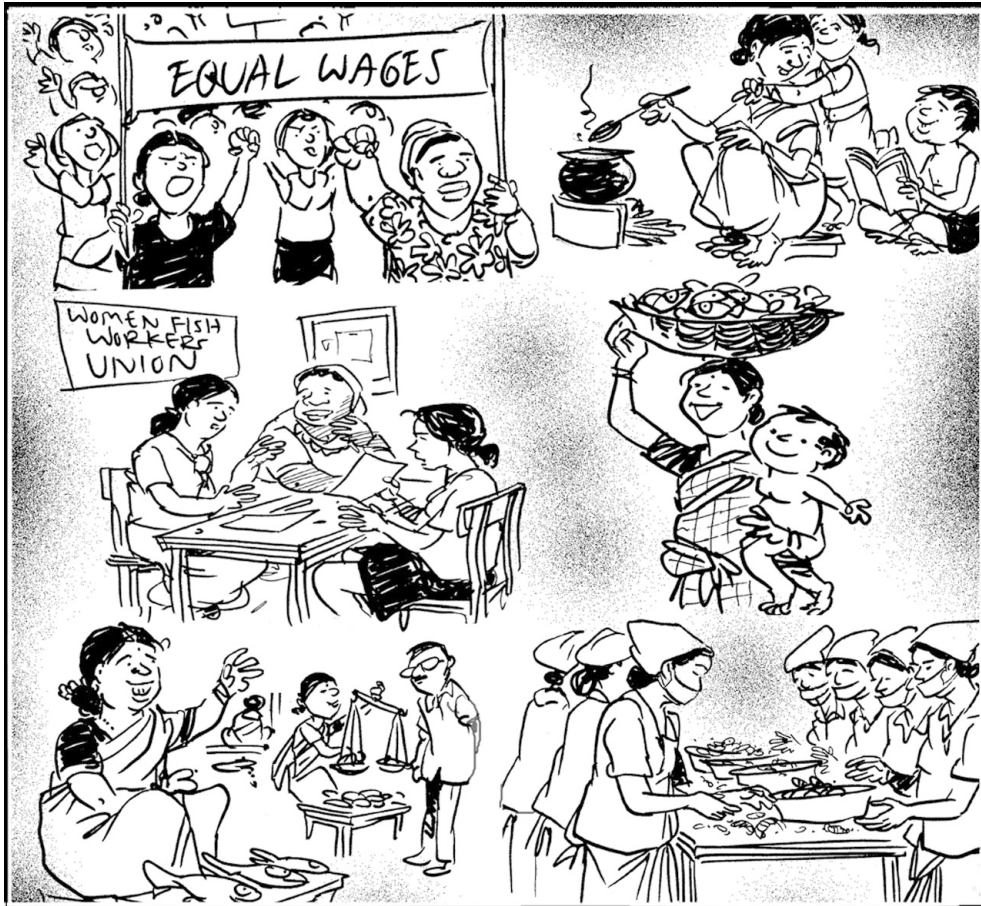


# Gender Agenda

Women in fisheries:  
a collection of articles from *SAMUDRA Report*



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**International Collective in Support of Fishworkers**

27 College Road, Chennai 600 006, India



SAMUDRA Dossier

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## Preface

From Kochi to Fiji, from Senegal to El Salvador, from Norway to Newfoundland, women of fishing communities play a central role in the fisheries and in maintaining the social fabric of their households and communities. However, they remain largely invisible, and the roles they play, largely undocumented.

Official surveys not only often fail to capture the gender diversity of the fishing economy around the world, but they also sometimes systematically introduce biases that underestimate and underplay the role of women in the entire gamut of fisheries-related activities—from net weaving, fishing, processing and marketing of marine products to trading, arranging financial credit and engaging in aquaculture activities. As a result, women's contributions remain largely unrecognized. Policy interventions directed at supporting women's roles in the fisheries have consequently been few and far between, contributing to their systematic marginalization within the fisheries. Policymakers have consistently failed to take account of women's potential roles in environmental and development planning.

As the world's fisheries undergo fundamental changes that spring from overfishing, use of highly efficient technologies, privatization of fisheries resources and poor fisheries management, on the one hand, and the growing thrust towards fish farming, aquaculture and ecolabels, on the other, women in both the North and the South face a battery of similar problems.

In the North, the artisanal sector and way of life are in danger, as more and more artisanal fishers are pushed out of the sector by State-sponsored policies to reduce fishing capacity and limit resource exploitation. State policies tend to be geared towards protecting the interests of large industry, often at great cost to the women in the fisheries and their communities.

As coastal communities in the North lose traditional access rights to fishery resources, their cultures and future are under threat. In Norway, for instance, the associations of wives of fishermen have demanded that coastal communities be given back their rights to fish freely in coastal waters, and that the State recognize the value of coastal communities and artisanal fisheries.

In Southern countries, on the other hand, women fishworkers are struggling to retain their spaces within the fisheries sector, in the face of the larger forces of globalization and liberalization. Even as they demand better access to improved facilities for marketing, transport, storage and processing of fish, they are joining forces with men in the artisanal sector to fight against the proliferation of socially and ecologically destructive

technologies such as trawling. In Senegal, for instance, women have played a prominent role in challenging inequitable fisheries agreements between their country and the European Union, and in securing a better deal for artisanal fishworkers under such agreements. As another dimension, in Peru, a combination of machismo and bureaucracy tends to obscure the role of women in the artisanal fishing sector.

Women's contributions and concerns tend to be neglected because community and household are not part of the official fisheries management paradigm. Typically, fisheries management is a relationship between a government and a rights holder, who, in most cases, is not a community or a household but an individual. Not surprisingly, the fishers targeted by management policies are predominantly men. There is little recognition of the fact that cohesive and strong community institutions, fostered and sustained by women the world over, are the foundations for effective and equitable systems for sustainable management of fisheries resources.

Women in fisheries communities are generally not as well organized and have been less effective than men as an outside political force. Where women are organized, they have brought in a perspective that puts improving quality of life and fisheries-based livelihoods as the bottom line. For them, life is the goal, not fishing—they are concerned with sustaining not only the fisheries but also the communities that depend on them. They have brought a community perspective into the fisheries debate.

These issues relating to women in fisheries have concerned the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF) ever since it was formed as a collective of supporters of the artisanal and small-scale fisheries sector in 1986. A particular emphasis has been given to the gender dimension through the ICSF's Women in Fisheries programme. All these issues have often been debated in the pages of *SAMUDRA Report*, the triannual publication of ICSF, through contributions from a range of writers, researchers and activists. Some of those articles are now collected here in this dossier. We hope they will go towards reasserting and valorizing the roles of women in fisheries, helping them occupy the spaces they rightfully deserve.



# Women's rights and fisheries development

Nalini Nayak

**In the small-scale fisheries sector, it is women who have a predominant role**

Preparations go on all around the globe for the long-awaited Earth Summit. Knowing that official positions may not strike any creative dimensions, the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have done their best to lobby and influence policymakers. Some of these efforts are sure to pay dividends, but we from India, and I am sure, many other Asians, are more sceptical than ever. Our country, like many others, is now undergoing a process of radical structural adjustment to comply with demands of the International Monetary Fund in order to receive loans to service debts. It strikes me that this is not only a massive sell-out of our country but a sure choice against the millions in favour of a new privileged rich.

Gone are the dreams of independent India—"Swaraj", as Mahatma Gandhi called it. While people everywhere crave for independence and autonomy, here are we in India willing to surrender all under the garb of growing *Hindutva* (a movement, now also political, to establish Hindu nationalism). These processes may be difficult to understand for those who do not know much of Indian history, but these new trends are bound to take their toll on the development of fisheries too.

Thinking about women's rights and fisheries development in this context becomes all the more difficult. First of all, fisheries development has, for the most part, paid no heed to the people whose livelihoods depend on fish resources. Even the data on fisheries relate more to the economics of production rather than to the socioeconomic conditions

of the fisherfolk. Nevertheless, there are anthropological studies that document the way of life and the struggles of these communities, which highlight the survival strategies these people have worked out for themselves against all odds. While this has been the case globally, in Asia and the Third World at large, the situation of these communities is far more in jeopardy than at present.

As it stands today, the development in technology and the demand for fish have led to the depletion of fish resources. At the marketing level, further organizing of the market system is the only way to get a better price to the producer; therefore, many organizational and government efforts plan to develop an infrastructure for the same. Little do they realize that in the small-scale sector, it is the women who have been predominant; they are redundant only when there are larger bulk landings and when purchase is more on a cash than credit basis. So, organized marketing is one more way in which women get marginalized.

The other side of the coin is to see how the people within the sector themselves respond to the changing situation. Most of the reactions within the sector, be they in relation to organization of work, adoption of tools of production, mobilization, etc., have been survival strategies, which is only logical. Unlike in the organized sector, where the capitalist organizes production for greater profit, in this sector there is not much of the cake left to struggle for. Of course, in the long run, the struggle for a greater part of the profit even in the organized sector

*Our country, like many others, is now undergoing a process of radical structural adjustment to comply with demands of the International Monetary Fund in order to receive loans to service debts.*

This article by Nalini Nayak, a member of ICSF, appeared in *SAMUDRA Report* No. 5 & 6, June 1992

· becomes a fallacy because of the limits to  
· growth, depletion of raw materials, etc.  
· Finance capital begins to play a greater role  
· among the factors of production, leaving  
· labour on the defensive. But, in the  
· unorganized sector, where the dependence  
· is directly on the natural resource for a  
· livelihood, the demand on the State is for  
· greater protectionism. This demand has to  
· be accompanied by an attitude of  
· conservation as well. This, in its very  
· essence, demands a reorganization of society  
· and a rethinking of social values.

· The struggle for survival itself heralds the  
· call for the limits to growth. Development  
· in this sector does not mean having more,  
· producing more, etc., but controlling the  
· pollution of the waters, maintenance of  
· ecological balance, respect for the  
· rejuvenation of stocks and re-establishing  
· communitarian controls. These may sound  
· romantic measures even to progressive  
· thinkers today. No question is actually raised  
· about the kinds of technology used and the  
· process of production itself.

· The rate and pace at which technology  
· develops today is also a factor of concern.  
· In fishing, we speak about overefficient  
· technologies like trawling and purse-seining  
· nets, which have the capacity to take all that  
· comes in their reach without being selective.  
· Or machines that produce nets so fast that  
· people do not have the time to test them out  
· before they flood the market and cause  
· disaster in the fishery. The pace at which  
· change takes place, therefore, is faster than  
· the change in life processes itself, and  
· before people have even learnt to master one  
· innovation, they are flooded with others. This  
· disregard for time, or the race against time,  
· also throws out of gear the processes of  
· maturing—both physical and psychological.  
· So, while new technological innovations  
· disrupt all natural processes with their speed,  
· they also create numerous imbalances and  
· contradictions between traditional and  
· modern systems of knowledge, which, in  
· their turn, destabilize people and lead to  
· insecurity. The culture that new technology  
· imposes on people is often only

superimposed on old knowledge systems that  
are resilient and slow to evolve. Consciousness processes in people evolve on a very different concept of time and all change has to take this into consideration. On the other hand, despite the fact that survival strategies today have forced fishermen to adopt technologies that are overefficient and destructive, there may be a possibility to help them question this in their own favour.

The new ecological consciousness that I speak about, and which relates to production of life-time and not technological time, will find more fertile soil in aspects of traditional consciousness. To the extent that mobilization processes are geared to people's control over resources and sustainable development alternatives, then such consciousness processes are crucial in determining the ethical frame of reference and value base for new forms of organization. While I do not advocate a turning back of the clock of history, I am categorically stating that the pace of development should, and has to, be determined by the broad mass of people and not technology, taking into account the natural life cycles as against 'mastering' nature. While planning will certainly play an important role in determining priority sectors and allocation of resources, active participation of local people's organizations will have to determine production strategies. In fact, this is what people's movements are demanding today. They have reached a level of maturity, being able to determine how development in their sectors should take place. The State will have to find a new role of coordination to facilitate mutuality and transference of surplus. It is certainly not an easy task, but gone are the days when the State could hope to meet either the employment or basic needs of the growing population with its centralized thrust.

It is necessary here to indicate areas in which a conceptual rethinking will have to take place if the process of transformation has to integrate an alternative development process. The crux of the matter will be the stress on

the need-based, rather than the want-based, economy, meeting the subsistence needs of the people. This is not a romantic proposition of going back to the past because producing for need is indeed a challenge to modern science. It is a challenge to the knowledge system of modern Western science as also to technology. An acceptance of a new conceptual understanding also raises many ethical questions, which cannot be ignored. They cannot be divorced from the ongoing social processes. Only genuinely participatory processes will be able to answer these ethical questions. In fact, if we go back to fisheries themselves, the very concept of production is a question.

If fishing is an act of capture, then this is not production but hunting. If culture fishery as envisioned today is capital-intensive and leads to greater privatization, then alienation from need is a natural consequence. This kind of production will not be an alternative. These conceptualizations of production keep women totally out of it. All their unpaid household labour is relegated to the realm of reproduction and if ever they can be ‘gainfully’ employed, then they are the labour banks that can easily be exploited.

The re-conceptualization of production, therefore, has to incorporate the element of nurture, which has, at its focus, the sustenance of life, rather than profit. If we look at production from this point of view, where nurture and sustenance of life are the prime objectives, then one also sees why and how the whole patriarchal domination in society has to be upturned. In fact, it is no make-belief that ‘mal-development’, as explained by Vandana Siva and other feminists, has been a result also of gender discrimination and male appropriation of the rightful role of women and subsistence in society.

The task of nurturing the human being and meeting the subsistence of the family has been thrust on women for no rewards. Patriarchy has been the domination of nature, and therefore life, as the acme of its development, but this is what the growing

numbers of the dispossessed—which include women, and, therefore, more than half of humankind—begin to question today.

Only by looking at fisheries development in the above context does speaking of women’s rights makes sense. In fact, fisheries development may be salvaged only if women’s rights are taken seriously. When I speak here of women’s rights I mean:

- a nurture approach to fisheries at large;
- women’s participation in the decision-making process in the realm of primary production and in the development of the sector; and
- production of life and giving life basic priority and first place in the hierarchy of values.

While this may be the larger framework in which we speak about women’s rights in the development of fisheries, there is no single charter of demands that is going to make achieving this possible. It will have to be a multipronged approach.

Firstly, there is a need for a wider consciousness within the fishworker movement itself. All fishermen’s unions and associations should begin to have their women as members, even if they are not engaged directly in fishing or post-harvest activities. This is where the division in so called “primary production” is perpetuated. Only if women and all the demands of the household become the concern of the unions, would production begin to be looked at differently. This would eventually encourage the nurture aspects of life too.

Secondly, those spaces that have all along been occupied by women in the production process should continue to be retained for them. These spaces vary from country to country—in some areas, they are involved in capture but in most areas, in post-harvest work. With the coming of modernization, they tend to be dislodged, and once ousted,

• they will not be able to enter the sphere again.  
• The planners have also to keep this in mind.

• Thirdly, in areas where women have already  
• become wage workers, their rights as  
• workers have to be secured. Because of poor  
• and desperate conditions, women are used  
• as contract labour and badly exploited.  
• Efforts must be made to see that they are  
• covered by the Contract Labour Act and their  
• life and work protected. They need legal  
• protection.

• Fourthly, there are all the problems of the  
• women whose husbands work on the distant-  
• water fleets. These women are left alone to  
• care for the family for long periods of time,  
• not knowing where their husbands are and  
• with no assurance of any remittances. The  
• male workers themselves are badly exploited  
• in this sector and while they have to be  
• legally protected, other community efforts  
• have to be organized to support the women  
• who are left behind.

• Returning to our point of departure, the tone  
• of pessimism lies in the fact that the  
• restructuring and globalization of our  
• economy under pressure of international  
• financial institutions will render all people's  
• participatory processes and survival  
• struggles futile. If the Earth Summit intends,  
• in some measure, to set a new track record,  
• then it may still be meaningful to speak of  
• women's rights and fisheries development.  
• The Women's Action Agenda 21, which was  
• framed at the World Women's Congress for  
• a Healthy Planet in November 1991, includes  
• many of these areas and should, therefore,  
• receive support worldwide. ■

# Not just home-makers

Sereana Saukalou and Milika Naqasima

**Fishing is an important, though sometimes neglected, activity for women in Fiji**

For the women of Fiji, as with their sisters in much of the rest of the world, looking after homes and children is just one among several responsibilities. Their working lives have traditionally been given over to handicrafts, community development and, most importantly, fishing.

Fiji has a coastline of over 5,000 km and the total fish production in 1991 was 33,000 tonnes. The fisheries comprise mainly three subsectors: subsistence, artisanal and industrial.

Fiji is still a net importer of fish products. In 1991, for example, while it exported fish products amounting to 8,320 tonnes, the gross imports amounted to about 13,050 tonnes, comprising mainly mackerel and pilchard for domestic consumption and albacore for processing at the Pacific Fishing Company (PAFCO).

While the fishery is mainly classified into artisanal, subsistence and industrial, the fisherfolk themselves are classified into artisanal, semi-commercial, commercial and industrial.

The women of Ra District of the Western Division of Fiji are typical of this nation of islands. Here, fishing is the second most important source of income, after sugar-cane processing. Ra District has its own sugar mill, which supplies the sugar for the nation.

The fishing villages are close to one another. Yet neither the fish resources nor fishing seasons and gear are similar, even for villages separated by a mere 2 km. The Fiji government's Department of Fisheries issues

licences to fish and permits to sell. These are meant to regulate only the commercial fishery. No permits or licences are needed to fish for domestic consumption.

Fiji's Department of Fisheries is believed to be the best managed in the whole of the South Pacific. According to the Director, it is the third largest earner of revenue for the government, after the Customs and Inland Revenue departments.

The Department follows the principle of self-reliance and is against dependence on external aid agencies. It also discourages subsidies, as far as possible. Instead, it encourages individual enterprises.

For commercial fishing, licences are given only to those women who own an outboard motor and adequate fishing gear. Most women in Ra District have permits. Only a few have fishing licences.

In the north of Veti Levu, at a place called Rakiralci, a large number of women participate actively in fisheries, especially in diving for trochus.

Soqosoqo Vakarama, a women's association under the Ministry of Women and Culture, has field programmes with these fisherwomen.

## **Two kinds of boats**

Women fish almost on all days, and operate both inboard and outboard motors in Rakiraki. Two kinds of boats are used: the 28-footer and the 16-footer. The former can carry about 10 to 12 women and the latter, six to eight. With a 24-HP outboard motor,

*The Department follows the principle of self-reliance and is against dependence on external aid agencies. It also discourages subsidies, as far as possible. Instead, it encourages individual enterprises.*

This article, based on accounts by Sereana Saukalou and Milika Naqasima of Fiji and the South Pacific Mission of ICSF, appeared in SAMUDRA Report No. 8, November 1993

• the boat takes close to an hour to reach the  
• fishing ground, which is often on the seaward  
• side of the reef.

• These women are relatives of either the reef  
• owners or the chief. Diving is normally done  
• from 9.30 pm to 3 am. One night's diving  
• fetches about F\$300. While diving takes  
• place on alternate days, fishing occurs on all  
• days, except the Sabbath. Women's  
• participation in activities related to fisheries  
• also extend to making nylon nets, traps and  
• smoking fish.

• In a week, the women give the village  
• organization the value of two days' catch.  
• They retain one day's catch value for  
• education and development of the village  
• through activities like sanitation,  
• construction of jetties and community halls.  
• These women belong to the 19-50 years age  
• group. Most of the divers are older women.

• Although women and men fish together at  
• times, most often, they fish separately. On  
• Saturdays, fishing is undertaken only for the  
• family. The divers' occupational hazards  
• include deafness and joint pains.

• According to Sereana Saukalou, the  
• Coordinator of the Women's Association in  
• Rakiraki, fishing is lighter work than  
• collecting firewood and tending the garden.

• It is much more arduous to carry a basket of  
• root crops, she says, than to dive for fish and  
• collect them in the boat. In cleaning fish,  
• other family members do help, unlike in  
• cleaning and cooking root crops.

• The Ra fisherwomen preserve the fish by one  
• of several methods: smoking, drying in the  
• sun, boiling in deep-sea water or, for  
• overnight preservation, by frying. Deep-  
• freezes come in handy where electricity is  
• available.

• The fisherwomen sell their catches in towns  
• and villages. From here, middlemen buy the  
• fish to sell in other towns and cities. There  
• are also export dealers who buy fish,  
• seashells, pearls and lobsters for the overseas

markets of the United States, Australia,  
Korea, Japan and China.

The fisherwomen of Ra observe traditional territorial rights. They take particular care not to disturb one another's fishing areas and seasons.

Customary beliefs help maintain this mutual restraint. They consider the sea capable of dispensing penalties on encroachers. These may take the form of ray stings or fish poison or even a total lack of catch for the offender.

