed.

During discussions in the Committee on the Fisheries Sector several delegates raised issues related to women and to small-scale fishing. Some of these discussions, as contained in the Provisional Record of the session, are summarized below.

During the Introduction, the Chairperson “recalled that the purpose of this first consideration of a new comprehensive standard was to strengthen decent work in the fishing sector, to promote opportunities for women and men to obtain decent and productive work, in conditions of freedom, equity, security and humanity.” He also pointed to the challenging task ahead: “to prepare a standard that did justice to the great diversity of the sector, the many types and sizes of vessels, the variety of fishing operations, and the different levels of development in the States concerned.”

During the General Discussion, several members referred to the importance of bringing small-scale family-run fishing operations, accounting for most workers in the sector, under the coverage of the standards. The Government Member from Canada pointed to the necessity of developing international labour standards specific to the fishing sector with particular focus on occupational safety and health, and emphasized that the text should provide strong protection for fishers and be flexible enough to accommodate diverse operations, conditions and employment relationships.

**Part I. Definitions and scope***Definitions, Clause 5 (c)*

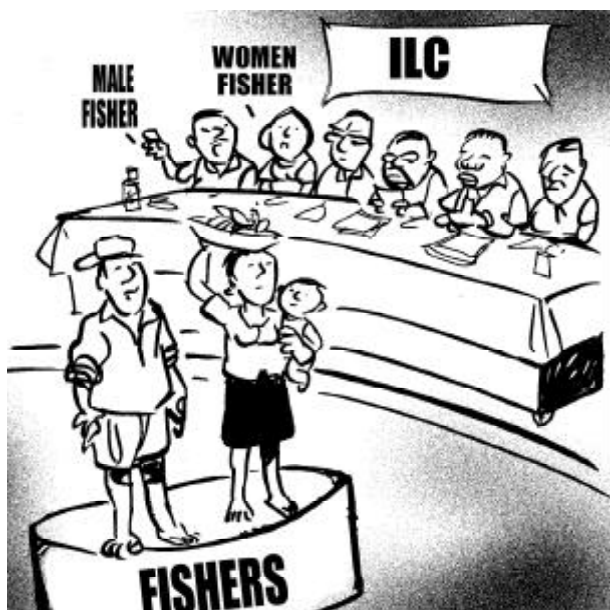
With reference to the definition of “fisher”, the Government member of Brazil, speaking also on behalf of the Government member of Chile, introduced an amendment to add, at the beginning of clause (c), the following phrase: “without prejudice to the provisions of national legislation, for the purposes of this Convention.” This amendment addressed a possible exclusion from protection of fishers, who were not working aboard ships. According to Brazilian legislation, workers working in aqua farming, as well as persons catching crabs in swamps or picking oysters were also considered fishers. These were currently not covered by the Office text, since presence aboard a fishing vessel was a strict requirement. The Government member of Brazil stressed that the amendment’s goal was not to provide an automatic extension of cover, but to allow member States to fill gaps resulting from too strict a definition of fishers,

thus giving discretion to member States to extend the cover of the Convention to other groups of workers they considered fishers” (para 149).

The Government member of Norway understood the concerns of the Government members of Brazil and Chile, but pointed out that Norwegian legislation did not treat workers involved in fish harvesting as fishers. They were covered by regulations for shore-based workers. Since the amendment created two alternative definitions of fisher, Norway did not support it. Member States could, in any case, extend the protection to other types of workers, if they so wished (para 150). The Norwegian position was supported by several other Government members, including Greece and Germany. The Employer and Worker Vice-Chairpersons expressed sympathy with the reasons for the proposed amendment, but said they could not support it.

The representative of the Secretary-General pointed out that article 19, paragraph 8, of the ILO Constitution, allows governments to apply more favourable conditions than those provided for in a Convention or Recommendation. On that basis, the Government member of Brazil withdrew the amendment.

Following this, the Government member of Argentina submitted an amendment, seconded by the government member of Brazil, to insert the words “man or woman” after the word “person” in clause (c) on definition of “fisher”. This was done because the concept of gender did not appear anywhere, and they felt it important for issues such as accommodation, to consider that the vessel could be carrying women as well as men (para 161).



The Government member of Brazil added that, besides the question of arrangements on board, very real problems, such as sexual harassment on board fishing vessels, needed to be addressed (para 162).

However, this amendment was opposed by several Government members and by the Employer and Worker Vice-Chairpersons, given that after lengthy discussions it had been agreed that the term “fisher” was a term that would cover both men and women. The Government member of Germany also opposed the amendment, noting that specific issues related to the situation of women could be taken into account elsewhere in the text. The amendment was withdrawn.

### **Part III. Minimum requirements for work on board fishing vessels**

#### *Part III.2. Medical Examination*

The Government members of Argentina, Brazil and Chile submitted an amendment to Point 20, clause (a), to add after the word “examinations” the words, “also considering gender issues”. The Government member of Chile explained that provisions on medical examinations should take into account gender issues (para 424).

However, the Employer Vice-Chairperson rejected the amendment given that the Committee had earlier agreed that “fisher” comprised men and women. The Government member of France considered the amendment unjustified and pointed out that it was up to the doctor to check the aptitude for work of both men and women. It was further pointed out that such an amendment would set a precedent for every ILO Convention concerning aptitude for work. The Government member of Chile subsequently withdrew the amendment.

### **Part IV. Conditions of service**

#### *IV.1 Manning and hours of rest*

The worker members submitted an amendment to replace the title “Manning” with “Crewing/manning” (para 459). It was explained that this was to provide a more gender-neutral terminology. The proposal was to use “crewing/manning”, a more inclusive term, in the title while keeping “manning” in the substantive provisions, because of its legal significance. This was opposed by the Employer Vice-Chairperson, who considered that “manning” meant “resourcing the

vessel”. It was also pointed out that the Committee had already decided not to use the term “crew member” for fisher. Following opposition from other Government members the amendment was withdrawn.

## **Part VI. Health protection, medical care and social security**

### *VI.1 Medical Care*

The Worker member from the United Kingdom introduced an amendment to replace in clause (a) the word “appropriate” by “specified”; add “, including women’s sanitary protection and discreet and environmentally friendly disposal units,” after the word “supplies”; and to add “and applicable international standards” after the word “voyage”, to be proactive in protecting the health of women fishers (para 610).

The Employer Vice-Chairperson further proposed a subamendment to add the words “and gender” to the original text of the paragraph, as follows: “taking into account the number and gender of fishers on board”.

However, the Employer’s proposal was opposed by the Government member of Germany as it narrowed the scope of the text too much. It was stated that this was not an occasional medical problem, but a regular day-to-day issue of personal hygiene. She therefore fully supported the Workers’ amendment. The amendment was also supported by the Government members of Argentina, Brazil, Chile, France, Guatemala, Mexico, Spain and Venezuela.

The Government member of Greece considered the second part of the amendment too detailed and subamended it to have it placed in the Recommendation, the position to be recommended by the Drafting Committee. It was a health not a medical issue. The Government member of the United Kingdom seconded this. The amendment was finally adopted as subamended by the Government member of Greece.

Part D (Proposed Conclusions with a view to a Recommendation, Part III. Health protection, medical care and social security), para 60 thus states that “The competent authority should establish the list of medical supplies, including women’s sanitary protection and discreet environmentally friendly disposal units, and equipment to be carried on fishing vessels appropriate to the risks concerned.”



**Statement / Labour****Right to decent work**

*This is the text of the ICSF Statement to the Committee on the Fishing Sector at the 93rd Session of the International Labour Conference in June 2005.*