Fiji's Ministry for Women has a programme on Social and Economic Development for Women. This is usually organized around workshops and training agendas.

On the social front, they cover issues of environment, school lunch programmes, hygiene and personal goal setting. On the economic side, they deal with elementary matters of business and finance like budgeting, costing and pricing, and book-keeping.

However, according to Saukalou, even though women do participate, fishing is generally perceived to be an activity meant for men.

When they get married to men outside their locality, women who fish refuse to do so if the prevailing customs in that village are against their participation.

A woman can fish only if her husband has rights and that too, only if he is alive. She has no right to fish if her husband is dead and if she does not have sons. In general, Saukalou observes, women have a secondary status in Fijian society.

The Ministry for Women chooses to emphasize the importance of the women's own knowledge and ways of living. At the same time, it seeks to raise their economic standard of living. In the pipeline is a programme to set up, within the Department, a Fisheries Management Board, with autonomy for all the separate sections.

About the status of Fiji's women, Saulcalou says, "I feel fishing is one area which they understand and adapt to well. Above all, it is a traditional obligation of their community." This feeling is echoed by Milika Naqasima, convener, board of trustees of the Women and Fisheries Network, headquartered in Fiji. "As regular food providers within semi-subsistence communities," she elaborates, "women are well placed to perform a central role as fisheries resource managers".

"But," cautions Milka Naqasima, "the continued neglect of women's fisheries activities and of subsistence fisheries in general could have critical implications for the future food security, the health and the very survival of Pacific island communities".■



# Dragging women through suffering

Vicky Silk

**The technology of dragging has ravaged the fishery of Newfoundland and caused grief most to the local women**

*The fact that our forefathers predicted the eventual outcome of dragger technology 70 years ago makes today's crisis even more of a tragedy.*

**D**ragger technology was first introduced in Eastern Canada in the late 1890s. At the time, it was poorly received by fishers who believed the technology would eventually destroy fish stocks. The Royal Commission of 1928 described otter trawls with mouths a hundred feet across, catching 130,000-250,000 lb of fish.

The Commission had then predicted that draggers would destroy the spawn of cod and haddock, destroy the feed grounds, take large quantities of immature and unmarketable fish and glut the market, making it impossible for inshore fishers to dispose of their catches.

The fact that our forefathers predicted the eventual outcome of dragger technology 70 years ago makes today's crisis even more of a tragedy. Fishers vigorously protested the use of this gear because of its potentially negative impact on the inshore fishery.

Nevertheless, after the Second World War, the augmentation of the shore-based, fixed gear fishery with an industrial, mobile fleet became a reality.

Dragger technology was designed to enable the pursuit of a mobile offshore fishery. One of the advantages assumed for this type of gear was the possibility for greater exploitation of fish stocks on a year-round basis.

The technology provided better access to relatively unexploited stocks, thereby ensuring greater profits for its corporate

owners. Side trawlers were common until the late 1950s, when stern trawlers came to be widely accepted as being far superior. In side trawls, the gear is worked from the side of the boat; in stern trawlers, from the stern. The shift from side trawlers to modern-day draggers saw an incredible increase in the catch and carrying capacity of the boats. The side class trawlers of the 1950s had a gross tonnage of 300-500 GT, whereas the newer draggers have a 2,500-4,000 GT capacity.

Modern draggers are large boats, usually 120-160 ft long, with a capacity of up to about 300,000 lb of fish. They generally employ around 16 men who go on 8-25 day trips at sea.

During the peak years in the mid-1980s, boats of Fishery Products International (FPI) would sometimes show up with 400,000 lb of fish on board. This was before certain boxing and icing regulations decreased the carrying capacity of the big draggers.

Draggers are primarily owned by corporations such as FPI and National Sea, although there are smaller draggers in the 65-ft range owned by smaller companies. The fishing technique employed is called otter trawling or dragging, and involves huge nets attached to the boat by cables. Large metal squares, called otter boards, weighing up to 5 tonnes each, keep the mouth of the net open.

## **Channelling fish**

The otter boards drag along the bottom, smoothening the way for the gear while also

This article, by Vicky Silk of the Canadian Oceans Caucus, appeared in *SAMUDRA Report* No. 9, February 1994



Table

**Two fishing technologies: dragger vs. hand-line**

	Dragger	Inshore hand-line
BOAT:	<i>Atlantic Vigour</i> Corporate owned 150-ft steel hull Cost: Can\$2 mn	Inshore hand-liner Privately owned 22-ft fibreglass hull Cost: Can\$20-22,000
CREW:	32 men Non-unionized Hired through Nova Services who take percentage of pay	1-2 people, male and/or female Unionized
SALES:	Primarily to own corporate interest	To worker-owned co-operative fish plant
FISHES:	Clams	Cod
GEAR:	Mobile 'track and catch' Offshore and year-round	Inshore fixed (hook-and-line) Seasonally, depending on migratory patterns of fish
CATCH:	May lose all income on occasion, due to quality of clams Average catch: 250,000- 330,000 lb clams in shell for 20-25 days' fishing	Known in the morning if there is a market for the day's catch and how much can be sold Average catch: 1,800-2,500 lb cod per day trip
FUEL:	Average consumption 375,000 l per round trip of 20-25 days 1.36 l fuel to catch 1lb of clam in shell	20 l of gas per day trip 1 l of fuel to catch 124 lb of cod

channelling the fish into the mouth of the net. Once a school of fish is trapped between the huge otter boards, escape is unlikely. This type of gear is unselective, both in relation to the size of fish caught and the mix of species. It is also disruptive to the seabed.

From the perspective of the owners, this gear is considered to be more economically viable because it allows exploitation of large volumes of fish in a relatively short period of time with a greater percentage of profit.

One example of this approach is the winter dragger fishery of the northern cod, in which draggers fish the four main spawning grounds of this stock. When the fish notice spawning, they mass together by the thousands. This presents an ideal opportunity

to catch most fish at low cost and effort. The dragger fishery employs a broad range of modern fish-finding aids such as sonar, cableless net sounders, LORAN and automatic course recorders.

The dragger captains have access to scientific information about water temperatures, breeding ranges and other fish habitats. This contributes to a highly intensive fishery. That is why modern dragger techniques have been dubbed 'instrument fishing'. It is interesting to consider the rapacious nature of dragger technology. In terms of who designs, builds and operates the boats, it is an exclusively male technology. It is designed by men, for their own ownership and use. In Newfoundland, the workplace is 100 per cent male. Dragger fishing approaches a natural

· resource with very little sensitivity or  
· selectivity. Its main objective is to take what  
· it wants as quickly and brutally as possible.  
· There is a parallel between this masculine  
· orientation and the approach that many men  
· within our patriarchal society take towards  
· women, children and natural resources.

·  
· Not surprisingly, in a lengthy discussion of  
· stern trawling, 14 men were reported to have  
· had a frank discussion about the technology,  
· yet not once did they mention the issues of  
· conservation, over exploitation or social  
· impact of the new gear.

· Today's dragger fishery no longer involves  
· uncertainty or chance: if the fish are there,  
· they will be found. As one observer says,  
· we now have the technological capacity to  
· track down the last fish in the ocean.

· Dragger technology's effect is felt not just  
· by the target species but by the by-catch  
· species and the benthic habitat as well. The  
· table on the facing page provides some  
· comparative information about a typical  
· modern dragger and Newfoundland's  
· traditional hook and line technology.

· The problem of dragging has been discussed  
· by Jim Beckett, a member of the Canadian  
· Atlantic Fisheries Science Advisory  
· Committee. He points out that bottom  
· dragging can damage the young of the target  
· species. It also decreases the survival rate of  
· eggs by dislodging and destroying them.  
· Once detached, the eggs become food for a  
· broader range of predators.

· Beckett argues that closure of vital areas to  
· all fishing, or at least restructuring gear type  
· to hook-and-line or floating gill nets,  
· combined with closed seasons, could ease  
· the problem of exploitation, particularly on  
· spawning grounds. To give an insight into  
· the destructive potential of this gear type,  
· Dr. Leslie Harris describes a mid-water trawl  
· whose opening would allow 16 jumbo jets  
· in a four by four formation to fly through it.  
· As of today, thanks to draggers, 17 of 20  
· Newfoundland groundfish species have a  
· lower biomass than is normal, with a dozen

of them having the lowest biomass ever  
recorded.

It is questionable whether or not the northern  
cod stocks will actually be able to ever  
recover.

### **Unwanted by-catch**

The only problem that corporations,  
government officials and scientists will  
openly admit exists with dragger technology  
is that of unwanted by-catch and immature  
fish.

By-catch refers to anything living that gets  
caught and destroyed in the process of  
dragging for a target species.

Since draggers scoop up thousands of pounds  
of fish at a time, all of them under  
phenomenal pressure as they are dragged  
aboard, nothing survives.

Two common techniques used by dragger  
management officials in order to offset the  
few government regulations that exist are  
high-grading at sea and using smaller mesh  
liners in the cod end. The process of high-  
grading refers to the illegal discard of  
valueless immature fish that are supposed  
to count against a boat's quota.

While 100 per cent observer coverage of  
draggers was recognized by inshore fishers  
as one method of curtailing such corrupt  
practices, it was not until 1991 that this was  
actually achieved, just months before the  
moratorium was called.

It is apparent that the potential of draggers  
to decimate whole ecosystems is virtually  
unlimited. This is obvious considering the  
catching capacity of a trawl, the highly  
sophisticated fish-finding technologies and  
the corporate greed that fuels the process.

There is an apparent unwillingness on the  
part of fishery scientists to err on the side of  
caution. This seems paradoxical since  
science preaches the importance of  
conservation and balance within ecosystems.  
Another striking peculiarity of the approach

of science to the fishery is that stock assessment in recent years has been based on the catches of the dragger fleet plus two annual DFO surveys. Rather than judge the health of the stock by natural migratory patterns, it has been judged by the volume of the dragger catch.

Since tracking and catching technologies are so sophisticated, there is no accurate picture of what is truly available, in terms of normal abundance.

The harvesting effort of modern technology, combined with bad science and gross mismanagement, has had a negative impact particularly on women fishworkers of rural Newfoundland.

With the loss of the northern cod fishery, they have lost access to economic activities. Regulatory policies and the moratorium have also hit them badly.

### **Impact on women**

In order to appreciate the impact that the introduction of dragger technology has had on women, it is necessary to take a look at the current status of women who are either direct wage earners or indirect wage contributors in fishing households.

One could even argue that women's homes and communities have been forced on to the bargaining table by exclusively male unions, government and corporate policy makers. The re-introduction of dragger technology in the 1950s, which coincided with Newfoundland's modernization phase, saw women alienated from their traditional involvement with the industry.

Women have a major investment in the fishery; their jobs, households and ultimately, their communities are dependent on the health of the fishery.

Fish plants are almost always the largest employers in rural fishing communities, especially of women, and the steady decline in fish landings has meant a decline in fish plant work. To give one perspective of what

the traditional involvement of women was, consider a census taken between 1891 and 1921 on Fogo Island. It shows that the number of women engaged in the fishery at that time ranged from 40.5 per cent to 43.4 per cent of the total workforce.

It is also notable that, in the 1950s, trapmen of Seldom, Fogo Island, sent out their fish to be cured on a piece-work basis to other outports due to a shortage of female labour in Seldom.

The realization that women workers were being displaced by overfishing was recorded in a 1991 government survey which discovered that 2,850 plant workers would not be eligible for unemployment insurance due to a shortage of fish landed. In six of the eight districts where 20 per cent or more workers would not be eligible, over half of these people were women. The political issues at stake get highlighted when one realizes that government officials were aware of impending disaster, yet chose to turn a blind eye to many of the key issues.

Many plant workers who have a lengthy historical attachment to processing northern cod are currently not eligible for compensation due to the restrictive nature of the guidelines, which do not reflect the fact that cod landings have been in decline over the past. This decline has resulted in fewer weeks of work for thousands of people each summer. The federal government, in drawing up qualifying guidelines for the Northern Cod Adjustment and Recovery Program (NCARP), ignored one crucial fact. This was that plant workers were finding it increasingly difficult to obtain unemployment insurance.

While fishers have always had the ability to manipulate the unemployment insurance system either by general averaging of their earnings or by transferring catches into the accounts of other fishers, plant workers have never had this advantage.

### **Loss of earnings**

They have lost innumerable weeks of earnings because they can not hold back

· hours of work until they have enough in for  
· a stamp.

· Women are the most poorly compensated  
· since they received fewer hours of work at  
· lesser rates of pay. The average NCARP  
· benefit for female plant workers is Can\$254  
· per week, compared to Can\$299 for male  
· plant workers.

· Single-parent women can wind up needing  
· welfare benefits to top up their NCARP wages.  
· One woman with five children and no spouse  
· support gets NCARP benefits worth Can \$900  
· per month. There is no recognition at all of  
· women's 'ground crew' contribution and the  
· undeniable amount of work they do within  
· fishing households. Wages for housework  
· and reproductive activities remain well  
· outside the realm of reality as far as policy-  
· makers are concerned.

· Although there are now laws that recognize  
· women's domestic labour through financial  
· recompense in divorce settlements, the  
· recognition seems to end there. It is assumed  
· that if the needs of the male head of the  
· household are met, then surely all needs have  
· been addressed. Household issues are not  
· addressed, nor are some of the broader issues  
· of community survival. The current  
· provincial government's commitment to  
· downsizing the industry by half or more will  
· leave communities economically devastated.  
· Many single-industry towns depend on the  
· fishery as the sole source of employment.  
· The closure of plants will mean huge losses  
· to these communities and their residents.

· While fish landed may be trucked around the  
· province on a daily basis, a work-force is  
· not nearly as mobile. Traditionally, men are  
· more able to travel for work, have more  
· transferable skills and are not burdened with  
· the responsibilities of care-giving and home  
· maintenance.

· Women, on the other hand, look after  
· children, extended families and the home.  
· Many women are single parents, relying

heavily on family and friends to help with  
childcare.

After the economic backbone is removed  
from many small communities through plant  
closures, economic pressures may well force  
mass compliance with what could easily be  
labelled forced resettlement. It can be argued  
that women have the most to lose from this  
process. ■



· obligations. Coastal fishing could not be  
· looked at merely from the perspective of  
· economic efficiency and competition, they  
· argued.

· Their demands were aimed at rescuing a way  
· of life, where people were woven into  
· intimate relationships with their social and  
· natural surroundings. Coastal fishing, not  
· distant-water fishing, maintained the coastal  
· cultural heritage and the many small fishing  
· communities. This was by giving several  
· people opportunities for a meaningful life,  
· not merely assuring prosperity for a few.

· Women in Norwegian fishing communities  
· have always been the strings that kept the  
· weaving together. While men are away at  
· seasonal fisheries, these women keep the  
· family and the community going, socially,  
· culturally and materially. They have been the  
· providers of daily food through subsistence  
· husbandry (some sheep and a cow) and of  
· woollen clothing for use at home as well as  
· at sea.

· This domestic production suffered in the  
· 1950s and the 1960s. In today's fishing  
· households, due to modernization and  
· specialization, women's inputs, along with  
· their housework, are service tasks which  
· supplement the income from fishing and  
· wage-work.

· As fishing opportunities decline, such  
· supplementary income is becoming ever  
· more important. Norwegian women are also  
· increasingly entering fisheries politics,  
· voicing their concerns for a decent, dignified  
· and just treatment of fishworkers. And  
· among themselves, they discuss increases in  
· wife-battering, family conflicts and divorces  
· prompted by inactivated and frustrated  
· husbands.

· The political action by fisherwomen led to  
· some subsidies to lessen the immediate  
· economic burden imposed by the closure of  
· the coastal cod fishery. But the questions of  
· future access to resources and their

distribution were settled by the authorities  
and the national fishworkers' association.

The solution to the resource crisis was the  
introduction of boat quotas. With that, the  
open access for coastal fishworkers became  
history. Limits to fishing efforts were reached  
by quotas to large-scale as well as small-scale  
vessels. But in coastal fishing not everyone  
got a boat quota. Those who had caught the  
smallest amounts of codfish in the previous  
three years were excluded.

For the large group of small boats which  
were excluded by this system, a small  
amount of the total permissible annual catch  
was set aside. Those without quotas can  
compete in fishing for this amount each  
being limited by a maximum quantity of  
catch. Newcomers cannot enter coastal  
fisheries, except by buying a vessel with a  
quota. The closed access thus functions as a  
privatization of what was previously a  
common property resource. Almost all  
boatowners are male.

The introduction of boat quotas has thereby  
formalized fish resources as an all-male  
property. Although fishing is heavily male-  
dominated, women have always been  
fishing—when necessary. They have taken  
part in the seasonal herring and cod fisheries,  
where many hands were needed. They have  
joined their brothers, fathers or husbands at  
sea, when there was a lack of crew.

They have taken part in subsistence fishing  
in the home fjord, in between the cooking,  
washing of clothes and tending animals. If  
widowed, they have had to fish to provide  
for their children. Now, however, access is  
closed and it is not needs but rights that guide  
the distribution of fish resources.

Ironically, the historical access of women to  
fish resources, based on needs, never led to  
any rights. The Norwegian example of  
exclusion of small-scale fishworkers, when  
resource considerations call for limited  
access, is not exceptional. All industrialized  
fisheries are facing recurrent resource crises

and are imposing different limiting management systems in their own waters.

Although it is evident that the general overexploitation results from heavy investments in crude horsepower and ever more efficient fishing technology, this development is not halted. What governments and those fishworkers who gain most from the closure of the commons can easily agree upon is to exclude the marginal groups.

This has happened in Denmark too, in the early 1980s, where part-time small-scale fishworkers were suddenly defined as spare-time fishers and excluded as intruders. Since then, these fishworkers, who have combined fishing with other sorts of petty industrial or wage-work when available, have gradually lost all rights to fish commercially. The logic in the management system favours the resource-intensive fisheries, instead of supporting the fisheries that have little impact on fish stocks and which spread the profit across many hands. Small-scale fishing may not be competitive when export revenue is regarded as the only value that counts.

But in small-scale fishing, many fishworkers can live off small quantities of resources. This way of life is dependent on women's management in all kinds of household and community resources, always economizing and doing both the visible and invisible tasks necessary for the production of daily life.

In large-scale trawling, only a few fishworkers live off the huge quantities of resources. Yet the more sustainable way of life through small-scale fishing is not respected either by the authorities or the national association of fishworkers.

The agreement between the Norwegian state and the association included the 'trawl ladder'. As the stock of Arctic cod grows and quotas can be augmented, the relative distribution between trawlers and the coastal fishing vessels can change in favour of the trawlers. This means that the marginalization

of those who took the least codfish is permanent. Even when resources get more plentiful, fishing is not going to be opened for all small-scale fishworkers—women, children or men.

When a vessel is withdrawn from fishing and the owner does not transfer the quota to a new boat, the quota is returned to the state. Newcomers or those who were excluded from the quota system can apply for this very limited number of boat quotas. The rules for redistribution of quotas prohibit any vessel under 8 m in length.

### **Over-Industrialization**

The logic of the 'trawl ladder' and the permanent marginalization of small-scale vessels favour a production pattern that has proved to be unsustainable ecologically as well as socially. Overindustrialization, not just in fisheries, leads to the marginalization of millions of people throughout Europe. Fisheries authorities seek support among fisheries economists when they claim that the numbers of fishworkers have to be reduced to reach a sustainable fishing effort. But, in effect, the abolishment of open access works to marginalize women and small-scale fishworkers.

In the debate on fisheries development, Norwegian fisherwomen introduced a different line of argument. The importance of coastal fishing as a means for a livelihood for many small communities and for a socially and culturally meaningful and dignified life is now stressed by two organizations fighting the injustices in current fisheries policies.

The Norwegian Association of Coastal Fishworkers demands that coastal fishworkers get open access to use passive fishing gears responsibly and under municipal control. To be a full member, one still has to be on the official register of fishworkers, which is not open to everyone.

But a member has to pay a fee to the competing National Association of Fishworkers. This fee is taken from the

· amount of the sale of catch. Due to heavy  
· protests, over the past years, this fee has been  
· reduced from one per cent to 0.4 per cent of  
· the catch value.

·  
· The second association, the Open Fisheries  
· Commons, which permits everyone living in  
· Norway to be a full member, filed a case  
· against the state, claiming that the historical  
· common right could not be given to an  
· exclusive group of fishworkers at the  
· expense of others.

·  
· Though the association lost the case in the  
· City Court, it is now taking it up to the High  
· Court. The resistance to attacks on the more  
· sustainable fishery is alive. The issue of  
· resource depletion also gets support from  
· groups in the environmental movement in  
· Norway. But women's voices are  
· continuously needed in the debate to keep  
· intact a wider perspective, including the  
· social and cultural aspects of fishing.

· **Future directions**

· Women in Norway know that life is the goal,  
· not fishing. The present conflict is more than  
· a fight between interest groups. It concerns  
· the direction of the development of the  
· fisheries of industrialized countries—are  
· they going to support socially and  
· ecologically sustainable ways of life or  
· not? ■



# Women must recover their spaces

Nalini Nayak

**Despite a long period of debate, the important issue of a gender perspective in fisheries has not received enough attention**

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*How was the Women in Fisheries programme conceived? What was the need for a separate programme for women?*

The reason we felt we needed a special programme for women in fisheries was because, although in ICSF we always stressed the role of women in fisheries, we realized that the member unions that participate in the network did not really have a gender perspective. Neither did they see the seriousness of protecting women's spaces in fisheries.

Initially, when the Animation Team decided to also have this as a funded programme of ICSF, the members were not very clear about how it should evolve. But we thought that we should particularly develop a consciousness on gender issues within the unions that related to the network.

So, that is why this is a very specific action programme. It is not a research programme but basically an action-oriented programme. We are studying what women are doing, particularly in the unions that were interested in developing this perspective. We included the specific countries where unions were participating in the network.

Further, we wanted to have a fair share between the North and South because we knew that fisheries are affected by North-South relations and the development of fisheries is part of this whole North-South relation. There was also the whole context of the globalization of the labour market and

the fact that women are the main reserve in the international labour market.

These factors affect the role of women as workers and in whatever spaces they otherwise had in the post-harvest activities. So, that is the reason why we also saw it important to include countries of the North.

The first intensive year saw a kind of international co-ordination of the programme. This year was basically to initiate thinking on these issues, to visit the countries that were participating and then to raise the debate in those countries. Launching the programme was achieved in the first year.

At the workshop that we finally had in Cebu, the ideological thrust and the framework of the programme were discussed with all the members of the participating countries. That was a very exciting workshop because we realized that many issues, as well as the whole perspective of gender, was very new. Although people had talked about women and women's participation, talking from an evolving perspective of gender relations was something new.

At the major Cebu Conference, we had initially thought of having one workshop on women in fisheries, the gender perspective, along with the five other workshops. But then we dropped this workshop mainly because we thought that gender issues had to be discussed in all the workshops and should not be something which is sidetracked or which only one group of people talked about.

...although in ICSF we always stressed the role of women in fisheries, we realized that the member unions that participate in the network did not really have a gender perspective.

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This interview with Nalini Nayak, appeared in SAMUDRA Report No. 10&11, December 1994

. The gender question had to be integrated into  
. all the discussions related to fisheries. So, it  
. was with that perspective that we dropped  
. the specific workshop on gender.

. We had a small preparatory meeting with all  
. the women who came to participate in the  
. conference, explaining why we had dropped  
. the workshop and what would be our role in  
. each of the other workshops. So I think it  
. was quite clear when we started off, what  
. the role of the women participants would be  
. in the different workshops.

. And I think that women really took this role  
. consciously in each of the workshop. In all  
. the reports from the workshops, there were  
. very specific mentions made on issues  
. related to women.

. But what I think was very distressing was  
. that these things were not picked up. You  
. know, we are not people who are talking  
. about women's issues just for the sake of  
. talking about women's issues. All of us are  
. very committed to the broader perspective  
. of women and unions and the issues of  
. fishworkers at large.

. I feel that some of these very sensitive things  
. were overlooked in the final writing of the  
. Cebu Conference document. Therefore, we  
. have lost quite a bit of the specific  
. contributions made by those women in those  
. specific workshops.

. As a result of this, we were disappointed that  
. we had dropped the specific workshop on  
. women. I particularly felt that—and this was  
. what most women felt—we should not have  
. dropped it if there was no real sensitivity in  
. the larger group. But maybe we should have  
. been much more forceful in the final  
. document. Maybe we can achieve that at  
. another step. But this was a pity, a real pity,  
. because after the workshop, people realized  
. why it was important.

. So, we finally concluded that if at all we have  
. another such conference in the future, there  
. should be a specific workshop on gender

questions, which should be made  
compulsory for everybody to participate in.  
In this way, we will really be able to  
emphasize and discuss why this perspective  
is important. This is what we would like to  
tell the organizers of the next conference.

*But why were these objections not raised at  
Cebu—after all, there was a stage between  
the preparation of the draft and final  
conference statement?*

True, there was time, many efforts were  
made and people did write down their  
objections, but I have a feeling it all depends  
on the extent to which we are conscious of  
these issues, only then can we build it up  
into a final document.

*Was it because no woman was involved in  
the final drafting of the conference  
statement?*

Finally, we thought so too. You know, we  
don't distrust our men who write, but it  
probably just gets passed off like that.  
Though they had worked hard on it and there  
were one or two mentions of the women's  
issues, what was disappointing was the lost  
opportunity, the way in which the whole  
thing could have been well worked out.

Particularly in the workshops on  
transnational linkages, technology and the  
environment, where the labour force is being  
exploited, not sufficient mention has been  
made of the impact on women. It is  
mentioned only in passing. There could have  
been a specific paragraph on the issue  
because we also recommended that ICSF take  
up a special study on this question.

We had women from the processing  
industries of Fiji, Solomon Islands and  
France, from countries where women were  
losing their work, as well as from countries  
where they were gaining work. Specific  
mentions could have been made of these, to  
give more flesh to the Cebu Conference  
statement. This did not happen. It was all  
just mentioned in passing.

We are so disappointed, we expected much more understanding from the people who wrote the final statement. Many of them are, after all, very conscious of our perspective. They could have done something. But they just got carried away.

*What about the separate workshop on Women in Fisheries which you held later? Did that result in any sort of statement?*

The second meeting was a workshop, not a conference. It was mainly meant to discuss the framework and the perspective. While we could really further our understanding, the workshop revealed to me that most of us are so unconscious of these questions that we were only starting. It was only a beginning.

At an international level, one would have expected to further the debate and analysis. But we could not do this at all. I expected we could go ahead but no, we were only starting.

Those of us who had worked longer on the question realized you had to go slow; people were just beginning to understand. But since people were so interested and committed, it was very fruitful because they felt they had learned something and could go back and work on it.

The participation of Senegal in our women's workshop was superb because we had held a big seminar in Senegal, where we highlighted the issues that relate specifically to women. These issues, in turn, got discussed at their national conference. So, those participants came and spoke very enthusiastically at the workshop. Everybody was surprised that Senegal had come with some issues and the participants knew what they were talking about. For some countries like Fiji, we had sent outlines on what should be written. That's why so many women presented so many papers on the first day. Those papers were those prepared for our women's workshop.

*This issue of gender is today a major point of discussion in all sectors, whether social, cultural or economic. But is there something in the fisheries sector that makes the question much more stark and specific? How would you articulate that? Put simply, what is so special about the issue of women in fisheries?*

This is my personal point of view and it is what we tried to emphasize in Cebu. We had related the whole question of production—the production of commodities and the production of life. This is what all life is about—either you are producing something to consume or you are producing another generation.

The production of the next generation is something that is just left to women, while the production of commodities is something that is everybody's business. It is only that calculation that goes into gross national product and all that. So, we tried to highlight why the production of life is very important and that is where all the exploitation of women takes place. Gender awareness is really built on this whole basis that producing the next generation is not the sole biological responsibility of women, it is the social responsibility of all human beings to care, whether you are male or female.

But this fact of the production of life has to do also, specifically in fisheries, with a live resource that we are relating to, which is fish. And fish has its own reproductive time, it has its own cycle, it has its own nurturing necessities. If you destroy the environment, you are not going to get any more fish.

So, you see, these relations of nurture, of production time, of reproduction time, are all very much related to this whole reproduction of life. And in today's society, the burden of reproduction of life is something that is not paid for. In our society we don't have a calculation for unpaid labour, for nurture activity. We only have calculations for production activity.

• This nurturing and the time factor that is  
• necessary to reproduce a resource has to do  
• with life. I feel this sensitivity of a respect  
• for the environment and for nature has also  
• to do with the respect for life.

• In fisheries, if we are really conscious of  
• gender, we would really be conscious also  
• of this resource we are interacting with.

• We can't exploit it at the rate we are  
• exploiting today; we can't use the  
• technologies we are using today. Whatever  
• we use has to be in relation to the kind of  
• living resource we are dealing with.

• All this has to do with the way we have  
• exploited a sex in our society. The way  
• modern society is evolving, it is very  
• competitive, it gives value only to the  
• productive ages in life, while everything else  
• doesn't matter.

• Imbalances exist and because of these  
• imbalances and our disrespect for the  
• sustaining of life, I feel the whole perspective  
• in thinking of a sustainable fishery has to be  
• in terms of a nurture fishery, which respects  
• life, which respects spaces for people. This,  
• then, is definitely a very feminist perspective.

• At Cebu, we didn't start off with the women's  
• question, we started off with production,  
• what production is all about, where does  
• fisheries production lie in all this. Then we  
• went into the production of commodities and  
• life.

• We put it only in that perspective, not in the  
• way some others would merely rant—that  
• women are exploited, and so on. No, instead,  
• we looked at fisheries and what is the sexual  
• division of labour and how to analyze that.

• Only by looking at it from this point of view  
• can we see it more globally. Otherwise, we  
• come off just being defensive.

• *But several women themselves do not seem  
• to recognize this parallel between the nurture  
• aspect of fisheries and their own lives.*

Because we have been driven to this. It is a  
survival strategy, now that you exploit a  
resource in order to survive. No traditional  
community is exploitative. Traditional  
communities had very strict norms for their  
relations with nature.

When you used certain kinds of nets, you  
knew what sizes of fish you would catch.  
There were very strict norms. Now, as social  
controls and norms have deteriorated  
because technology has turned superior, the  
disrespect for nature has also crept in.

*Does the Women in Fisheries programme  
have a component to raise the consciousness  
of women about these issues?*

This is what we have been talking about and  
what we think movements should integrate  
into their whole awareness programmes.  
Take, for instance, coastal zone management.  
The experience in the Philippines, for  
example, is quite ridiculous. There, women  
are the actual sea wardens.

These poor women, who are not paid, protect  
the sea for their traditional fishermen so that  
the trawlers don't come and take their catch.

Yet these women have no right to the fish  
once it is landed on the shore. It's all in the  
hands of the merchants.

What's the point of protecting fish when you  
have no right to it afterwards? So, part of  
coastal zone management is also to protect  
the space of women in post-harvest activity,  
not only to protect the resource.

This is why we are saying that we must be  
conscious, even men must be conscious of  
the need to protect the spaces in the economy  
that women once held. You have to still  
continue to protect them.

*Was this perspective shared by everybody at  
the workshop?*

It was so new for everybody. Some of them,  
even long-standing activists, came up and

said, only now do we realize what gender actually means.

Or take the question of technology. The North has never questioned technology. They have never even seen it like that, related to the environment, while in the women's movements in India, we are all the time talking about these questions.

*And are there distinctions within the women's movements?*

First of all, there is a big distinction between the women in the movement who belong to autonomous groups and women like us who work with women in the movement. That is a big dividing line. Women working with this autonomous women's perspective take up very different issues than those we take up in movements. And within movements, you also have those who work in sectors based on natural resources and those who work on, for instance, dams or construction workers, where the issues are not related to a basic resource.

Our perspective has evolved from those of us who work in a sector that relates to a common property natural resource. We have very consciously not gone off alone. We have worked within the movement to develop this consciousness.

I think the fishworkers' movement is very special. Those of us working in the sector have tried to understand fisheries, therefore we can relate this perspective to fisheries. People working with agricultural workers, for instance, only take up wage issues. Nobody looks at the production of food or cash crops and how women are marginalized and why we should therefore fight. If you don't analyze your sector and see what spaces exist and why, you can not do much.

We thought that, through this Women in Fisheries programme, we could develop this perspective. The idea was first presented as a paper in Bangkok. We felt that, through the programme, this paper could get some flesh and a more global perspective and, over

two or three years, we could come out with an official document of ICSF.

So, the process started, but we didn't make the progress I thought we could make. You know, you have to interact with people who are thinking on these issues; it may happen over time. But the fact that people in ICSF are speaking about nurture and sustainable fisheries has also to do with this. Progress will slowly come.

*At what stage is the programme?*

The country programmes are independent. Each country has made its own programme. These will go on. Then ICSF should commission the study on women in the international market in fisheries. Exchange programmes have been organized between a number of countries.

Further, Latin America has decided to join the programme. It was not in earlier. Eventually, maybe in two years or so, after people have done some work and experimentation, we can have one more workshop.

*Is this marginalization of women universally true in all the world's fisheries?*

I think so.

*But don't women in the Southeast Asian countries still have access to the spaces they once held traditionally?*

That depends. We haven't really analyzed this. Women do play a role in the marketing chains in the Bangkok and Manila fish markets, like the big markets of Navota, where thousands of women are present at the landing centres, some of whom are big merchants and some, agents for merchants. Of course, that is another class of women, not women who have traditionally done fish vending. These are women who have money to invest and so enter the merchant field.

In Ghana, for instance, women also invest in the purchase of craft. I haven't seen this

· happen in the other countries I have visited.  
· In Vishakapatnam in India, for instance,  
· women advance money to the trawlers so that  
· they have a right to their catch. So, these  
· kinds of activities exist and women have got  
· into those niches. But whether the old spaces  
· have been retained—that's a million-dollar  
· question. They have been, for the most part,  
· commercialized.

·  
· *With the way the global economy is now  
· getting integrated, do you ever foresee a  
· situation where women will be able to carve  
· out a niche for themselves? Or will they  
· necessarily be subsumed under the larger  
· process and then have to work within those  
· constraints? Are you trying to glorify a lost  
· era?*

· (Long pause) But then, in that case, there is  
· no need to fight. We may as well close down  
· our unions, if we think that the cause is lost.  
· The reason why we are carrying on in this  
· sector is because the sector doesn't lend itself  
· to this kind of development. If the sector lent  
· itself so, then there is no cause to fight. But  
· this sector does not do this. So, one has to  
· fight and see what role women are going to  
· play.

· *That may be true, but within the sector, is  
· there ever going to be a separate space for  
· women?*

· Oh, yes, I am positive about that because, if  
· at all the fishery has to be sustained, it has to  
· be decentralized. You can not go on with this  
· kind of centralization that we think is modern  
· development. We are basically fighting for  
· a decentralized fishery. ■

# The jury's verdict

V. R. Krishna Iyer, Janaki Amma,  
Indira Jaisingh and Nandita Haksar

**A unique public hearing in India on women in fisheries, organized by the National Fishworkers' Forum, came up with a judgement. Excerpts:**

**W**e, the four members of the Jury on the Public Hearing on Women's Struggle for Survival in Fisheries, organized by the National Fishworkers' Forum and the Women in Fisheries programme of ICSF, have heard the testimonies of women who are working in seafood processing factories in Goa, Tamil Nadu, Bombay, Calcutta and Kerala, and also read detailed reports presented by the following people/groups:

- Report entitled *The Seafood Processing Industry and the Conditions of Women Migrant Workers* by Aleyamma Vijayan of NFF/WIF, Trivandrum
- Report entitled *Girls and Women Employed in Prawn Processing* by R. V. Mathias, Executive Secretary, CBCI Commission of Labour, New Delhi
- Report on conditions of women in fisheries by Albertina Almeida of Bailancho Saad, Goa
- A study of problems and prospects of migrant women workers in seafood industries at Veraval, Junagadh, Gujarat by the Department of Social Work, Diocese of Rajkot
- Report on the condition of women in fisheries in Calcutta by Minnie Joseph, freelance journalist and school teacher, and Y. De Steen Hault, St. Lawrence High School, Calcutta

We also heard the testimony of representatives of the Government of Kerala's Labour Department. Testimony

after testimony by women between the ages of 17 and 60 gave us a vivid picture of the inhuman working and living conditions of women in fisheries. It is shocking to record that as the prices of shrimps and prawns go up, the price of human life is next to nothing.

The lives of these mostly young women, capable of hard work, bearing great hardships, but who can still laugh and dream, is worth but a few rupees a month. If they challenge the system, they are thrown out of their jobs, far from home, vulnerable to exploitation. We heard at least one account of how a young woman died under suspicious circumstances.

Women and girls told us how they are hired to jobs in shrimp factories by false promises by contractors, denied minimum wages, made to work for 10 to 12 hours in badly ventilated factories, inadequately protected from cold and ice, threatened by ammonia leaks, denied their rights to even drinking water and health insurance.

The living conditions of these women are shocking. These young workers live in crowded rooms, often 30 to 35 in a room, with just one or two bathrooms or toilets, and no privacy. The women are often not allowed to have even a day off or any holiday. The women suffer from numb, blistered fingers, back and leg pain, and are subjected to unhygienic conditions.

In fact, most of these women are used as forced labour and are in servitude. From the testimonies of the women and the written reports presented, we see that it is not only their young fingers that are frozen and numb

*The lives of these mostly young women, capable of hard work, bearing great hardships, but who can still laugh and dream, is worth but a few rupees a month.*

This verdict, proclaimed by Justices V. R. Krishna Iyer and Janaki Amma and advocates Indira Jaisingh and Nandita Haksar at Ernakulam, India on 23 June 1995, appeared in *SAMUDRA Report* No. 13, October 1995

• but their souls are also benumbed. After  
• hearing the testimonies of those who deposed  
• at this public hearing, we are of the  
• unanimous opinion that the provisions of the  
• relevant labour laws are being totally  
• violated. In particular, these have been totally  
• violated:

- Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act, 1970
- Inter-state Migrant Workmen (Regulation and Employment) Act, 1979
- Bonded Labour (Abolition) Act, 1976
- Minimum Wages Act, 1948
- Factories Act health insurance.
- Employee's State Insurance Act

• We are satisfied that the violations of these  
• laws have resulted in the denial of  
• fundamental rights guaranteed in the  
• Constitution of India, in particular:

- Article 14 (the right to equality)
- Article 19(1), Article 21 (right to life)
- Article 23 (prohibition of trafficking in labour and forced labour)
- Article 24 (prohibition of employment of children in factories) read with Article 42 (provision of just and human conditions of work)
- Article 47 (duty of the state to raise the level of nutrition and public health)

• In addition to violating the Constitution of  
• India and statutory laws, there is also a  
• violation of international human rights and  
• international labour standards specifically  
• contained in the following articles of the  
• Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

- Article 22: The right of every member of society to social security and the right to

realize through national effort and international co-operation, in accordance with the organization and resources of each State, the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for the dignity and free development of personality

- Article 23: The right of free choice of employment and just and fair conditions of work
- Article 24: The right to leisure and holidays

The conditions of the women also violate Convention 122 of the International Labour Organization concerning employment policy of the ILO (1969) read with the Declaration on the Right to Development, 1986.

... We record that not even a single contractor has been registered in Kerala as required under the Inter-state Migrant Workmen (Regulation of Employment) Act, 1979.

If labour laws were implemented, the sufferings and pain of these young women would be alleviated to a large extent. Whenever there has been pressure on factory owners by activists, governments or the local church leaders, the working and living conditions of women have improved.

... In the above-mentioned circumstances, we have the following suggestions to make:

- a. Strengthen international solidarity among workers in all countries to ensure a non-selective enforcement of labour standards and indivisibility of human rights. We note that the National Fishworkers' Forum has taken steps in that direction and ensured the presence of delegates from Senegal and Canada at this hearing.
- b. We call upon the Government of India to restructure its policies to ensure that the natural resources of the country are preserved for the people of the country and to ensure just and human-centred



development based on principles of self-reliance.

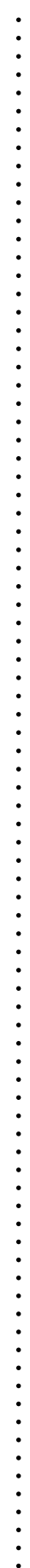
- c. We call upon all State governments to ensure that labour laws are implemented through the active intervention and action of the labour and law enforcement machinery.

While these recommendations can help to improve the working and living conditions of women in fisheries, the problem will not be solved.

We have to commit ourselves to a long struggle so that world production systems based on production for life, not production for profits, are evolved. We have to evolve a jurisprudence, which is based on the belief that each human being is a priceless asset.

We need to develop a resurgent jurisprudence to protect workers from exploitation so that we never have to hear such painful testimonies again.

The new jurisprudence will help to convert the pain of these women to power—power to fight this unjust system. ■



# Up against several barriers

Aliti Vunisea

**The women of Fiji still remain critically disadvantaged in the country's fisheries development process**

*The importance of women's fishing activities is evident in the vital contribution of the subsistence and small-scale commercial fisheries in Fiji.*

As in other Pacific islands, women in Fiji dominate subsistence fishing and are also increasingly involved in the local commercial fishing sector. The importance of women's fishing activities is evident in the vital contribution of the subsistence and small-scale commercial fisheries in Fiji. The women's involvement in other fisheries sectors is diverse

Their involvement has increased significantly with the emergence of fish processing as a growth area within the manufacturing sector in the post-coup years in Fiji. The expansion in the industry during this time have largely been attributed to the contribution of women workers.

Total employment (staff, workers and management) for the Pacific Fishing and Canning Company (PAFCO) in 1993 was reportedly over 1,000, with the majority being female production workers paid hourly.