1. The proposed Convention and Recommendation contained in Report V (2B) concerning work in the fishing sector go a long way in protecting and promoting rights of fishers to decent conditions of work. However, it falls short of promoting the rights of fishers who undertake commercial beach-seine operations, diving and gleaning that do not necessarily involve the use of any fishing vessels.
2. While commercial beach-seine operations are widespread in Asia and Africa, commercial shellfish gathering through diving and gleaning are common all over the world. The latter category also employs a large number of persons, including women. Extending provisions of health protection, medical care and social security to this category of persons, where reasonable and practicable, would do justice to women in fishing, in particular, and it will help the proposed Convention to meaningfully address fishing activities where women's participation is more important than that of men's. This would, however, require broadening the definition of a 'fisher' in the proposed Convention also to include those employed in shore-based fishing operations, who do not necessarily work on board any fishing vessel.
3. ICSF's consultations with artisanal and small-scale fishers' organizations in Africa, Asia and Latin America since the 92nd Session of the International Labour Conference 2004, demonstrate an overwhelming support to the inclusion of social security provisions in the proposed Convention, and it has been suggested that such provisions should extend to fishers irrespective of their sphere of fishing operation. It has been further proposed that these provisions should be no less than those included under the 1952 Minimum Standards for Social Security Convention (C.102).
4. The December 2004 tsunami in the Indian Ocean that took an unprecedented toll of human lives, at least 300,000, including a large number of fishermen and women from coastal fishing communities, is a sad testimony to the urgent need for social security measures for small-scale fishers. Very few of the fishers who perished in the tsunami wave-surge in the affected countries came under any social security scheme.
5. Moreover, while welcoming the proposed degree of flexibility in relation to minimum age, medical examination, occupational safety and health and fishers' work agreement, the artisanal and small-scale fishers urge that the provisions for artisanal and small-scale fishing vessels undertaking international fishing voyages should be no different from those applicable to larger vessels undertaking such voyages.
6. As far as larger vessels are concerned, ICSF would like the proposed Work in Fishing Convention, 2005, to ensure that the protection afforded to fishers on board larger vessels by current International Labour Organization (ILO) instruments are at least retained, if not further improved. The ILO should make efforts to link up proposed labour standards with international instruments for fisheries management, particularly at the level of regional fisheries management organizations, and ensure that effective labour standards for crew on board larger fishing vessels are a pre-requisite for effective fisheries management, especially with regard to straddling fish stocks and highly migratory fish stocks.
7. Last but not least, ICSF would like to wish the Committee all success in its deliberations and would like to see a Convention sufficiently flexible and protective for artisanal and small-scale fishing, on the one hand, and adequately prescriptive for large-scale fishing operations, on the other.
8. We would also like to take this opportunity to announce a panel discussion on *ILO Labour*

*Standards for the Fishing Sector: A Small-Scale Fisheries Perspective* that will be held on Tuesday, 14 June 2005 from 14.30 to 17.30 hrs at the John Knox International Center, 27 ch. des Crêts-de-Pregny, CH-1218, Grand-Saconnex, Genève, Suisse, Tel: 0041-22-747 0000. ICSF is happy to invite all interested members of this Committee to the panel discussion where representatives of small-scale fishers from Africa, Asia, and Latin America are expected to speak.

**Comment / Labour****Not broad enough**

*Women who work to support their husbands' fishing activities should also be covered by the proposed ILO Convention on Work in the Fishing Sector*

**This comment is by Cornelia Quist, Member of Vin Vis, Netherlands, and a Member of ICSF**

---

I was very happy with the contents of the ICSF Statement at the International Labour Conference calling for a broader definition of 'fisher'. Don't you think it is also good to include the 'collaborating spouse' in the definition? Many women who work in the family fishing enterprise have no other status than that of wife of a fisherman and her work is primarily seen as a sort of extension of her domestic activities. Therefore, she has no right to represent the family enterprise, to be elected to the boards of fishermen's organizations or to join social security schemes. The principle of equal treatment for men and women in a self-employed activity should be followed, to include spouses who are not employees or partners, but who habitually, under the conditions laid down by national law, participate in the activities of the self-employed worker and perform the same or ancillary tasks.

Regarding 'collaborating spouse', there is legislation in France that covers this. This legislation was achieved as the result of the demands of fishermen's wives in Brittany, following the crisis in the fisheries sector in the country. Women demanded the status of 'fisherman's wife' in order to benefit from social security (retirement) provisions, professional rights and professional training. This was achieved on 18 November 1997 with the passing of the Fisheries Orientation Law. Fishermen's wives were given the status of spouse, with rights to retirement benefits, to represent their husbands on economic councils, and to training sessions.