In addition, women's inclusion in the production process—they make up about 90 per cent of the total workforce in the cannery—is said to be a replication of the practice of assembly lines, which utilize women's manual skills, speed and efficiency.

Women form the core of the industrial fisheries labour force through their involvement in post-harvest or processing activities. This mode of involvement conforms to perceived gender biases in development, where women are largely employed in areas pertaining to traditional labour divisions. Given the increasing emphasis on the exploitation of the migratory tuna and the attempt by Pacific Island

countries to process their own catches, there will most probably be greater involvement of women in commercial fishing in the near future.

Women contribute significantly to the artisanal fisheries sector, especially through small-scale village-based commercial activities. This increased participation can be attributed to the growing commercialization of non-fin fish species, especially shellfish. According to the Fisheries Division Report for 1993, for the past three years, sales of non-fin fish (shellfish, crustaceans, octopus, *beche-de-mer*, seaweed, etc.) have totalled an average of 2,000 tonnes, worth US\$4.5 million. *Kai* or freshwater mussels, which are exclusively harvested and marketed by women, comprise about 48 per cent of this volume.

The main sales outlets for artisanal fishers are municipal markets, hotels, restaurants and cafes, butchers and fish merchants, retail shops, supermarkets and roadside stalls, with women dominating selling activities. The past years have witnessed a decrease in fin fish sales at municipal markets, with non-fin fish becoming more popular.

Despite the women's contributions, their participation in the artisanal sector is hardly acknowledged. Except for the mention of the 22 non-fish gleaning licences issued to fisherwomen in the Northern Division, most women fish without licences and are thus largely categorized in the subsistence sector.

## **Post-harvest activity**

In addition to their own fishing activities, women also provide the necessary post-

This article, based on the draft of a thesis by Aliti Vunisea of the University of South Pacific, Suva, Fiji, appeared in *SAMUDRA Report* No. 15, July 1996

harvest activities for men's catches. Although formal production has, in most cases, doubled in intensity and volume, processing and preservation activities remain unchanged. Hence, major processing activities like smoking, drying and salting are still traditionally practised by women.

In addition, the preservation, distribution and marketing of catches remain the responsibility of women. Therefore, artisanal fishing could be described as being principally dependent on women's support. Increased modernization and associated commercialization in the rural areas of Fiji will eventually make women get more involved in the future development of the artisanal fisheries sector.

Subsistence fishing is an essential component of the fishing industry in Fiji. For the substantial rural coastal populations and communities situated alongside inland waters, this fishing sector is a major source of food. In addition, increasing urban populations are also dependent on marine food sold in local markets.

Fishing methods employed by the women on the coastal flats are generally very simple, with tools and technologies primarily traditional. Methods utilized are diverse, with specific methods employed for different species. These are usually simple, on most occasions involving the use of hands and simple tools. These revolve around a few principles or basic methodologies. For freshwater locations, these include netting activities and trapping or stupefying fish.

To exploit sea resources, the women net, set up barriers and traps, use hand-lines and glean or collect on the dry reef flats. Such fishing activities usually require keen eyesight and skill with the use of hands and feet. In addition, the intimate knowledge and understanding that women have of their immediate environment enable them to easily identify and catch prey.

So, even if the methods used sound and look simple, they are, in reality, complicated and

require extremely adroit use of the senses, and skilful utilization of fisheries knowledge.

Net fishing, using small hand-nets and larger nets, is common in inland areas. The hand-nets are used for fishing in groups along rivers, lakes and ponds. The nets are firmly lodged in mud or sand, while the women feel into holes, under grass or weeds, with their bare hands.

### **Amazing ability**

The women have the amazing ability to grip and pull fish or eels out of small crevices, holes or from under weeds. Those that escape are trapped in waiting nets. Larger nets are used to block off creek or stream openings.

Fish are then chased into these nets by splashing on the surface of the water. Another variation of net fishing is when a group of about 10 to 16 women wade around in a lake, in waist-deep water, removing weeds and grass. The activity is continued until the water becomes muddy, thus stupefying fish and eels.

Consequently, fish swim either to the surface to get clearer water, try to escape along the dry banks or lie still at the bottom of the lake.

When a woman steps on a fish, she keeps her feet on it, dives down, and grips it by the gills, before killing it. Fish that escape to the surface of the water are caught in nets, while those that escape to the banks are caught barehanded.

In recent years, large gill-nets are increasingly used in inland locations. Although the use of large nets in rivers for commercial purposes is not allowed legally, the introduction of species such as the grass carp and the availability of freshwater fin fish in major rivers have motivated the use of nets,

More recently, the women have moved away from netting to fishing with lines. Just like their counterparts in coastal locations, the women are familiar with the best times, winds and weather for fishing. Line fishing is used during, and after, major flooding,

## Pacific invisibility

In documenting women's participation in development, the status and roles of Pacific women have commonly been evaluated using Western models and perceptions. When I started on this project, I spent substantial time with women from my village, in Nadali, near Nausori town—women who spent endless hours diving for freshwater clams (*ka*) or line fishing for grass carp (*ika droka*) or flagrail (*Kuhlia repestris*), maleya or tilapia (*Oreochromis mossambica*) and duna or eels (*Anquilla*).

I used these opportunities to engage women in informal discussions. During one of these, I was surprised that many of the women, including my mother, who was a regular fisher, seemed taken aback when I suggested that the fishing activities they engage in were an added responsibility to standard domestic chores.

The majority of the women did not see fishing as work, and in response, asked what they would do for leisure if there was no fishing. Going to the films, visiting relatives, or other such social activities were, in most cases, regarded unbecoming in our society. Hence, fishing was the opportune time to spin yarns and catch up with the news, while also doing something useful.

Obviously, from this experience, it is clear that the case of women in Pacific has to be addressed differently, keeping in mind the roles assigned them within social concepts prevalent in the Pacific Islands.

This is not to say that Pacific societies do not customarily recognize women's rights. In Polynesia, for example, females are not considered intrinsically inferior to males. In Samoa, even though women are largely dependent on their husbands for social status, those who are unmarried, divorced or widowed and continue to reside in the village are known as the 'ladies of the village'. Such women hold high ceremonial status which is independent of male rank and which grants important decision-making powers within their families. In Fiji, women of chieftainly birth also hold special status and can ascend to chieftainly positions if they were the first-born ones in their families. Thus, there is a need for a better understanding of what women actually do and how they are regarded socially within the context of Pacific

societies today. Traditional fishing activities are normally segregated, with men's fishing activities focusing on deep-sea areas and women's activities confined to shallower, inshore areas. Women, however, generally support men's fishing activities through preparing and repairing fishing equipment, cooking food and taking part in required rituals. Recently, women have started to participate in more traditionally male-dominated activities like offshore fishing in Tonga, Marianas and Fiji.

Such increased women's workload, resulting from the expanded fishing activity, is a removal from distinct traditional gender roles existent in Polynesia and Melanesia. Women's fishing activities are generally referred to as gleaning and collecting on reef flat. This definition does not accurately portray the immense knowledge and skills that women's fishing activities entail. Nor does it reflect the importance of women's fishing activities, especially to the total household production.

Early Pacific societies were self-sufficient in food, much of which was acquired through family fishing, foraging and collecting efforts. Women's subsistence fishing activities were a major component of these activities. Even in current times, women fishers are portrayed as basic providers of family protein through their fishing ventures.

The advent of commercialization in rural communities has resulted in a greater emphasis on economically viable products. This has motivated the evident shift from the consumption of local food to less nutritious, imported food. These trends have also been intensified by the change in emphasis in women's fishing efforts, from subsistence to commercial.

Women are also the major informal traders throughout the region, dominating municipal markets and other roadside and street outlets. If the 'self-employed' category is used as an indicator of informal sector activity, then almost a quarter of Pacific women are engaged in informal trade. In Fiji, women operate from homes, roadside stalls and streets, selling a diverse range of foodstuff. However, another explanation holds that women's immense involvement in the informal sector was a response to poverty. This significant informal participation

reinforces women's undervalued roles because the formal sector is usually rated higher than the informal. Women also possess an extensive knowledge of traditional post-harvest activities, which is not recognized enough. This is because current fisheries development emphasizes production, with the post-harvest sector being given low priority.

As a result, women's dominant participation in post-harvest and processing activities is regarded as secondary in fisheries development. It has been argued that post-harvest activities performed by the women of Vanuatu contribute very significantly to the nutritional and income levels of households. Modern fisheries development, therefore, needs to blend traditional processing knowledge with new strategies.

The concept of access to resources has been addressed only minimally in the literature on the Pacific. In the majority of the Pacific Island countries, resources are clan-owned and mostly through partilineal descent. When women marry, they become a part of their husbands' clan but can not own or have legal control over resources in their new home area. At the same time, they lose resource rights in their places of origin. Thus, in the modern context, women are usually landless.

Exceptions occur where there are traditionally matrilineal descent systems, such as in Bougainville in Papua New Guinea and Nauru. These two societies have been affected by mining, which has eroded the control of resources by women. For example, female landowners in Nauru do not have much influence over negotiations for compensations or for the management of phosphate.

Thus, even where women have resource access, they lack economic, political and social authority to control it, especially as resources take on increasing commercial importance. In spite of Pacific women's increased participation in the market economy, they are generally regarded as basically involved in subsistence fishing, with minimal defined participation in commercial fishing activities. Commercial fishing, in this context, does not regard essential post-harvest activities as active commercial participation. Neither is women's domestic work viewed as necessary for the success of men's commercial fishing.

Another major obstacle in the documentation of women's economic participation in the fisheries sector is how their fishing activities are not seen as economically productive. The failure to recognize the mixed subsistence nature of the village fishery results in an undervaluation of their participation.

Apart from this, the involvement of women in fisheries is usually not well documented. For example, female participation in the fisheries sector in 1993 for Fiji, Samoa and Tonga was recorded as only 13-17 per cent of the total workforce. This low statistical measure of the women's economic participation is due to the subsistence sector not being enumerated.

The obvious indifference to women's fishing activities and the non-recognition of their work in the subsistence sector prompted the description of them as "invisible fisherfolk".

The current industry-oriented fisheries development leaves women's small-scale commercial and subsistence activities unmonitored and undeveloped. Wherever women have been incorporated into the industrial sector, this has been in gender-related types of employment, such as fish processing. Among major constraints to women's fisheries development are the lack of access to technology and the absence of fisheries extension assistance.

This trend is not surprising, considering that it was only during the past decade that women's contribution to fisheries began to be recognized. Recent literature has begun to record the substantial involvement of women in processing and marketing, especially in Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu.

Women continue to be largely responsible for post-harvest activities in all the different sectors of the fishing industry. This has been increasingly so with the establishment of tuna canneries in Fiji, the Solomon Islands and Western Samoa.

Various international and regional organizations specifically address women's issues through regional co-operation and with assistance from bodies such as the UNDP and the FAO, and research and awareness into women's concerns are being highlighted.

• when the fish leave their abodes and feed in  
• calmer areas of ponds and rivers.

• The women often identify fish by how they  
• bite or nibble on the lines. For example, when  
• the women use kneaded dough as bait for  
• mullets (*kanace*), spotted scat (*vetakau*),  
• mangrove jack (*damn*) and tilapia (*maleya*),  
• they can tell the differences in feeding  
• patterns. For instance, mullets nibble on the  
• dough, spotted scat touch lightly on the bait,  
• while the mangrove jack and tilapia pull  
• strongly on the bait.

• Sometimes, when the women identify the  
• fish feeding on the line, they immediately  
• change their hooks, bait and lines to suit the  
• particular fish. Thus, when line fishing, the  
• women are armed with a range of lines and  
• hooks.

• Another major resource for inland areas is  
• the freshwater mussel (*kai*), which is usually  
• caught by diving to depths of to 2-3 m, using  
• goggles and small wire-mesh baskets or  
• pieces of cloth. Once the *kai* are sighted, the  
• women dig them out with their fingers and  
• fill their baskets.

#### • **Storage method**

• More common for storing *kai* is the use of a  
• piece of cloth, called *sulu* or *lava-lava*, with  
• one end tied around the women's waist and  
• the other around the neck. The *sulu* will then  
• form a sort of space where the *kai* is stored  
• while the women fish. If full, the weight of  
• the *sulu* could drag the wearer down. In the  
• course of my research, a young mother died  
• in Nadali village from this practice.

• The women's commercial exploitation of *kai*  
• has become very organized. For instance,  
• some villages along the Rewa River, the  
• largest river in Fiji, are entirely dependent  
• on *kai* as a commercial resource. The villages  
• of Nakini, Naganivatu, Natoalka,  
• Deladamanu, Nacokaika and Kasavu have,  
• over the years, organized a fishing  
• programme whereby villages do not fish at  
• the same time.

The villages are divided into two groups,  
which take turns at fishing and selling in the  
market. In this manner, an oversupply in  
markets is avoided, and the women are also  
free to attend to other duties during their  
week off from fishing.

For coastal locations, gleaning and collecting  
on the sand flats are the women's major  
fishing activities. Other specific fishing  
activities differ, depending on the location  
and accessibility to urban markets. In fact,  
there is a marked difference in the use of  
time between areas participating in the  
commercial economy and those fishing  
basically for subsistence.

For example, in Totoya, the women's  
activities are very flexible and selective in  
nature. The species targeted depend  
principally on the season and the weather.  
For instance, during the south-east trade  
winds, the women exploit octopus on the dry  
reef flats. When it is the season for seaweeds,  
their collection is the women's main activity.

Apart from the sporadic nature of fishing,  
the technology used also differs from that  
used in urban areas. For example, netting is  
still widely practised in rural isolated areas,  
while in urban locations, where there is a  
higher emphasis on selling, the women do  
not net regularly. Surprisingly, netting is still  
significantly used by the women who reside  
on the coastal fringes of the main towns.

Line fishing is a popular women's activity  
in Fiji. It has many variations, depending on  
the location and target species. Line fishing  
can be done from boats, on feet or while  
swimming. In inland areas, short rods are  
sometimes used. Baits include worms, fish  
pieces, octopus, shellfish such as *kaikoso* or  
hermit crabs (*kasikasi*). There are many  
variations in the methods used. Some  
exceptional ones include *siwa nunu*, which  
is practised in areas such as Cicia and Totoya  
in the Lau group of islands. In this case, the  
women hold fishing lines and dive along the  
reef slopes. When the fish is sighted, the bait

is thrown at it, and, as soon as the fish bites, the line is suddenly pulled in. *Basikeli* (bicycle fishing), which is practised in Totoya, is where the women swim in deeper lagoon areas and fish with lines. Since the water is deep, they stay afloat by treading water while fishing. This is why the fishing style is likened to bicycle riding.

The women also have unique ways of adapting methods and gear to suit the occasion. In Totoya, during moonless nights, I saw the huge bay adjacent to the village covered with lights. The women have recently discovered that certain mackerel species have a taste for flour dough. Coupled with this is a weakness for bright lights.

Thus, on such nights, the women are out in punts in the bay, with their pressure lamps suspended from sticks firmly lodged in the boat. The light attracts these fish and they congregate around the boat. Using kneaded dough as bait, the women drop their lines over the side of the boat and the fish snap them up. The villagers call this type of fishing 'Korea', because it is likened to the method of Chinese or Korean fishermen who used lights to catch bait fish in Fiji's lagoons. Other methods used include the setting up of barriers, fish fences and traps. Stone weirs or *moka* are usually erected within the coastal area to catch fish that feed with the tide. Fish fences are still used, especially along estuarine locations.

Net fishing is commonly used in isolated rural locations and is only occasionally used near urban areas. The use of large gill-nets has greatly increased with the availability of faster and bigger boats, but it is an activity restricted to male fishers.

In areas such as Nukui, where net fishing is an important activity, there exists a wide range of practices. For example, *qoli rai* is when a school of fish is sighted and the nets are put out to encircle the catch. This is usually done within the outer reefs.

At other times, large nets are used to catch fish hiding under rocks. For this method,

rocks are usually surrounded by nets while *duva*, or fish poison, is crushed and squeezed into the water around the rocks. Since this is practised on the outer reefs, the larger species get trapped in the net when they try to escape.

The *yavi ran*, or leaf drag, is widely practised in Fiji, with variations, depending on the location. Both men and women participate in this activity which, in most cases, is for communal purposes. Customarily, men and women swim towards the shoreline, a few of them holding the drag-net. When they near the shore, those with the drag then close in towards one another.

When the shallower areas are reached, the fish are harvested using both hands and scoop-nets. Gleaning and collecting are the major fishing activities of women in the subsistence and small-scale artisanal sector. Surprisingly, these activities are not confined to women in rural areas, as women residing in semi-urban areas also extensively gather or collect from urban foreshore areas.

Gleaning includes collection of a wide range of non-fin fish along the inshore coastal areas. Bivalves, crustaceans, octopus, seaweeds and other miscellaneous items are usually the target of these gleaning activities. Recently, some previously caught species are being neglected. This decline in harvest is because such species now hold little economical value. Examples are *ibo* and *vetuna* (both sea worms), *dio* (oysters) and *woce* (a small edible brachiopod). Once, most of these species were coastal delicacies and were usually eaten raw.

Traditionally, there has been a complementarity in the organization of Fijian labour, with women being engaged in domestic duties and nearshore fishing or foraging activities, while men farmed and were responsible for deep-sea fishing.

At least in Totoya and Nasau, men worked in gardens and only occasionally fished. Recent developments have led to a transformation of such roles with the emphasis in production getting focused

· primarily on economically productive  
· activities and men engaging more in fishing  
· activities. The argument here is that the  
· traditional context of labour division can no  
· longer be casually applied to all rural  
· situations.

·  
· Generally, it can be argued that women have  
· been largely disadvantaged in  
· institutionalized fisheries development in the  
· Pacific Islands. Apart from traditional and  
· social constraints, they are hindered by  
· technological innovations, which principally  
· target male fishing activities and marginalize  
· the participation of women in fishing.

· **Increased participation**

· Although there has been increased  
· participation of women in formal  
· employment, this has, unfortunately,  
· predominantly been in menial, underpaid  
· jobs. An overview of the Asia-Pacific region  
· shows that Asia has been more advanced in  
· addressing the issue of women in fisheries.  
· This has come about through government  
· support and the accomplishment of  
· programmes which targeted small-scale  
· fishing enterprises.

· Tradition is not static, and thus the ideologies  
· which revolve around its usage are not static  
· either. Due to women's dominant role in the  
· subsistence fishing economy, and their  
· contribution to the family diet, any shift in  
· their fishing patterns will have several kinds  
· of impact on local village societies and  
· practices.

· Despite women's increased participation in  
· the fisheries sector in the Pacific and in Fiji,  
· in particular, their activities remain officially  
· overshadowed by those of male fishers. ■



# Different voices, similar concerns

Chandrika Sharma

**Sharing a vision, women from several countries agree to fight to retain their spaces within the world's fisheries**

A workshop on Gender Perspectives in Fisheries was held in Senegal in West Africa, between 10 and 18 June 1996, bringing to an 'official' end ICSF's Women in Fisheries (WIF) programme in India, Senegal, the Philippines and Thailand. The workshop brought together representatives of fishworker organizations, academics and activists from 13 countries in Asia, Europe, Canada, Africa, South Pacific and Latin America.

The participants shared reports detailing the role of women in fisheries in their respective countries, as well as the role of women in fishworkers' organizations. Participants from countries where the WIF programme had already been under way, namely, Senegal, India, the Philippines and Thailand, reported on the work done under the programme and the processes that had been initiated as a consequence. The programme has been instrumental in 'visibilizing' women's roles in fisheries, in facilitating the organization of women fishworkers and in increasing their representation in fishworker organizations.

It was observed that various strategies and organizational forms have been adopted by women fishworkers to address their concerns in different countries, each appropriate to the particular context and situation of the country concerned.

In India, for instance, women fishworkers, rather than forming separate women's organizations, are fighting for spaces within mainstream fishworker organizations to address issues that concern them. Their basic

contention is that women married to fishermen automatically qualify for union membership by virtue of the fact that they look after the household and sustain future generations, even if they are not directly involved in economically remunerative fishery-related activities.

In Canada, on the other hand, different strategies have been employed by women in fishing communities. Wives of fishermen organize as autonomous groups, join with fishermen's unions, and get together at the community level to protect the interests of coastal communities.

The discussion on women's participation in fishworker organizations revealed that, even though women have succeeded in finding a place within mainstream fishworker organizations in some countries, as in Senegal and India, they rarely occupy decision-making positions.

As a consequence, issues specifically concerning women are rarely addressed by these organizations. These include, for example, the problems women face at work in fisheries, such as the lack of adequate marketing, transport, storage and processing facilities, or the problems that they encounter within the household and community, such as violence directed at them.

Country reports at the workshop also revealed that the extent and form of women's participation in fishworker organizations and movements differ in the North and South. In the North, women of fishing communities are

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This report, written by Chandrika Sharma of ICSF's Madras office, appeared in *SAMUDRA Report* No. 15, July 1996

• organized primarily as ‘associations of wives  
• of fishermen.

• **Southern women**

• In the South, women participate in  
• organizations as fishworkers themselves,  
• indicating that women still retain their spaces  
• in fishing operations, primarily in the  
• processing and marketing of fish. This is also  
• because women and men from the South  
• involved in fisheries operations, on a part-  
• time or full-time basis, do not generally  
• require licences to be regarded as  
• fishworkers, unlike in the North.

• The issues taken up by women’s  
• organizations in the North and South differ  
• too. In the North, the artisanal sector and way  
• of life are under threat, as more and more  
• artisanal fishers are being pushed out of the  
• sector as a result of state-sponsored policies  
• to reduce fishing capacity and to limit  
• resource exploitation. State policies tend to  
• be geared towards protecting the interests of  
• large industry.

• Under the Individual Transferable Quota  
• (ITQ) system, for instance, licences to fish  
• are often cornered by the more powerful  
• economic interests, while smaller owner-  
• operators are either eased out of the sector  
• or forced into jobs on larger industrial  
• vessels. Working conditions aboard these  
• vessels are often poor and social security  
• benefits inadequate, especially on distant-  
• water fishing vessels operating under  
• bilateral fisheries agreements.

• Associations of wives of fishermen in  
• Europe, as in Spain and France, are  
• demanding better working conditions aboard  
• such vessels. They are also demanding better  
• State support for unemployed fishers or  
• fishers displaced from the sector, especially  
• during crisis periods.

• As coastal communities in the North lose  
• traditional access rights to fishery resources,  
• the very culture and future of these  
• communities are under threat. In Norway, the  
• associations of wives of fishermen are

demanding that coastal communities be  
given back their rights to fish freely in coastal  
waters, and that the state recognize the value  
of coastal communities and artisanal  
fisheries.

In Southern countries, on the other hand,  
women fishworkers are struggling to retain  
their spaces within the fisheries sector, in the  
face of the larger forces of globalization and  
liberalization. They are demanding access to  
better facilities for marketing, transport,  
storage and processing of fish. At the same  
time, they are joining forces with men in the  
artisanal sector to fight against the  
proliferation of destructive, super-efficient  
technologies such as trawling, within their  
waters. In Senegal, for instance, women are  
playing a prominent role in challenging  
inequitable agreements between their  
country and the EU, and in securing a better  
deal for artisanal fishworkers under such  
agreements.

**Areas of convergence**

Despite these differences, many areas of  
convergence between the women of the  
North and the South emerged during the  
course of the workshop.

Participants from several countries perceived  
women as being more concerned with a  
broader gamut of issues, relating to fisheries  
as well as to the community. Participants  
from Canada stressed that, while men are in  
the forefront of struggles on fishery-related  
issues, women take the lead on issues that  
are central to maintaining the viability of  
artisanal fisheries and their communities.

Several other questions were debated and  
discussed during the workshop. What sort  
of alliances need to be formed, and with  
whom, to defend artisanal fisheries and the  
artisanal way of life, as well as the spaces of  
women within these? What sort of  
*programme politique* is required to address  
these issues?

The participants explored these questions in  
the context of the realities within their own

countries. There was a broad consensus that cross-sectoral alliances of people's movements need to be formed with specific objectives, and a positive *programme politique* needs to emerge, if the artisanal fisheries and their way of life have to be sustained.

In Brazil, for instance, the artisanal fishery sector has made alliances with other marginalized groups such as farmers, landless peasants and indigenous peoples, to struggle for a recognition of their rights and for the espousal of an indigenous lifestyle. The necessity for regional alliances, as, for instance, among associations of wives of fishermen in Europe, was highlighted.

Southern country participants stressed the need to question the current development paradigm based on colonial and patriarchal values, and production for profit rather than production for sustenance of life and livelihood.

The impact of globalization on fisheries, on artisanal fishworkers and on women fishworkers was also debated. Globalization trends are eating into women's spaces in fisheries, often converting them from self-employed entrepreneurs involved in fish marketing and processing into inadequately remunerated wage labourers in factories controlled by large industrial groups or multinational companies, trends very much in evidence in Thailand, the Philippines and India.

The workshop ended with a commitment to continue efforts towards defending and expanding women's spaces in fisheries and in fishworkers' organizations, in further developing an understanding of gender issues in fisheries with a focus on 'nurture', rather than on 'extraction' and 'exploitation', and in resolutely working towards a sustainable fishery and an artisanal way of life. ■



# The tattered net of statistics

Sarah Gammage

**Data is often gender-blind, as in El Salvador, but there are several policy benefits in making women's roles more visible**

*...women's contributions remain unrecognized and policymakers fail to take account of women's roles in environmental and development planning.*

From anecdotal evidence, casual observation and ethnographic studies, it is obvious that women are an indivisible part of the artisanal and industrial fishing economy. Yet researchers consistently underestimate the role women play in harvesting fish, in generating household and national income from fishing activities, and in providing labour to the fish processing industry that ultimately enables economies to earn much-needed foreign exchange.

This is largely because quantitative survey instruments fail to capture the gender diversity of the fishing economy, and systematically introduce biases that underestimate the role women play in the fishing economy. As a result, women's contributions remain unrecognized and policymakers fail to take account of women's roles in environmental and development planning.

A cursory examination of the official statistics for El Salvador reveals that very few women fish. The 1990 Fishing Census by the Ministry of Agriculture identifies a little over six per cent of all fishers in El Salvador and almost nine per cent in the department of La Union to be women. Yet, observing the daily activities of fishers and the pattern of household involvement in fish production and processing in El Salvador and much of Central America, this figure differs markedly.

In El Tamarindo, La Union, El Salvador, the economic and subsistence activities of the fishing households have gone on, largely unaffected by the turbulence of the civil war and the insecurities of the reconstruction

period after the 1992 peace accords. Men and women continue to fish in exactly the same way as they have for hundreds of years, in wooden kayaks with nets and paddles. The differences are that now some have motors and others have fibreglass boats.

While men fish in the open seas, the majority of female fishers confine their activities to the estuaries and shore line, catching a range of freshwater and marine fish, crustaceans and mollusc. A few women also fish in the open sea, accompanying other members of their families, to catch shrimp in the coastal waters of Usulutn, La Union and the Gulf of Fonseca.

Women are disproportionately involved in cleaning, eviscerating and processing the catch. They prepare and dry fish for sale in local and regional markets; they contribute to the value added of shrimp exports, deheading and packing the shrimp in ice; and they gather shellfish and crab in the estuaries, providing essential nutrients and proteins to supplement the family diet of corn and beans.

A quantitative survey of 110 mangrove households and 489 individuals was undertaken in 1993 and 1994 in El Tamarindo. The purpose of the survey was to document the nature and extent of the relationship men and women had with the resource base. To capture information about seasonal variation in fishing and agricultural activities, the survey was undertaken during both the wet and dry seasons.

## **Primary occupation**

It revealed that 50 per cent of men in El Tamarindo fished as their primary

This article, by Sarah Gammage, an economist with the International Centre for Research on Women, appeared in *SAMUDRA Report* No. 16, November 1996

occupation. A further 3 per cent were involved in fish processing and marketing. However, only one woman declared herself to be a fisher, and only 6 per cent stated that they were actively involved in fish processing and marketing. The majority of female respondents defined their occupation to be 'housewife', and did not perceive their fishing activities to shape their occupational identity.

Yet, the household consumption and expenditure data revealed that almost 29 per cent of the women in El Tamarindo earned an income. At first glance, this appeared to be contradictory. How could we reconcile the women's economic activities with their stated occupations? In search of more data about how these women earned their income, we added a time allocation questionnaire to the survey. This consisted of detailed questions about how all members of the household spent their days, breaking down the array of household and market activities into their component tasks.

Using the additional data, we were able to determine that almost 26 per cent of women fished either in the estuary or close to the shore line; approximately 60 per cent cleaned the fish and processed the catch; 33 per cent mended the nets, along with other household members; 42 per cent cleaned the boats and helped their husbands haul the catch in from the beach; and 17 per cent sold the produce in local markets, restaurants or bars.

If both men and women fish, and are equally visible in the fishing economy of El Tamarindo, why then do the official statistics state that only 9 per cent of all fishers in La Union are women? Perhaps the answer lies in the use of survey and census questionnaires that are too rigid in their definition of what constitutes a fisher, too inflexible in their precoded responses, and too gender-blind to seek out both male and female respondents.

The majority of survey instruments are precoded. The expected responses to the

questions are laid out as a range of potential answers, so that the enumerator only has to check off the correct category. This offers very little flexibility and precious little time to delve deeper into the subtleties of the responses.

In most questionnaires, to qualify as a fisher, the respondent must: fish regularly for an extended period of time; concentrate his/her activities in the open sea; and demonstrate the possession of (or access to) fishing capital, such as a boat, nets, and a motor. Since the questionnaires are structured to capture this information, they may filter out those who fish sporadically, without capital and close to the shoreline or in the estuaries. The individuals who are excluded in this fashion tend to be women.

#### **Questionnaires faulty**

Another reason why women are consistently not identified as fishers is because many questionnaires are directed at a single household head, the principal breadwinner in the family. The survey usually requires the respondent to identify himself or herself as a household head and state an income that sustains the majority of the household expenditure.

Almost 80 per cent of women in El Tamarindo did not declare themselves to be household heads, although they were subsequently found to be significant decision-makers in the household and to contribute consistently by providing much-needed family income. Unless women are actively sought out as survey respondents, much of the information concerning their lives, their activities and their roles in the household economy will not be revealed.

Typically, surveys directed solely at the 'household head' fail to document or value the activities of other household members, regardless of their gender. This is particularly important for policymakers concerned with the extraction of fisheries resources, or conservationists who would like to harness the skills of all individuals whose livelihoods depend on their environment, to ensure its

· protection. If there is any genuine concern  
· about poverty and income inequality, it is  
· also important to realize that a failure to  
· understand the nature of each individual's  
· contribution to household survival, and the  
· constraints faced in generating income, may  
· result in the inappropriate application of  
· transfers or the wrong targeting of those  
· facing economic scarcity. Where households  
· depend on fragile ecosystems, poverty can  
· prove an overriding constraint that limits all  
· individuals' ability to change their resource  
· use and adopt more sustainable practices.

· As women are not recognized as fishers, they  
· do not have access to the financial and  
· physical resources and extension services  
· they need to improve their productivity and  
· increase their incomes. Moreover, their  
· ability to undertake resource conservation,  
· to fish sustainably, or switch the focus of  
· their fishing activities may be severely  
· limited by their lack of fishing capital.  
· Women's lack of access to fishing capital,  
· credit and extension services is thrown into  
· sharp contrast when we compare their  
· experience with that of male fishers.

· According to the survey, the majority of men  
· in El Tamarindo earned more than women,  
· although the women worked longer hours  
· and undertook both market and household  
· activities. On average, men earned US\$72.29  
· and women US\$29.19 a week. Men were  
· disproportionately able to offer fishing  
· capital (boats, nets and motors) as collateral  
· and, therefore, had better access to credit.  
· This enabled them to overcome cash  
· shortages and make investments in upgrading  
· technologies, or switching to different modes  
· of extraction and different fisheries.

· Approximately 70 per cent of those  
· individuals who had obtained formal credit  
· from a bank or agency had secured the loan  
· by offering the boat and motor as collateral.  
· The majority of these loans were used to  
· purchase new equipment and to upgrade or  
· repair the boats, nets and motors that they  
· already owned. The recipients of such loans  
· were all men.

Only one woman, a household head whose  
husband had left her and who fished with  
her sons, declared the boat and all the fishing  
capital to be hers. The majority of the  
remaining women who fished, or collected  
molluscs and crustaceans in the estuary, used  
tackle and capital that they did not own,  
which were loaned to them temporarily by  
male family members.

Due to their inability to access credit with  
which to purchase fishing capital and  
improve productivity, the women's incomes  
are substantially lower than those of men.  
This is because they are dependent on a  
particular set of coastal resources that have  
a lower market value. Furthermore, without  
fishing capital, they are unable to switch to  
offshore fisheries that yield higher returns  
and can be fished more sustainably.

#### **Limited access**

The majority of women who fished did so in  
the estuary or close to the shoreline. The  
women were confined to a resource base by  
their limited access to capital and by the time  
constraints they faced balancing their  
productive activities with their household  
tasks. They fished for resources that were  
increasingly scarce, or contaminated from  
pesticide run-off and siltation.

The establishment of shrimp farms and salt  
ponds in the mangroves had encroached  
upon their fisheries and destroyed many of  
the breeding grounds for molluscs and  
crustaceans. Increasingly, the resource base  
on which they depended was being  
threatened, and more women were  
competing for limited resources. As a result,  
the resources were being depleted too rapidly  
and extracted unsustainably.

Since women are less visible as fishers, they  
are also less likely to receive extension  
services that furnish them with the required  
knowledge and inputs to change cultural  
practices and extraction patterns. None of  
the women who fished in El Tamarindo had  
ever received a visit from the fishing service  
of the agricultural ministry, or been invited

to a local meeting to discuss fisheries resources. While the number of visits by fisheries extension agents of the Ministry of Fishing was extremely low for all fishers, many of the male fishers had met with the local representative and regularly registered their catch with the fisheries census monitor.

Without access to such knowledge and information, combined with their lack of fishing capital, the women of El Tamarindo were unable to switch to different fisheries and to halt their unsustainable extraction of estuarine resources.

This invisibility of women means that their rights are more likely to go unrecognized. Local legal, economic and political institutions determine the allocation of common property and the use to which that property may be put. In societies where women depend disproportionately on the commons, such institutions determine the nature and scale of women's production activities and their degree of environmental dependence.

In El Tamarindo, the consensus was that estuary fishing had become unsustainable and was threatening offshore fisheries by depleting breeding grounds and undermining a source of nutrients for marine fish. Recognizing local opinion and the Ministry of Agriculture's concerns, the community leaders imposed an informal ban on estuary fishing.

### **Poor institutions**

Consequently, women's access rights were not preserved and a vital source of household protein lost, while women's income-earning activities were displaced. Although the institutions that allocate access rights may not be appropriately structured to enable women to conserve the commons, they may not be immutable.

In several villages in Mozambique's Inhaca Island, for example, women who traditionally fished the estuarine resources of one large mangrove ecosystem

institutionalized the customary allocation of resource rights. Women began by limiting the number of fishers in the inter-tidal zone. Each inter-tidal area was delimited and assigned to an individual village or group of houses in such a way as to ensure that the number of fishers was in proportion to the size of the resource base.

By pressuring the community institutions that guaranteed resource rights, the women were able to secure their individual economic needs by clearly designating and enforcing property relations. The women carefully defined who had access to particular inter-tidal areas, prevented encroachments by outsiders and limited fishing for particular species to specific periods. In this way, they were able to gain the full benefits of conservation efforts, while continuing to meet their subsistence requirements.

In noting the contributions women make to the fishing economy, the evidence from El Tamarindo is not isolated. Yet, on the whole, the body of knowledge on women's fishing activities remains extremely small. Without a doubt, the role that women play as fishers supports households and generates income in many developing countries. In Pangasinan and Bataan in the Philippines, women generate, respectively, almost 34 per cent and 25 per cent of total household income from their primary fishing activity in the estuaries and lagoons. Cumulatively, they dedicate a little over 10 months of the year to these activities.

However, such examples of the careful documentation and quantification of women's economic activities in the fishing sector are rare. As a result, policymakers have little information about women's roles and contributions. Conservation and development policies may, therefore, be inappropriately designed.

As the data from El Tamarindo shows, the effective revision of survey instruments to include the full range of activities that women perform in the fishing economy is a

· prerequisite to enabling social and political  
· institutions to respond appropriately and  
· ensure the sustainable use of fisheries  
· resources. Researchers should judiciously  
· use qualitative and quantitative methods to  
· gather information about fishing populations.  
· In this way, policymakers can be better  
· informed about the needs of women fishers  
· and be better able to channel resources to  
· support changes in resource use and  
· extraction.

· Fishing data need not be gender-blind. By  
· overcoming the systematic exclusion of  
· women from statistical surveys and reports,  
· women may become more visible and their  
· activities more prominent. Furthermore,  
· attempts to change resource use, generate  
· alternative income-earning opportunities for  
· fishers and relieve resource dependency will  
· become more focused and more targeted  
· once they are informed by rigorous  
· qualitative and quantitative data that describe  
· the multiplicity of women's roles in the  
· fishing economy. ■



# Cut adrift

Barbara L. Neis

**The MSC initiative can be criticized from the perspective of fishery-dependent women of the North**

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*Women should come together as one and not leave the decision making and planning to the men... If women made some of the decisions, there would be more employment and better programmes in place for women in rural communities.*

—a Newfoundland fisherwoman

Throughout the world, the relationships of men and women to fisheries resources, work and wealth differ. Although important cultural and class differences exist, women depend on those resources for food, work, income and identity. Yet they tend to have less control than men over these resources and the associated wealth.

Despite these realities, initiatives in fisheries management and fisheries conservation are rarely scrutinized for their potential impacts on women. The proposal for a Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) developed by the environmental transnational, the World Wide Fund for Nature, and the giant corporate transnational, Unilever, shares this weakness.

The assumptions upon which it is based are flawed, and there are ways in which it might negatively impact women of the North (and South) and, indeed, the fish stocks themselves.

The proposed MSC will consist of an appointed team of 'experts' who will certify fisheries as sustainable and then encourage seafood companies to join groups of sustainable buyers, purchase fish only from these sources, and market such fish with an ecolabel. Consumer demand will presumably

provide the major incentive for corporations and, ultimately, governments to participate in the process of developing sustainable fisheries.

At first glance, the MSC proposal might be interpreted as a feminist initiative. Due to their continued responsibility for shopping, food production and service in the home, the MSC proposal appears to position women so that they could have an unprecedented impact on the fate of the world's fishery resources. Guided by expert advice and progressive corporate initiatives, women's choices could restructure the world's fisheries in the direction of sustainability.

However, there are some things wrong with this picture. There is definitely a need for greater public scrutiny of fisheries management and corporate behaviour within the fisheries sector. One way to achieve such scrutiny is through consumer education. However, education is only one factor that influences consumption.

The MSC picture ignores the complex realities of women's consumption work, its diversity and the differing places they occupy in fish product markets. For example, women in different parts of the world consume different fish products, in different contexts, and they acquire these resources in different ways. Rich women and poor women, urban women and women in fishery-dependent communities do not all consume fish in the same manner. One way to scrutinize the implications of the proposed MSC, then, is to examine its potential impacts on access to fish for consumption among these different groups of women.

*The assumptions upon which it is based are flawed, and there are ways in which it might negatively impact women of the North (and South).*

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This article, by Barbara L. Neis of the Department of Sociology, Memorial University, St. John's, Newfoundland, Canada, appeared in *SAMUDRA Report* No. 16, November 1996

• It seems probable that women of the North  
• (and in Southeast Asia) will be more likely  
• to consume fish that is ecolabelled than  
• women of the South. I say this because  
• ecolabelling will do nothing to reduce the  
• cost of fish and might actually increase its  
• cost—already a barrier for women of the  
• South and poor women of the North.

• This will happen also because women of the  
• North, particularly urban, wealthy women,  
• are more likely to consume processed fish  
• purchased in large supermarkets, where  
• packaging and labelling exist.

• If, as John Kurien has suggested (*SAMUDRA*  
• *Report No. 15*), ecolabelling actually  
• promotes the export of fish products by  
• fuelling consumer demand in a context of  
• resource scarcity, women consumers in the  
• North could unknowingly contribute to  
• reduced food self-sufficiency and reduced  
• economic power among women in the South  
• as well as among women in fishery-  
• dependent regions in the North.

• In his article promoting the MSC (*SAMUDRA*  
• *Report No. 15*), Michael Sutton argues that  
• the MSC will put the market in the lead and  
• “where the market leads, governments will  
• likely follow.” In the North, the emphasis  
• on fish exports is being combined with the  
• introduction of management initiatives like  
• Individual Transferable Quotas.

• These moves are drastically limiting the  
• access of men, and particularly women, in  
• fishery-dependent communities to those fish  
• resources that remain. The combined impact  
• of these initiatives and the increase in exports  
• of fish seems to arise from the growing  
• political commitment to the export markets  
• and those who depend upon them, and the  
• declining commitment to those in fishery  
• regions who experience the cumulative  
• effects of displacement from the industry and  
• loss of access to fish for subsistence.

• Women and men need to carefully scrutinize  
• Sutton’s endorsement of the claim that  
• “markets are replacing our democratic

institutions as the key determinant in our  
society.” While this may be happening, it is  
not something that we should necessarily  
support.

As argued by Czerny, Swift and Clarke, in  
*Getting Started on Social Analysis in*  
*Canada*, if the market is a democracy, it is a  
democracy in which some have more votes  
than others, and in which, although  
consumers can vote, they have little control  
over who or what they vote for. Poor women  
are particularly powerless, partly because  
they have few votes in the marketplace.