*Cornelia can be contacted at [cornelie.quist@wolmail.nl](mailto:cornelie.quist@wolmail.nl)*

**Book Review/ Globalization****Changing Tides: Gender, Fisheries and Globalization.**

*Edited by Barbara Neis, Marian Brinkley, Siri Gerrard and Maria Cristina Maneschy. Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2005, 307 pages.*

**Reviewed by Jackie Sunde, a researcher with the Masifundise Development Trust, Cape Town, South Africa**

*Changing Tides: Gender, Fisheries and Globalization* is an exceptional collection of research articles, case studies, reports and brief commentaries spanning 18 countries and including women fishworkers, community activists, researchers and academics from the South and the North. This book captures the work of a unique, ongoing research and development process, originating in Canada, that explores the way in which globalization is impacting on women's lives and gender relations within fisheries. The perspective of the book is clearly stated—it adopts “a feminist approach that seeks to be global, critical, holistic and integrative”. The editors must be highly commended for bringing together a very vast sea of literature on each of the aspects—gender, globalization and fisheries—and for challenging the boundaries of conventional methodologies by documenting and collating such diverse contributions in a most useful and creative way.

The book itself reflects the very nature of this project—reflective, dense, integrative, detailed and diverse. Continually challenging the reader to move from women's grounded experiences to theory and back to locality, it does take considerable time to read and digest. In thinking about the readership, I was struck by the possibility that this book will not be easily accessible to some of the participants in this project—and yet it is an important part of the process in and of itself. Several of the articles draw rather heavily on the language of taken-for-granted conceptual frameworks of feminism, poststructuralism and deconstruction in their understandings of globalization, race and gendered identities, whilst others, most notably the authors of the article on *Changes in Icelandic Fisheries*, are particularly good at weaving explanations of these theoretical tools throughout their discussion,

thereby extending the reader's own understanding of how we can make linkages as we move through information of this kind.

The editors have tried to assist the reader by structuring the book in such a way that the reader is able to assimilate the depth and complexity of the task of linking these broad topics. The introduction by Barbara Neis maps out the rationale for the structure of the book, providing an overview of the development of knowledge in the fields of gender, globalization and fisheries, and locating the book within the broader framework of the research initiatives that have shaped the contributions. The book is divided into six sections. The first two chapters provide an overview of the key issues. Most helpful is Martha MacDonald's chapter on *Building a Framework for Analyzing the Relationships Between Gender, Globalization and Fisheries*, which begins to “map linkages” and guides the reader to some of the questions that might be asked “from trawl” right through the production and consumption line to “the table”.

The book is simultaneously a journey of mapping the linkages for the reader as well as stretching conventional understandings and conceptual maps for understanding gender and globalization. As MacDonald notes, fisheries provides “an excellent vantage point for exploring the processes of capital accumulation and relations of class and gender.” It is as if the addition of ‘fisheries’ to globalization takes one on a deeper voyage, enables one to extend the depth and range of knowledge of women's lived experiences and hear previously unheard voices.

In the second and third sections, the interweaving of regional and local case studies with theoretical reflections on issues of women's identities, roles, rights, race and class has the effect of successfully keeping the book grounded in women's lived experiences of fisheries, and maps the geography of household and community at the centre of a global frame. The result is that as one reads these local stories, and then re-reads them through a conceptual lens in a following section, one sees the linkages between the lives of women living on the east coast of Canada with those of women dependent on fisheries in villages on the south coast of India.

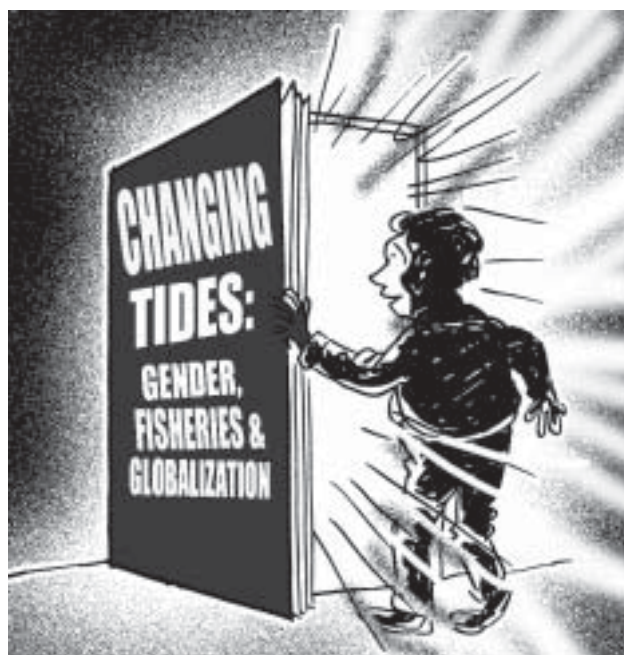
Section Four comprises a wide range of reflections on the ways in which the impact of globalization on fisheries