### **Food conglomerates**

Vertically integrated food conglomerates are  
increasingly the primary consumers of fish  
products. These conglomerates actually have  
the most votes in the marketplace for fish  
products. When we recognize that the  
producers are often also the consumers, what  
does this tell us about the MSC initiative?

Particularly in the North, fish is often  
consumed in restaurants and fast food outlets  
or in the form of products whose growth has  
been enhanced by the use of fishmeal and  
fish oils. A company might commit itself to  
use only fish from certified harvesting  
sectors, but will the ecolabelling process  
follow this fish from the vessel through  
processing, manufacturing, preparation and  
service to the consumer?

For example, will restaurants be certified?  
Will meat products grown using fish oil from  
sustainable fisheries be labelled at the  
counter or at the restaurant table? If they are,  
how will the validity of this certification be  
ensured? Who will police the corporations  
and how will they do this? At what cost? Are  
there other ways to spend this money that  
might be more effective at promoting  
sustainable fisheries? Why not ask some  
women what they think?

If, in our proposals for sustainable fisheries,  
we do not include differences in voting  
power within the market and differences in  
control over products available for purchase,

we could end up blaming stock collapses on consumers, The most probable target would be those increasing numbers of poor consumers, primarily women, whose purchases are dictated by low incomes and who, therefore, can not always afford to distinguish between fish products on the basis of ecolabelling.

This blame would be misplaced because it overstates the power of these women and also because it ignores the reality that the poor (both in the North and the South) consume relatively little protein compared to the rich, and the protein they consume is more likely to be a by-product of protein production for the wealthy than the primary source of demand. In a world where wild fish resources (like other natural resources) are limited, the problem is not just what fish we eat, but also how much we eat and in what form.

A full discussion of the implications of the proposed MSC for women of the North needs to look not only at women as consumers of fish products, but also at women who depend on fishery resources for employment, culture and community. The household basis of fisheries in Atlantic Canada, Norway and many other parts of the North is well documented. Women contribute directly to these fisheries as workers, organizers and managers, in fishery households, industries and communities. They have fishery knowledge and skills, and depend on fish resources and industries for their livelihoods and, to some extent, for self-sufficiency in food.

The moratoriums on groundfish in Atlantic Canada have demonstrated the profoundly negative impacts resource degradation can have on these women. In Newfoundland and Labrador, the area of Atlantic Canada hardest hit by the collapse of the cod stocks, about 12,000 women lost jobs in the industry. The crisis also affected women doing unpaid work in their husbands' fishing enterprises, such as bookkeeping, supplying and cooking for crews.

Other women lost work in childcare and the retail sector in fishery-dependent communities. In addition, out migration and government cutbacks are reducing the number of women employed in education, health and social services. As workers, wives and mothers who are rooted in their local communities, these women have a vested interest in sustainable fisheries.

When looked at from the perspective of these and other fishery-dependent women of the North, the underlying assumptions of Sutton's arguments for an MSC are extremely problematic. Sutton is correct in his argument that global fish stocks are in trouble.

### **Indefensible**

However, his explanation for these problems is more difficult to defend. He implies that the cause of these problems, particularly in the North, is too much democracy: governments have been unwilling to take the decisions necessary to prevent overfishing, due to political pressure from a fishing industry driven to use up resources and destroy itself. Women in fishery communities do not seem to share this perception that the roots of resource degradation lie in *too much* democracy.

In the case of Atlantic Canada and Norway, for example, they feel that decisions about the fishery, past and present, have been made by people who are not familiar with the strengths and needs of rural communities and, more specifically, with the needs of women. They also feel that without the knowledge and the support of local people, development efforts as well as initiatives to create sustainable fisheries will not succeed.

If Sutton's diagnosis of the causes of global overfishing is incorrect, so is his solution. There is no guarantee that the proposed MSC will remove politics from fisheries management. The process of defining 'expertise' has political dimensions, as does the process of defining sustainable fishing. In his book *Fishing for Truth*, for example, Finlayson has shown that data from small-

· scale fishers were underutilized by fisheries  
· scientists in Newfoundland, Canada because  
· of dissimilarities in the rules, norms and  
· language of these fishers and those of  
· scientists.

·  
· Elsewhere, I have shown how latent biases  
· towards the offshore trawler fishery in the  
· science of stock assessment in  
· Newfoundland became evident when this  
· science was examined from the perspective  
· of small-scale, inshore fishers. I have also  
· argued that small-scale fishers' knowledge  
· poses problems for fisheries science and  
· management that are similar to those posed  
· by the ecosystem itself. This is, perhaps, even  
· more true of the knowledge of fishery-  
· dependent women.

·  
· If the expertise of male fishers is  
· marginalized within fisheries science and  
· management enterprises in the countries of  
· the North, that of female fishers and  
· fishworkers is excluded.

·  
· Women in fishery households must bridge  
· the growing gap between the costs of fishing  
· and the value of landings that occur when  
· resources are mismanaged. Women  
· processing workers get less work.

·  
· However, when these women attempt to  
· draw upon their knowledge and experience  
· to influence fisheries policy, as happened in  
· Norway during the cod moratorium, the  
· integrative nature of that knowledge (rooted  
· in links between ecology, household, work,  
· markets and communities) makes it difficult  
· for managers to grasp.

·  
· **Objective knowledge?**

· As argued by Siri Gerrard, the perception that  
· such knowledge represents particular  
· interests, whereas scientific knowledge is  
· objective, contributes to this marginalization  
· by according science a greater power.

·  
· In Sutton's account, fisheries-dependent  
· women are not explicitly identified among  
· the stakeholders whom the MSC could  
· consult in formulating its standards and

principles for sustainable fishing. Shifting  
decisions on fisheries management from  
elected governments to an MSC with no clear  
accountability to fishery communities will  
augment existing limits on democracy  
located in the political sphere and in the  
market, and further erode women's power.  
In so doing, it will undermine the potential  
for sustainable fisheries.

The marginalization of women's knowledge  
and experience will persist despite women's  
continued responsibility for childcare, which  
may enhance their commitment to ensuring  
that resources are managed in such a way as  
to protect future generations—one  
requirement for sustainable development.

A second requirement for sustainability that  
is not explicitly identified in the MSC  
proposal is the need to reduce inequities,  
including gender-related ones, within the  
current generation. James Boyce has outlined  
the intimate ties between environmental  
degradation and the distribution of wealth  
and power. Economic inequities and not too  
much democracy are primarily responsible  
for overfishing in countries of the North *and*  
the South. The wealthy tend to benefit more  
than the poor from overfishing and the  
willingness to pay the costs associated with  
sustainable fishing is constrained by the  
ability to pay.

In politics and in the market, wealth speaks  
louder than poverty. In Canada, cuts to  
social and other programmes designed to  
redistribute wealth from wealthy to poorer,  
fishery-dependent areas of the country, and  
from men to women, are exacerbating  
economic inequities at the same time as those  
vulnerable to these cuts are reeling from the  
effects of resource degradation.

An initiative like the MSC that proposes to  
create sustainable fisheries without  
addressing these deepening economic  
inequities will not be effective. As women  
tend to be poorer than men, and exercise less  
control over natural resources and politics,  
it is probable that they will suffer most from

this failure. Unfortunately, there is no guarantee that the potential negative impacts of the MSC will be offset by gains in fishery sustainability. Ecolabelling could, ironically, undermine the sustainability of precisely those fisheries it identifies as adequately managed.

There are a number of reasons for believing this might be the case. The collapse of the groundfish stocks of Atlantic Canada has shown that there is enormous scientific uncertainty regarding the dynamics and status of wild fish stocks.

In addition, most commercial stocks are already overexploited; there is an arsenal of underutilized fishing vessels available to target those stocks for which there is a strong demand; and the national and international mechanisms for preventing the diversion of fishing effort from one fishery to another are extremely weak.

Defining some fisheries as sustainable and promoting the market for them will prompt increased pressure on those stocks. Not only will this be difficult to control but the effects of it will also be difficult to monitor.

**Prize or death sentence?**

In short, winning the ecolabel prize could be the equivalent of a death sentence for those fisheries and for the communities that depend upon them. ■



# Innocent victims

Nilufar Ahmad

**The women of Bangladesh are paying a heavy price for resisting the powerful interests in the shrimp farming industry**

*In the minds of local people as well as other citizens of Bangladesh, these incidents have raised serious questions about human rights, sustainable human development and the obligation of the government.*

**P**aikgacha and Batiaghata are not the most famous of places in Bangladesh. Only local people have heard of these remote areas in Khulna, a district located 350 km southwest of Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh. In the early 1990s, however, these names kept cropping up in the local newspapers as violence related to commercial shrimp cultivation erupted.

From 1995 onwards, these villages have achieved national prominence, following several reports of a number of violent incidents and indiscriminate abuses of human rights in commercial shrimp cultivation areas. In the minds of local people as well as other citizens of Bangladesh, these incidents have raised serious questions about human rights, sustainable human development and the obligation of the government.

The problems have been compounded by the fact that the local administrative officials and the police, who are supposed to maintain law and order, and implement their own stated policy of “protecting the innocent and punishing the criminals”, have allegedly done just the opposite: protecting criminals, while punishing the innocent.

Violence erupted in Horinkhola village within *polder 22* (a *polder* is an embankment) of Paikgacha in the early morning of 7 November 1990. Wajed Ali, a rich shrimp farm owner and businessman, arrived with his armed hired hands, intending to forcibly breach the embankment and establish shrimp farms there. *Polder 22* had been maintained as a shrimp-free zone at the insistence of local people, who wanted to

protect their environment and agriculture-based, traditional livelihood. When Wajed Ali and his hired hands arrived at the *polder* in speedboats, the villagers mobilized and rushed to the area to resist. They marched to the river-bank, women and children in the lead, believing that this would ensure a peaceful, bloodless confrontation.

Instead, Wajed Ali’s men hurled bombs and opened fire with rifles and machine guns. Fifty women and men were injured. A 45-year old woman, Korunamoi Sardar, was killed in the firing.

Ali and his men had to subsequently flee in the face of the strong resistance by the villagers. The body of Korunamoi Sardar was taken away by Ali’s men, while a tuft of her hair and a portion of her brain remained on the battlefield for two days.

Rahela Khatun, a landless woman from Paikgacha, describes what happened: “On 7 November 1990, on learning that Wajed Ali had arrived with goons to breach the embankment and flood land for shrimp cultivation, we rushed to the spot to resist the attempt.”

“As we were marching toward the embankment,” continues Rahela, “with the women and children in front, the hoodlums opened fire and hurled bombs at us. Korunamoi Sardar was killed on the spot and more than 50 men and women were severely injured.”

## **Police lethargy**

“The body of Korunamoi Sardar was taken away by the attackers,” recalls Rahela,

This article, by Nilufar Ahmad of Nijera Kori, an NGO working in Bangladesh, appeared in *SAMUDRA Report* No. 17, March 1997

“while a tuft of her hair was hanging from the nearby *babla* tree and a portion of her brain remained on the ground for two days, until the Paikgacha police finally took these away for examination. Korunamoi’s body was never found.

We have built a memorial on the spot she died. Every year we organize a large meeting on 7 November to remember her martyrdom. People from various areas come and pay respect. They are encouraged by our struggle and some managed to liberate their land from the illegal occupation by the *gher* owners.”

Rupabhan Bibi, a 46-year old widow and one of the 50 injured on 7 November 1990, was also taken away by Wajed’s men and later left on the river-bank, on the assumption that she was dead. When the *gher* owners came with their hired hands and firearms to forcibly gain control over land for shrimp cultivation, about 4,000 women and men of Koria village gathered on the river-bank. This joint protest forced the intruders to leave.

Later, in Koria village, police and armed guards came looking for villagers who were in hiding. They entered households where there were only women and children. They used obscene language and assaulted the women. This enraged the women, who started to fight back with brooms and sticks. The police were stunned by this unified resistance and fled.

Amina Khatun, a woman of Koria, was asked later about her courage in resisting police and armed men with her broom. She remained silent for a while, then replied with tears in her eyes, “My husband has been in hiding for the last few days and I have no food in my house. On top of everything else, the police came into my household, used obscene language and pushed me around. I have no place to hide. I have been pushed against the wall. I have no choice but to defend my children and myself with whatever I have, So, I picked up my broom and beat the policeman with it.”

After the news was flashed in the national newspapers, the police finally arrived at the scene. Although the villagers filed suits against Wajed Ali and 34 others, Ali’s membership in the ruling political party ensured his immunity from prosecution.

Wajed Ali filed suits against 50 villagers. Some of them were arrested in their hospital beds, as they recovered from the wounds inflicted by Ali’s attack, and placed into detention without bail.

At the time of the incident, Nijera Kori, an NGO, was working with landless women and men of Khulna. Nijera Kori’s legal aid cell helped the arrested villagers obtain bail. Though the villagers’ murder suit against Wajed Ali is still pending, they have won one battle of environmental justice through their activism and sacrifice of *life—polder 22* (surrounded by shrimp-cultivating areas) is still a shrimp-free zone.

On 17 September 1994, Jabber Sheikh of Batiaghata Thana was seriously injured by bombs, thrown at him by unknown assailants. He died in the hospital four days later.

Jabber Sheikh was a member of the Amirpur union council. He was against commercial shrimp cultivation in his area and had mobilized the local people to resist such aquaculture. As an elected official, he tried to get help from the local administration, and was a targeted enemy of the shrimp cultivators.

The murder of Jabber Sheikh enraged the villagers, who mobilized and repossessed the lands illegally occupied by the shrimp farmers. The shrimp farmers attacked the villages many times to reoccupy the shrimp ponds, but the villagers successfully resisted these incursions.

However, valuable land areas still remain barren, as villagers try to cultivate agricultural products, but are foiled by shrimp farmers, who forcibly breach embankments to flood land with salt water and ruin crops.

• The villagers allege that the local  
• administration and the police do not protect  
• them. Instead, they side with the shrimp  
• farmers. Thus, the people's movement for  
• basic rights and environmental justice goes  
• on.

• **Indelible mark**

• The violence from shrimp farmers has left  
• indelible marks on the bodies and minds of  
• the people in the coastal area. In one incident  
• in the Buzbunia village in Botiaghata, the  
• shrimp farmers forcibly dug into Sadiq Ali's  
• courtyard and family graveyard to take out  
• soil for constructing embankments around  
• shrimp ponds.

• When Sadiq Au objected to this sacrilege,  
• the armed guards beat him as well as his wife  
• and adolescent son. Their bodies still bear  
• the marks of the beatings. Violence left  
• grievous wounds in the minds of Hameeda  
• Begum, Manjira Akhtar and Anjira Akhtar  
• of Buzbunia village, who were also assaulted  
• by the armed guards.

• Violence by armed guards and harassment  
• by police forced the men of Korla village  
• into hiding between February and April  
• 1995. The men were afraid and could not  
• participate in the prayer for Id-ul-Fitra—one  
• of the biggest and most important religious  
• festivals. When a child died in the violence;  
• only children attended the funeral as a sign  
• of solidarity. Even the activities for national  
• immunization day on 16 March 1995 had to  
• be cancelled because of the violence by  
• shrimp farmers.

• As a result of Bangladesh's current  
• development priorities, the majority of the  
• people tend to lose access to, and use of, the  
• common property resources appropriated by  
• wealthy corporate and individual interests.

• Often, the State has supported influential  
• business interests through legal, illegal and/  
• or violent means. It is ironic that enhanced  
• production of these food crops has  
• contributed to decreased food security at  
• national, local and household levels;

deteriorated human and environmental  
conditions; escalated social injustice and  
violence.

In recent years, commercial shrimp  
cultivation has increased tremendously in the  
coastal areas of Bangladesh. About 2.5 mn  
hectares of coastal land have potential for  
shrimp farming. In 1995, a total of 124,000  
ha of coastal land in Khulna, Satkhira,  
Bagerhat and Cox's Bazaar were under  
shrimp cultivation. This represented an  
increase of about 10 per cent per annum since  
1980.

Export earnings from shrimp have increased  
from 145 mn taka in 1977-78 to 6,997 mn  
taka, or close to US\$175 mn, in 1992-93.  
Thousands have found employment in the  
shrimp cultivation and processing industry.  
This has had some impact on the economy  
of Bangladesh.

**Livelihoods destroyed**

Unfortunately, profit-driven, unplanned,  
indiscriminate and illegal shrimp farming is  
destroying the livelihoods of small, marginal  
farmers, fishermen, dairy farmers and the  
landless poor. The law and order situation  
has deteriorated in these coastal areas and  
the long-term environmental consequences  
of unregulated shrimp cultivation include the  
irreversible degradation of land, water  
systems, biodiversity, forest and vegetation.

It is unfortunate that while, nationwide,  
leaders of the women's movement are  
mobilizing for gender equality and  
empowerment of women in every aspect of  
their lives, the women in the shrimp  
cultivation areas are deprived of even the  
basic human rights provided for by the  
Constitution of Bangladesh and different  
United Nations Conventions. These women  
regularly face physical and sexual violence  
and abuse from the *gher* (shrimp farm)  
owners and their hired hands.

Like in other rural areas in Bangladesh, the  
communities in Batiaghata and Paikgacha  
are fairly conservative. The women usually



remain secluded within the household. However, due to the atrocities committed by the *gher* owners, especially the murders of Kornnamoi Sardar and Jabber Sheikh, women are forced to come out of seclusion to resist the *gher* owners.

This new attitude was typified by Maimon Bibi, a 60-year old woman who testified at a public hearing. She described how she had picked up the broom and run with the others to the riverbank to resist the goons. In a tearful voice, she asked again and again, “Is Batiaghata truly a part of Bangladesh? If yes, why are the government and police not protecting us from the *gher* owners?” ■



# Tussle in Tranquebar

George Mathew

**The problem of access to credit has divided the women fish traders of three villages in Tamil Nadu, India**

*Now, during crises, they have to depend on informal sources of credit for loans at fairly high rates of interest, from middlemen and moneylenders, for example.*

Women in India's artisanal fishing communities do not usually catch fish, but they do just about everything else related to fishing—net-making, processing, gutting, drying, smoking and marketing. Many of them also work as petty fish traders.

A major problem such traders face is their inability to save. Savings would not only form a cheap source of credit but also allow these women to tide over lean periods. Now, during crises, they have to depend on informal sources of credit for loans at fairly high rates of interest, from middlemen and moneylenders, for example. While formal sources of credit, such as banks, would charge lower interest, their procedures are difficult to understand. In addition, the petty fish traders are largely regarded as bad risks.

This problem of access to credit has led to an interesting power struggle among the petty fish traders in three Tamil Nadu villages—Pudupettai, Kuttilyandiyur and Vellakovil, located close to Tranquebar town in Nagai Quad-E-Millet district.

To facilitate access to credit, the Rural Organization for Social Action (ROSA), an NGO formed seven years ago near Nagapattinam, organized groups of petty fish traders and encouraged them to save part of their income. The money thus saved was then re-loaned at rates of interest below those charged by the local moneylender. The whole operation was managed by the petty fish traders through a management committee.

Petty fish traders are often seen as a homogenous group with similar

characteristics and needs. This has meant that development programmes end up actually helping only a small proportion of the population. In reality, there are considerable variations in the socioeconomic status of the petty fish traders, due to differential access to local resources.

Over the years, recognizing these differences, ROSA has classified the petty fish traders into three categories on the basis of the value of their transactions, the markets accessed, type of assets possessed and their status within the household and the community.

The first category comprises the vast majority. These women usually belong to nuclear households. They are the have-nots of the community, with few material possessions, a low social status and little decision-making power within the household.

They usually buy low-value fish, like sardines and mackerels, from catamarans which land fish between 7 am and 8 am, and engage in door-to-door sale till 10 am. Their turnover is typically between Rs100 to Rs750. They carry fish on their heads to households located in the surrounding agricultural villages within a 25-km radius. The physical work is heavy, competition is high and profit margins are low.

The fish is usually procured on credit, either from the auctioneer or from friends and relatives. The auctioneer is repaid at the end of the day—no interest is charged. Friends or relatives can be repaid over two or three days; but the interest is as high as 120 per

This article, by George Mathew, Officer, Social & Economic Unit, ODA Post-harvest Fisheries Project, Madras, India, appeared in SAMUDRA Report No. 17, March 1997

cent. The women have to care for their small children, with little help from the family. Most often, husbands work as crew members on fishing vessels, with low earnings. The women's earnings are thus needed to keep the kitchen fires burning. Some husbands have no income and are alcoholics living off their wives.

Within their households, these traders do not enjoy any decision-making power. The inability to save reduces the capacity of the household to meet the periodic crises that are common to fishing activities. The formation of the thrift group has provided the petty fish traders from this category an opportunity to save a part of their income, most often without the knowledge of their husbands.

Nagavalli of Vellakovil, who entered into fish trade recently, says, "The credit group has enabled me to set apart some of the money which would otherwise have gone into alcohol or gambling. I now have a larger circle of friends whom I can turn to when I need money."

The second category of petty fish traders usually deals with high-value species, such as prawns and seer fish. They also procure sardines, mackerels and clupeids, when in season, but handle much larger quantities. Their turnover is usually between Rs1,000 to Rs10,000 per day.

These women get fish from both traditional craft and from trawlers which land their catch at the Nagapattinam fisheries harbour. They procure their fish around 5 am and leave for the market by 6 am. Most often, to ensure a regular supply of fish, they advance credit to the auctioneers located both in their fishing villages and at Nagapattinam.

The capital they use is either their own or borrowed. The latter is most likely to be from a friend or relative, who would typically charge an interest of around 60 per cent per annum. Traders belonging to this category are usually considered creditworthy. Hence,

they are better placed to bargain for lower interest rates, unlike the women in the first category.

These better-off traders access distant markets, such as Mayiladuthurai and Sankaranpanthal located 60 km from their fishing villages. Their clients are usually men, often of rich households, that have a family member working in Singapore or the Middle East countries. The prices they charge are fairly high as their customers demand a regular supply of good quality fish. As transactions are usually based on the weight of fish, it is easy for the traders to cheat on the quantity sold. Consequently, traders from this category have fairly large margins.

### **Greater powers**

These women enjoy relatively greater decision-making powers within their households. They also save fairly well. Due to this high rate of savings, these women are the major contributors to the business transacted by the savings and credit group to which they belong. They express keen interest in the working of the group and most often play a major role in the management of the group's resources.

The biggest problem faced by these traders is getting their fish to the markets on time. They can only use public transport buses to reach Mayiladuthurai and Sankaranpanthal, since fish baskets are not allowed inside private buses. It costs approximately Rs35 to transport two baskets. Apart from the ticket fare of Rs11, the cost includes a bribe for permitting fish on board.

A woman needs to sell at least two baskets to make a decent profit. The women use ice to preserve the fish. Water from the melting ice seeps from their baskets, much to the irritation of fellow commuters. During peak hours, these women are not allowed to board. As a result, some of the fish gets spoilt.

When there are more than five women going to the market, they get together and hire a van, paying around Rs50 per head for a one-

way trip. On their return from the market, they usually buy groceries or essentials for their households.

As the timing of their return varies, some of them take buses to come home. “I have a difficult time when I return from the market. The conductors object to my entering the bus on the ground that the basket stinks. They want me to pay the bribe I would otherwise have paid on my onward journey,” says Idumbayi of Kuttiyandiyur.

Most of the traders in this category come from households that possess at least one traditional fishing craft. They usually have grown-up children who manage the household while they are away selling fish. Large sums of money have to be raised to acquire a craft for a grown-up son or to marry off a daughter, after paying a big dowry. Sometimes both these obligations have to be met.

The money needed for a fishing craft is usually around Rs150,000. The amount given as dowry varies. A dowry usually consists of a range of assets, such as craft and gear, cash and jewellery. The groom’s family status in the village hierarchy often determines the amount of cash and jewellery.

A recent development has been the construction of brick and concrete houses or ‘cement *veedus*’. A State government loan of Rs25,000 for such construction is supplemented with loans from the local prawn trader. And instead of a two-room dwelling, a two-storied house is then built. Up to Rs200,000 may be borrowed to construct the house. The rise in status, and the consequent access to government structures in the local area, drives such debt burdens.

Consequently, many traders in this category are either in the process of building houses or have completed construction. They are confident they will be able to repay the prawn traders. A big rental market for accommodation has opened up with the establishment of prawn farms in the local

area. “I had to spend Rs3,000 for bribing and entertaining the officials of the fisheries department,” says Ariyamuthu of Kuttiyandiyur. She clearly did not intend to repay the amount.

The third category of fish traders deals in dried fish—usually ribbon fish and flying fish as well as mackerels, when there are glut landings—and sell them in the interior. Besides this, when there are very large landings of sardines, they are dried for use as poultry feed. Women from both the second and third categories of traders help produce such poultry feed, following the expansion of the poultry industry around Namakkal in Salem district.

Fish used for drying is usually bought from traditional fishing craft, usually when there is a glut in landings. The traders also use the catches from their own family’s catamarans. The value of fish procured is between Rs10,000 and Rs15,000. With unit prices being the lowest, the quantity of fish procured is large.

#### **Distant markets**

These traders usually access distant markets, such as Kumbakonam and Thanjavur located about 120 km from their villages. In most cases, the markets are weekly fairs where all manner of agricultural, marine and artisanal products are sold. The low procurement cost, and the relatively long shelf-life of dried fish products, make the profit margins relatively high.

The scale of the operation allows the individual trader to hire transport on her own. Market timings are such that the women reach the market on the previous night to set up shop early the next morning. “I have often had to sleep in the open in order to ensure that I get a suitable place next day,” says Madathachi of Kuttiyandiyur. The women usually sell fish on a retail basis but sometimes they get involved in wholesale trade.

The traders in this category are usually heads of joint families, are over 60 years old, and

have few social commitments. Unlike young women, they can venture out far from the village. The young women in the families manage the household and supervise the processing of fish. The older women belong to some of the most powerful families in the region and they are the ones who control the activities of the savings and credit groups.

The traders take part in these groups so that they can influence the other petty fish traders and the auctions on the beach. Many catamaran operators and beach-level auctioneers, who owe them money, give the dry fish traders preferential access in return.

The other petty fish traders borrow money from the dry-fish traders. They curry favour with the latter traders for another reason as well—to buy fish on more favourable terms from the catamaran operators.

The typical thrift and credit group in these villages consists of 15 to 20 members. Each member pays Rs20 per month. Every month the total amount collected is loaned out in multiples of Rs200. The size of the loan and the repayment schedule are decided by members of the credit group. Decision-making power in the group is usually in the hands of the second and third categories of petty fish traders, although in all they constitute just 20 per cent of the members of the group.

The members are encouraged to open individual bank accounts. This enables access to concessional credit provided by the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), under its self-help group programme. Although this is a major achievement, the beneficiaries are the well-to-do fish traders.

### **Bank loans**

To qualify for a NABARD loan, the individual trader must maintain a savings account for a minimum of six months. During this period, she is not allowed to withdraw any money and should maintain a balance of Rs250 at the end of the probation period. This stipulation effectively prevents traders from

the first category accessing NABARD funding. Worse, traders from the second and third categories often re-loan the money they get from NABARD to needy traders from the first category. Similarly, the lack of access to public transport is a major issue for the credit groups, though it affects only the few relatively well-off fish traders. The vast majority walk to the markets. For them, access to buses is merely an academic question.

The credit group spends a lot of time and effort in agitating for special public transport services from the town of Tranquebar to the large markets of Mayiladuthurai and Sankaranpanthal, though this will benefit only a few members.

Through its animators, ROSA has taken several steps to break the stranglehold of the well-to-do traders in the credit group, and also ensure that the group stays together. Recognizing the need for greater control over the allocation of financial resources within the household by petty fish traders of the first category, ROSA devised a series of training exercises to improve the self-confidence of these traders. After 15 months of these exercises, 25 traders from the first category, from three villages, reported that they had more than doubled their savings. “For the past three months, I have been able to save Rs30 per month, as I do not give any money to my husband. Instead, I demand that he contribute to the running of the household,” says Selvi of Kuttiyandiyur.

Two additional income-generating activities were initiated: production of fish pickles and high-quality rack-dried mackerels, both of which enjoy a good local market. Both these activities were taken up exclusively by women of the first category of traders.

While ROSA supplied the initial working capital and did the marketing, the traders provided their labour and skills to get raw materials at the cheapest prices. The profits generated from the activities were reinvested. After three production cycles, the volumes were large enough to ensure that each

· individual had a bank balance of Rs250 at  
· the end of a six-month period. Although only  
· five benefited from this activity, it did open  
· NABARD's doors to the traders.

break up within a few months, as their  
management committee often lacked the  
ability to enforce decisions. ■

·  
· Transporting fish from the landing centre to  
· the market is the most strenuous part for petty  
· fish traders belonging to the first category.  
· "I am so tired by the time I reach the nearby  
· villages, I have little energy left to market  
· the fish," says Deviga of Kuttiyandiyur. To  
· reduce the strain, an appropriate means of  
· transportation—a motorized tricycle that  
· could carry eight persons and their baskets—  
· was introduced in the villages.

·  
· It turned out that the tricycle benefited others  
· as well. The second category of traders used  
· them to travel from fish landing centres to  
· the bus-stand. Besides, fishermen started  
· using the tricycles to visit cinema theatres  
· or tea shops at Tranquebar.

·  
· Local merchants used them to transport  
· commodities from large towns such as  
· Mayiladuthurai and Karaikal. The income  
· generated from such operations was  
· reinvested in a capital fund meant to be used  
· to buy a new tricycle when the present one  
· becomes unusable.

·  
· Breaking the stranglehold of the second and  
· third category of fish traders is not easy. They  
· resist any overt attempt to organize and  
· strengthen the first category of traders. Since  
· these women lack the entrepreneurial skills  
· needed to run small units, the second and  
· third category of traders manage to control  
· these units too—by taking on administrative  
· tasks such as procuring raw materials and  
· maintaining the accounts.

·  
· Lately, though, the first-category traders have  
· managed to muster enough confidence to  
· take over the maintenance of accounts in two  
· credit groups. In a few other cases, the group  
· had to restructure itself to allow the first-  
· category traders to form a group of their own.

·  
· However, it remains to be seen whether such  
· a group can maintain its cohesion. Earlier,  
· credit groups formed in this way tended to



• On arrival at the local landing centre, we  
• were greeted by a most worrying sight, which  
• reflects what is happening along the entire  
• Peruvian coastline. In the aftermath of El  
• Niño, most of the important fish species have  
• not yet recovered to their historic levels and,  
• because of this, most boats lie idle.  
• Fishermen have to wait for the few boats to  
• arrive, to help unload the catches or clean  
• out the fish-holds. We also saw fishermen's  
• wives competing for the same work as their  
• husbands.

• Maria, who married an artisanal fisherman  
• after studying at the university, told us her  
• story. They came to Pucusana eight years  
• ago, and, for the last seven, she has worked  
• alongside her husband to help raise their six  
• children. Due to the difficult economic  
• situation and the need to increase their family  
• income, she decided to look for work. Of all  
• the options open to her, she chose to go  
• fishing with her husband. This has effectively  
• doubled her workload.

• Along with taking care of both the children  
• and the household, she has to do the same  
• jobs and work the same long hours as her  
• husband—making nets, cleaning fish-holds,  
• repairing boats, slicing up sharks, etc. She  
• has to get up at 3 am or 4 am, and does not  
• get home until very late. Also, each day she  
• goes fishing, she has to avoid being caught  
• and fined for not having a fishing licence.

• Although the men are totally convinced of  
• the need for their wives to go out fishing with  
• them, women still face considerable  
• difficulties in starting to work catching fish.  
• The difficult economic situation and the  
• problems which afflict that section of the  
• population (alcoholism and drug addiction)  
• make it difficult to find fit and reliable crew.  
• All this makes fishermen keen to have their  
• wives help them with their fishing activities.

• Despite this, women still have to face up to  
• the strong machismo widespread among  
• artisanal fishermen. Women brave enough  
• to venture out fishing or to do the work  
• normally done by men are told: "This is

men's work, go home and look after your  
children and do the cooking."

Initially, women find it very hard to enter  
into fishing. However, after they have been  
fishing for some time and have earned the  
respect of their fellows, they gradually gain  
acceptance and become considered as one  
of them.

In the past, the maritime authorities would  
not even consider giving women a licence  
to fish. Today, they say that they will  
certainly give a licence to any woman who  
asks for one. Despite this, not one of the  
women working in fishing today in the *caleta*  
of Pucusana has a licence.

### **Women barred**

Several years ago, in the *caleta* of Tambo  
Mora, women had tried to go out fishing with  
their husbands as part of the crew. However,  
the local maritime authorities put a stop to  
this, and, in some cases, imposed fines on  
boatowners who had allowed their wives to  
go out fishing without a proper licence.

A fishing licence would allow women to join  
professional and social organizations of  
fishworkers, giving them the right to vote  
and speak. It would also enable them to gain  
access to training and formal education,  
which would enable them to carry out their  
activities more efficiently.

In the *caleta* of Tambo de Mora, 200 km  
south of Lima, there are many families who  
have been engaged for some time in  
processing saltfish. Fish curing is mainly  
carried out by fishermen's wives. It started  
many years ago when, at the end of the day,  
after the fish sales were over, there was  
always a large quantity left unsold. As there  
were no facilities for storing fish, it would  
spoil. It was, therefore, decided to start  
preserving fish by curing.

Fish processed by families in this way was  
used for their own consumption. The  
methods of washing, salting and sun-drying  
have been passed down through several



generations. Over time, the technique has been improved, so much so that today it is not only the leftover fish that is processed and marketed, but also the fish freshly caught by the men in the family. This activity, which started as a way of conserving fish for family consumption, has gradually increased as women found new markets, which, in turn, has led to an increasing demand.

In this *caleta*, and in the others that were visited, marketing is actively carried out by a large proportion of fishermen's wives. It represents a significant activity for them. Women await the arrival of their husbands on the jetties, ready to start selling fresh fish straightaway. They also go to the local market to look for traders willing to buy from them. It is not only fishermen's wives who engage in this activity, but also their mothers and daughters. They also generate income from other activities, such as selling handicrafts, operating small shops and restaurants, and so on.

Employment in the processing plants found in various *caletas* also provides women with an opportunity to earn a small salary (even if they are paid an unfair wage) and contribute to improving their family income.

In the artisanal fishing sector, the work of women in the processing and marketing segments is widely recognized. However, as far as fishing is concerned, women are still highly restricted, equally by the machismo which exists amongst their fellow fishers as by the maritime authorities who will not provide them with licences to fish.

With time and perseverance, the women can overcome this traditional machismo. But, in the short term, the issue of granting licences to women to fish alongside their husbands must be sorted out. Their right to work in any activity in the artisanal fishing sector should be respected. ■



# Feeling insecure

Estrella Diaz

**Women workers in Chile's fish processing factories face bad working conditions and an insecure future**

*As well as being strongly biased towards employing women, the job market in the fishing industry has a marked division of labour by gender.*

The Chilean fisheries sector provides large quantities of marine products for export. This has enabled it to establish a very effective and dynamic place for itself in international trade and given it a very important role in the national economy.

Its efficient growth and expansion, particularly in the last ten years, are shown by several macroeconomic indicators: the volumes produced and exported, foreign exchange generated, levels of investment, increased productive capacity, increased job opportunities.

However, these positive trends in growth and expansion hide the social processes associated with export-oriented production, where social imbalances, inequities and exclusion form an integral part.

In order to analyze and explain these issues, we have focused on the main aspects of the working conditions and quality of jobs in the sector, with particular emphasis on the section of workers from the plants processing fish for human consumption (canned and frozen products).

It is particularly important to note that the growth and expansion of the overall sector, while producing a considerable expansion of the job market, has produced jobs that are extremely insecure in nature.

They are characterized by: insecure tenure; informal contractual relationships; subnormal salaries; a bad working environment; lack of access to health or pension schemes; negligent working arrangements; and barriers to forming unions

for collective bargaining. So, although there are many more workplaces available, they are not associated with any improvements in the well-being of the workers.

It has been calculated that women represent nearly 50 per cent of the full-time workers in the sector, and in some parts of the production chain, this can rise to as high as 80 per cent. Some incomplete national-level statistics, which only include production units employing ten or more persons, show that there are around 10,000 full-time women workers. To this one must add an unknown number of part-time workers who can only gain employment according to production demands.

As well as being strongly biased towards employing women, the job market in the fishing industry has a marked division of labour by gender. Particular tasks are only allocated to men and others only to women. There is a tendency for the latter to be more short-term and insecure, and this is caused as much by cultural factors as by structural and economic ones.

The workers in this kind of industry are generally drawn from lower socioeconomic classes, have inadequate education and qualifications, large numbers of children, and are frequently women heads of households (who are the sole earners and providers).

## Specific roles

They are usually best at undertaking tasks which involve handling raw material and, as a result, are assigned specific roles in the production process, including working in a production line with both unprocessed and

This article, by Estrella Diaz, a member of Hexagrama Consultants, Santiago, Chile, appeared in SAMUDRA Report No. 22, April 1999

finished products. They are able to undertake highly skilled manual tasks, which require the development of special abilities. But as these tasks are also very routine ones, they pay low salaries and offer poor job security.

In terms of numbers and turnover of workers, it is the small-scale and low-technology enterprise sector that mainly employs part-time workers for fish processing. The processing of perishable products without access to cold-chain infrastructure, for example, obliges them to recruit this kind of manual labour.

While the job market in the fisheries sector is flexible, there are structural aspects which make the demand for manual labour vary over the year. Above all, adjustments must be made to take into account seasonal peaks and troughs in catches and production. It is also important to point out that the flexible numbers of male and female workers allows employers to evade the responsibilities and costs required in contracting a full-time workforce. This makes possible subcontracting of workers, working out of home, and short-term contracts. This latter arrangement forms a central part of the economic strategy and commercial organization in fish processing plants.

Within the workforce, there is a high turnover rate, where a large reserve of people cyclically enter and re-enter the job market, increasing the supply of cheap labour, thus forcing salaries down. The fishing industry also uses a system of variable salary rates, designed to avoid any salary indexation, any payment of minimum wages or other employment-related responsibilities.

Any increase in pay rates is almost exclusively linked to productivity, and such payments are mainly conditional on productivity and profitability performances. The working days are long, with irregular hours, and are subject to variations according to the weather, season, volume and time of fish landings, and the time of deliveries and sales.

Processing plants are characterized by a combination of significant risk factors, and the more insecure the job, the greater these are. They are related to the technical nature of the work, and associated with damage to health.

The poor quality of the jobs is also revealed by the lack of opportunities for access and use of social security and pension schemes. The irregular working periods mean that the workers' benefits are interrupted, so that they have to fall back on the public health system, pleading poverty or dependency.

### **Intermittent work**

As for pensions, considering the intermittent nature of the work and the low and unstable incomes, it is unlikely that the workers will be able to build up sufficient individual funds to acquire a future pension adequate for their old age.

As far as labour laws are concerned, there are particular provisions that prevent part-time women and men workers from organizing themselves into unions and collectively bargaining for better working conditions. This increases their vulnerability and reduces their rights.

The Chilean law has strengthened the concept of individual rights, and this has reduced the collective power of the unions and their capacity to negotiate. Only the unions of a particular firm can negotiate. Since part-time workers can only be affiliated to industry-wide unions, they are much more vulnerable. The most frequent complaint of part-time workers concerns salary and job security.

Full-time workers can affiliate themselves to the company unions which negotiate their conditions of work. A group of company unions can establish a federation, and a group of federations can establish a confederation.

Through increasing the flexibility of the organization of their production processes, and by reducing their labour costs, businesses

• are attempting to maintain competitiveness  
• without affecting their profit rates. This is  
• making jobs even more insecure.

• In addition to the benefits provided to the  
• industrial sector by the State through its  
• subsidy policies on credit export promotion,  
• etc., and through the intensive exploitation  
• of available marine resources, the absence  
• of effective controls and the presence of  
• abundant and cheap workforce have made  
• possible the growth and expansion of the  
• sector. ■

# Beyond the veil

Svein Jentoft

**A skewed model or image of community makes gender a non-issue in fisheries management**

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For current fisheries management systems and practices, women's concerns, interests and contributions are typically considered unimportant. It is not simply a matter of neglect but rather an issue of perceived irrelevance. This is an observation that fisheries social scientists share—and I believe it to be fairly accurate—in Norway and elsewhere.

One may wonder why this is so. Why are women's issues, interests and knowledge disregarded when governments design fisheries management systems? This is the question addressed in this article.

One reason, advanced in Norway by Siri Gerrard, is that women are conspicuously absent in management agencies. Thus, women in fisheries communities have few insiders who speak on their behalf when management decisions are made. Also, women in fisheries communities have been generally less effective than men as an outside political force, due to poorer organizational resources than their male counterparts. Another likely cause is the simple fact that the fishers targeted by management policies are predominantly men. In Norway, for instance, women constitute only 2 per cent of the registered fishing workforce. As a consequence, men's concerns in fisheries management are viewed as primary. Therefore, one may expect that more women in managing positions in government agencies would not make much of a difference as they would still be aimed at men as targets.

I do not intend to criticize these explanations. I believe they are part of the overall picture. My point is that there are additional and more

subtle factors at play here. I suggest that women's issues are perceived as irrelevant by fisheries managers for some of the same reasons that they regard social science to be irrelevant. Moreover, I argue that women's contributions and concerns are neglected because community and household are not part of the management equation. Typically, fisheries management is a relationship between a government and a rights holder, who, in most cases, is not a community or a household but an individual. I claim that fisheries management systems, as they are presently constructed in Norway and other North Atlantic countries, reflect a certain image of community that has the effect of veiling women's concerns and positive contributions to fisheries management.