management issues is mediated by gender, class, cultural and national identities. The contributions highlight the way in which globalization and gender discrimination combine to shape women's access to marine resources within marine conservation systems in Mexico, threaten women's occupational health in Chile as well as limits their participation in specific approaches to management systems such as quality control systems introduced in Norway. The destructive impact of greedy, accumulative, gender-blind fisheries management systems is highlighted by the article on the impact of the individual quota system on communities in Iceland. The fact that women are not passive victims of these impacts is illuminated by the article on the use of trawler bycatch in Ghana, where class status enables certain women to enhance their entrepreneurial power in a globalizing fisheries context.

In Section Five, the authors pose critical questions regarding the nature of information gathering and warn against the dangers of "intellectual imperialism" mirroring the exploitative nature of globalization through one-sided research processes. Siri Gerrard's article suggests that feminist approaches to research provide a range of methodologies that can mitigate against unequal relations in a context in which access to information shapes power relations. The need for researchers in the North to learn from the insights of frameworks developed in the South as well as for inter-sectoral, multi-disciplinary approaches is motivated by two Canadian academics who have transferred a conceptual framework developed by Indian feminist Bina Agarwal for understanding the materialist basis of gendered aspects of resource degradation in India, to a fisheries context in Newfoundland, Canada.

In the final section, the impact of the intersections of a neoliberal, capitalist global system with unequal relations of power along gender, race, class, cultural and geographical lines is underscored both through the statement from the Gender, Globalization and Fisheries Network Workshop from which the initiative for this book arose as well as in the "last words" presented by Barbara Neis and Maria Cristina Maneschy. The authors of this section provide a very useful overview of the key themes that emerge in the book as well as identifying a research agenda for the future.

The fact that globalization processes are "fundamentally gendered" is strongly illuminated through the 'fisheries'



and 'gender' lenses used in this book. The work presented here deepens our understanding of the very destructive impacts of these processes by mapping the interstices of these systems of power relations at all levels of our lives. However, whilst mapping these destructive forces, it simultaneously highlights the strength of women's resistance and the way in which feminist perspectives point to alternative ways of living and interacting with our fisheries and other natural resources. Early on in the book, Indian feminist activist Nalini Nayak reminds us that feminist approaches to working within the fisheries sector have long emphasized the need for an alternative development paradigm and a more sustainable way of living that is based on "fisheries for need not greed".

This collection suggests that creative research and development projects such as that of the one through which this book was produced, which draw on the critical insights of gendered analyses whilst also strengthening networks for transformation across the globe, might enable us to begin to "imagine and fight for alternatives...more likely to sustain life and enhance justice" (McMahon, 2002).

Jackie can be contacted at [suntel@netactive.co.za](mailto:suntel@netactive.co.za)

# Gender Focus

A collection of articles from *Yemaya*

Women of fishing communities across the world play vital roles in fisheries, and in sustaining their households, communities, social networks and cultures. While these roles are central to maintaining livelihoods and the very activity of fisheries, they often remain unacknowledged and undervalued.

*Yemaya*, the gender and fisheries newsletter from ICSF was initiated in 1999 to draw attention to women's roles and work in the fisheries and in fishing communities, as well as to initiatives being taken by them to organize and defend their interests and the interests of their communities. It was also to provide a meaningful forum for sharing of experiences, views and strategies.

This web dossier compiles selected articles from *Yemaya* by region—Asia, Africa, Latin America, Europe, Pacific Islands and North America. The articles, taken together, provide a broad overview of the key issues facing women in the fisheries sector in each region, as well as the local, national and regional initiatives being taken by women's groups to organize around their concerns.

ICSF ([www.icsf.net](http://www.icsf.net)) is an international NGO working on issues that concern fishworkers the world over. It is in status with the Economic and Social Council of the UN and is on ILO's Special List of Non-Governmental International Organizations. It also has Liaison Status with FAO. Registered in Geneva, ICSF has offices in Chennai, India, and Brussels, Belgium. As a global network of community organizers, teachers, technicians, researchers and scientists, ICSF's activities encompass monitoring and research, exchange and training, campaigns and action, as well as communications.