Community is a missing link in fisheries management, as it also is in Garrett Hardin's model of the 'tragedy of the commons' that is at the root of prevailing management practices. But they both hold an implicit theory of community. Fishers are perceived as competitors in the fisheries commons, their social relations are overall "positional", as Fred Hirsch described relationships within zero-sum games. To use an example by Jean Paul Sartre, as in a bus queue, the people lined up may not have any other relation to each other than being at a particular place at a particular time, all with the same goal in mind that is to get on the bus first and find a good seat. From the perspective of the individual, other passengers are nothing more than a nuisance. They are merely in the way.

## **Methodological individualism**

Obviously, harvesters on the fishing ground can be seen in this way, likewise communities, especially if one adopts the

Why are women's issues, interests and knowledge disregarded when governments design fisheries management systems?

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This paper, by Svein Jentoft of the Institute of Planning and Community Studies at the University of Tromsø, appeared in *SAMUDRA Report* No. 23, September 1999

· perspectives of methodological  
· individualism and rational choice that  
· underpin the Garrett Hardin argument.

·  
· A different image regards community as a  
· system of symbiotic relationships, where  
· fishers and community members are  
· mutually dependent and supportive, and  
· where individuals regard each other as a  
· group.

·  
· In the social science literature, local  
· communities are frequently described as  
· *gemeinshaft*, learning systems, moral  
· communities, employment systems, or  
· networks, all hinting at the integrative social  
· qualities of communities. In this vision,  
· communities are more than simply  
· aggregates of individuals driven by self-  
· centred utilitarian motives, as the former  
· model takes for granted. Rather,  
· communities are well connected systems  
· rooted in kinship, culture and history.

·  
· To clarify further this point, one can fruitfully  
· make use of the French sociologist Raymond  
· Boudon's distinction between 'functional'  
· and 'interdependent' systems. By the first  
· category he means systems of interaction  
· where the actors involved assume positions  
· or roles within a scheme of division of labour.  
· Thus, functional systems require a minimum  
· of organization. A firm and a household are  
· typical examples. Interdependent systems, on  
· the other hand, are "those systems of  
· interaction where individual actions can be  
· analyzed without reference to the category  
· of a role".

·  
· In interdependent systems, there are no  
· predefined rights and obligations that relate  
· actors to each other and prescribe their  
· behaviour. Nevertheless, actors affect each  
· other with their individual behaviour, and  
· they typically produce collective phenomena  
· which they do not foresee or want.

·  
· The bus-queue example used above  
· illustrates the basic traits of an  
· interdependent system. The "tragedy of the  
· commons", as it is explained by Garrett  
· Hardin, is another good illustration.

A fisheries management system based on the premise that fisheries communities are, by essence, interdependent, as Boudon defines it, risks dissipating the social capital that is invested in the community. It neglects what collective action, institutions and organizations can do to build communities. The interdependent systems model leads to few reservations regarding a fisheries management system aimed at downscaling the fishery. The fewer the bus passengers, the more comfortable the ride (but perhaps not so interesting?).

### **Interdependent model**

Furthermore—and in this context, this is the main point—the interdependent systems model of the community totally overlooks women's roles and contributions in the fisheries community employment system and civil society. Since fisheries management predominantly, but implicitly, rests on the interdependent systems model and not the functional model of the community, this effect is, of course, unfortunate but predictable. This model also leaves the scholarly contributions of fisheries sociologists and anthropologists outside the knowledge base on which managers draw, because these researchers are more inspired by the functional than the interdependent system model.

There is no need to go into a detailed description and discussion of women's efforts in fisheries. They are well documented in the social science literature. Donna Davis and Jane Nadel Klein's book, *To Work and to Weep*, is one reference. In Norway, Siri Gerrard's pioneering work on women's role as ground crew in the small-scale fishing enterprise stands out.

The research programme Women in Fisheries Districts, initiated by the Norwegian Fisheries Research Council, further filled some of the gaps in existing knowledge. It is now well established that women provide a whole range of services that are key to the viability of the fishing household as well as the fishing enterprise of their spouses. This, of course, is a

phenomenon that is not unique to Norwegian fisheries.

Liv Torill Pettersen's thesis on the economic contribution of women as a buffer in times of crisis, must also be mentioned. Likewise, Viggo Rossvaer's recent book on Srvaer, a crisis-ridden fishing community in Finnmark. Here, it is women's efforts, partly channelled through their local association Helselaget that keep the community together and maintain the spirit and life's meaning during times of crisis.

In other words, women's contributions are not restricted to the household and their husbands' fishing enterprise. They also take on a responsibility for the whole community, also as community spokespersons *vis-à-vis* the society at large. Again, this is not unique to women in Norwegian fisheries communities.

The irony is that these contributions are mostly disregarded by fisheries managers who have their eyes fixed on the fish and the fishermen. Had they adopted the functional system model of fishing communities rather than the interdependent model, they could not have avoided noting that fishing enterprises could only work within the larger context of the community, in which women play crucial roles. Then, they would have had to also recognize that women are stakeholders in fisheries management and that they also could legitimately claim to be holders of resource rights, a status which current management systems do not grant them, in fisheries less so than in other primary industries.

In a recently published article, I argue that not only are healthy fish stocks necessary for healthy communities, but that the reverse also holds true. Overfishing is not always a result of market failure, as the interdependent system model would have it, but a community failure. This is the community that fails to install self-restraint, high normative standards, social solidarity and cohesion among community members, and not least among the young fisher recruits.

Hence, a community which finds itself in a state of anomie that has disintegrated socially and morally, has lost its ability to formally or informally sanction irregular fishing behaviour. This is perhaps the most serious crisis a fishing community may encounter.

Norwegian newspapers have recently reported that quotas are deliberately being exceeded, rules are ignored, and that a culture of cheating is spreading within the fishing industry, at the expense of the resource. I argue that this is what is to be expected of a fisheries management system that has no appreciation of community as a functional system, where the roles and contributions of men and women are equally important, for the material as well as moral well-being of communities.

#### **More than mere rules**

What then is the answer to the shortcomings of fisheries management? Since healthy communities are vital to maintaining healthy fish stocks, fisheries management must consist of more than just rules and regulations that curb fishing effort. The community must be part of the fisheries management tool-box. Management must then also aim at building communities. It must reinforce those conditions and processes that make geographical communities into communities in the sociological sense.

Resource rights should, therefore, be vested in communities; they should not be the privilege of individual fishermen. Then also the civic institutions of the coastal community, in which women have always played a crucial role, could not be defined as outside the fisheries management realm.

In other words, a more holistic management, community-centred approach is needed, an approach that recognizes women's contribution to communities' viability and hence stock conservation.

Only when the functional systems model of the community is adopted, would women's contributions to stock preservation become focused. Only then would supporting





# Fighting for space

Aliou Sall

**Fishworkers' communities face another challenge as tourism develops in the coastal areas of West Africa**

This article deals with fishermen's organizations at the national level, although there exist traditional associations at the local level. Today, the type of fishermen's organizations existing in countries from Mauritania to those in the Gulf of Guinea demonstrates that it is a strictly material and economic concern which is the base for setting up fishermen's organizations nationally.

It is in this context that the initiative of CNPS (*Collectif National des Pecheurs Artisanaux du Senegal*) can be appreciated, despite the growth crisis this organization is currently facing. Towards the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, CNPS decided to evolve thematically, refusing to focus its analysis and actions strictly on economic issues. Thus, it came to pass that after 1990, for the first time in African artisanal fisheries, an organization defended its right to participate in the EU-Senegal negotiations of fisheries access agreements. Since 1994, CNPS has participated in the negotiations for the renewal of these agreements.

These agreements, considered a threat to the traditional rights of access of artisanal fishworkers to the resource, consolidated the CNPS, giving it a more political dimension, compared to co-operatives. This happened in two ways.

First of all, the campaigns led by CNPS to denounce these agreements mobilized women from the processing sector, especially when the 1996 agreement decided to explore the possibility of access to small pelagics for European vessels.

Secondly, as the Senegalese are huge consumers of fish themselves (28 kg/person/year), the media coverage of the agreements won the organization public sympathy. From a social organization, CNPS grew into a more general movement.

With the complicity of some government functionaries, promoters of tourism have developed their businesses on land initially used by maritime communities for fishing, processing and, in some cases, for agricultural activities complementing fishing. This process of displacement in the localities of M'bour, Joal, Kayar and Saint Louis is a 'hidden privatization' of coastal zones. The development of tourist complexes and related activities, such as yachting, are forcing fishermen and women to reduce, or even abandon, their earlier activities.

In the zone of M'bour, for example, many fishermen are not able to use their beach seines because tourist complexes have privatized these spaces with marker buoys. These areas are being used instead for recreational boating. Similarly, the mooring of yachts and pleasure boats close to the coast makes it impossible for fishermen using oars to practice passive net fishing in their traditional zones. These problems of cohabitation between tourists and fishermen using traditional gear and pirogues propelled by oars are more accentuated in the localities of M'bour, Hann and Sendou.

## **Women's problems**

Women fish processors are also the victims of tourism development. For some years, women fishworkers based in M'bour have

Today, the type of fishermen's organizations existing in countries from Mauritania to those in the Gulf of Guinea demonstrates that it is a strictly material and economic concern which is the base for setting up fishermen's organizations nationally.

This article, by Aliou Sall of CREDETIP, appeared in *SAMUDRA Report* No. 23, September 1999

· lived under the threat of displacement. Public  
· authorities prefer to defend the interests of  
· the tourist sector rather than those of women  
· fish processors, despite their socioeconomic  
· importance in creating jobs and supplying  
· fish and processed fish products not only to  
· the Senegalese population but also to other  
· West African consumers.

·  
· The administration, in fact, constantly  
· reminds the women that the smoke produced  
· by fish smoking is unpleasant for tourists  
· (foreigners, of course). The authorities  
· conveniently forget the important role played  
· by a locality like M'bour in the African  
· integration process and in the regional  
· market. M'bour is a converging place for  
· fishmongers from several countries within  
· the sub region, and contributes to the supply  
· and exchange of fish adapted to African  
· tastes

·  
· In some localities, artisanal processing of  
· fish has completely disappeared because of  
· the lack of necessary space. The use of the  
· coastal zone as a residential area for wealthy  
· people (both locals and foreigners) has, for  
· example, led to the removal of women fish  
· processors in Hann. They have now to work  
· at a distance of 4 km from their homes.

·  
· At the end of the 1980s, a small group of  
· women who had been able to maintain their  
· activities along the coast were pushed out  
· towards Thiaroye by the political authorities  
· of the village, in collaboration with the  
· police. This was the consequence of a  
· demand by a Korean who wanted to start a  
· fish processing plant and who promised to  
· recruit for his boats some family members  
· of the politically powerful village authorities,

·  
· These developments also threaten the right  
· of access to resources for a number of small-  
· scale fishermen who still utilize unmotorized  
· boats propelled by oars or sails and who can  
· not go farther out to sea to fish in other  
· fishing zones.

·  
· In July 1990, CNPS began a campaign to  
· denounce the negative impacts of tourism.

This campaign had several phases, including  
the sending of memorandums to the  
authorities and the organizing of press  
conferences.

A request was made to the government  
proposing a study, to be undertaken jointly  
by CNPS and the Tourism Ministry, to  
evaluate the consequences of tourism.  
Through its campaign, CNPS hopes to  
persuade the government to switch from a  
relationship of conflict between fisheries and  
tourism to one of sustainable cohabitation.  
One of the main demands is to get the  
Senegalese parliament to extend land  
reservation for fishermen.

Women will play a prominent role in this  
campaign for the recognition of the access  
rights to land because, for cultural and  
historical reasons, the essential activities of  
women relating to fisheries (like processing  
and small-scale marketing) take place on  
land. ■



• nearshore longliner vessel, and the owner  
• decided to ship his fish or crabs off the island.  
• Another issue was whether all members  
• understood and agreed with the policy, which  
• was brought up at a general meeting in  
• March. The long-standing local dilemma is  
• that the co-operative 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 in  
• 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 (that is,  
• seniority) and their ability, no matter whom  
• they live with and are related to. Complaints  
• about hiring for other reasons—the so-called  
• ‘fishermen’s wives’ preference—are long-  
• standing. Bringing the situation to a head is  
• increased competition with other buyers for  
• the fish and crabs caught by Island fishers.

• In 1999, a large number of longliners began  
• to ship their catches elsewhere, in many cases  
• because they needed financing to do well in  
• the new crab and shrimp fisheries. The co-  
• operative’s board of directors can not legally  
• force members to sell to it. They found  
• another pressure point: the jobs of fishers’  
• family members.

• In the March 2000 hearing, the first witness  
• who took the stand was long-time employee,  
• Irene Nippard, who had begun her  
• employment with the co-operative under its  
• first manager, back in the early 1970s.

• Nippard stated for the court that in losing  
• her position, “it was as if someone belonging  
• to me had died. It couldn’t have hurt any  
• worse. To be employed for so many years  
• in the same industry and to be let go because  
• my husband didn’t ship his lobster to the co-  
• op hit me hard. I looked forward to every  
• spring when the plant would be up and  
• running, but last year, when the plant opened  
• and work started, I didn’t get a call, while  
• the rest of my shift went in to work. It was  
• odd because I was on top of the seniority list  
• and, under normal circumstances, would

have been among the very first. Soon the  
phone started ringing and I began talking to  
other workers who also didn’t get called in  
[to work]. I spoke to Pad Shea [the crab plant  
manager] and he told me that I lost my job  
because my husband didn’t ship his lobster  
to the co-op. I questioned him further. He  
said my husband would have to sign an  
agreement to sell all his lobster to the co-op.  
We decided to attend the board meeting the  
next morning and find out what was going  
on”.

Although Nippard was upset, she continued  
with her story: “I told my husband about the  
agreement and he was willing to sign it, but  
I said ‘no way’. After 20 years of working  
with the co-op, I shouldn’t have to do this”.  
Irene also stated, “The Fogo Island Co-op  
always said that hiring was done by seniority,  
but they have never done it properly”.  
However, in the end, Irene was among the  
few workers who had their spouses sign the  
co-operative’s agreement and, as promised,  
found herself back at work within a day or  
two.

Daphne Bailey was next to take the stand.  
Like Nippard, Bailey too felt pressured into  
having her husband sign the agreement and,  
when asked by her lawyer how it made her  
feel, her response was, “I felt like a nobody.  
I wasn’t a person”. Bailey too had been  
employed at the plant for 21 years and stated  
she had no clear understanding of the new  
hiring policy.

The next witness called was Doreen Keats,  
an employee of almost 20 years. She stated  
that she contacted management for  
verification of the new policy, as her husband  
is a crew member on his brother’s longliner,  
which doesn’t ship to the co-operative.  
Doreen stated that Kirk Decker, manager of  
the plant where Doreen has worked for  
almost 15 years, acknowledged to her that  
“he felt as though he was caught between a  
rock and a hard place”. Keats explained that  
she was forced to look for work and  
eventually was employed as a home-care  
worker. Betty Brett was next to testify. She

was told she was not on [the call-in] list either and was told that management assumed that her spouse/boyfriend was fishing as a crew member aboard a vessel that did not ship their product to the co-operative. Brett did go to work, but only received five to six days of employment, as her spouse did get a berth with a longliner.

### **Last testimony**

The final witness to be called on behalf of the employees was Rita Penton. Her testimony was a little different, as she held a supervisory position as a forelady, and also because her husband was part owner of a vessel that did not ship to the co-operative.

She explained that her husband and his partner could not get financial backing from the co-operative to enter the new shrimp fishery and so looked elsewhere, which meant a commitment to deliver the shrimp elsewhere too. She also explained exactly how the list of workers to be called in was created, including a new category called “non-affiliated”, resulting in many women being moved to the bottom of the seniority list. She talked about 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.”

On the second day, George Lee testified that he had been a part of the formation of the Fogo Island Co-operative Society, which became internationally known as the ‘Fogo Process’ and “was a means of educating people on solving their own problems and furthering economic development.” He explained that the process involved several growing pains all through the years, with moments of crisis, perhaps among the worst being the cod moratorium beginning 1992, and the most recent being the decline in raw material with vessels leaving the co-operative to ship elsewhere. Lee stated, “The fishermen who stayed around and continued

selling their catch to the co-op have helped economic growth and have kept the plants in operation. Fogo Island would have had difficulty surviving if it were not for their continued support”.

Wayne Cull, Project Co-ordinator for the co-operative, was the next to testify. Regarding the last hiring policy, he 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”. Cull also stated, “To accommodate members whose spouses are supporting other businesses, we would be helping to subsidize another business, often at our own expense”.

The lawyer for the plant workers then asked Cull to sum up the management decision on hiring. Cull replied, “It was only fair to hire workers who were full supporters of the co-op”.

### **President’s testimony**

Cecil Godwin, current President of the Board of Directors, and Vice President of the Federation of Co-operatives, was the next to testify. He stated, “The hiring problems have been going on for years and that, in an attempt to find closure to the very festering problem, the co-op had gone out and arranged community-based meetings to hear from members and to listen to their complaints and try to come up with a solution that would be in their best interest”.

General Manager Hugh St. Croix was the last witness called to the stand on behalf of the co-operative’s lawyer. St. Croix described the state of affairs that the business was in [allegedly close to financial bankruptcy] when he came to the position. He described the low morale and the every-present seniority issue and how it could not be rectified to suit everyone.

Day Three saw the closing arguments from Barry Fleming, for the Human Rights Commission, and Christine Fagan, for the Fogo Island Co-operative Society. Briefly,

• the Human Rights Commission’s argument  
• was that the women workers were  
• discriminated against because they were not  
• hired because of their spouse’s activities. In  
• addition, the new “preference policy” had  
• no rational basis because it had nothing to  
• do with the efficient work of the women.  
• Moreover, the co-operative was not acting  
• in good faith because the membership voted  
• down a resolution to amend the constitution  
• to reflect this policy but the board of directors  
• passed it. “The fact is that the ability of these  
• workers had nothing to do with being a  
• family member of a 100 per cent supporting  
• fisherman. Essentially, it’s a case of ‘The  
• Devil made me do it.’ They had to secure  
• products to keep the plant operations going.  
• They were responding to a threat by  
• fishermen and they wanted to ensure  
• employment for their families”, Fleming  
• said.

• Christine Fagan invited the court to  
• recognize the unique aspects of this case. “It  
• is a unique industry that has been owned and  
• operated by its members. We heard in Mr.  
• Cecil Godwin’s testimony that the co-  
• operative has a social conscience, and that  
• the co-operative has delivered a service that  
• no other entity could have filled back then.  
• The fish-plants would not have survived  
• without the establishment of the co-  
• operative. Thirteen million dollars were paid  
• out to its employees last year, and it doesn’t  
• take a rocket scientist to figure out the co-  
• operative’s contribution to the Island,” she  
• said. She also discussed the problems in plant  
• and employee management which had  
• escalated during 1998, and the need to  
• “restore fairness and balance, and to find  
• some sort of control within the business and  
• to ensure its economic survival”.

• Although Fogo Island, a small island in the  
• North Atlantic, is remote, it is firmly  
• enmeshed in a globalized system. In this  
• case, globalization and its regional and local  
• echoes have played a role in making life very  
• difficult for women whose only income-  
• producing opportunity, by and large, is  
• working in the fishery. Fogo Island’s co-  
• operative is an institution created to provide

some buffer to the worst side-effects of  
globalization, the displacement of people due  
to overexploitation of natural resources and  
the movement of capital. As a co-operative  
rather than a private business, it can endure  
far more belt-tightening and non-profit years  
on behalf of its members and workers.

More recently, the Fogo Island Co-operative  
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. It has diversified, and its crab  
fishery and crab plant helped families get  
through the groundfish crisis. 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  
has invested in a new, more efficient crab  
plant—with a much-reduced workforce.  
Competition for jobs at the plant increases,  
and the need for clear rules about hiring and  
firing goes up.

### **No financing**

Meanwhile, competition for the crabs caught  
by Fogo Island’s large longliner vessels, and  
the inability of the co-operative 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 is far higher than the  
raw product available. This means less work.  
The co-operative’s board of directors hit  
upon a solution to both problems in its  
‘preferential hiring’ policy—increase  
incentives to deliver fish and crabs to the  
co-operative by requiring that the spouses  
or boyfriends of workers at the plants do so,  
and, at the same time, have a way to  
rationalize the reason for ‘calling in’ some  
women and not others.

Those made to pay the price of this survival  
strategy in an increasingly competitive  
environment are women workers at Fogo

Island's fish and crab plants. As their testimonies indicate, their very identities, shaped by the intense, seasonal work at the plants, gets collapsed into those of their husbands and boyfriends by the new policy. No matter that they have their own memberships, share capital and work history, if their 'men' do not support the co-operative by shipping their lobsters, fish or crabs to it, neither do they support the co-operative—or such is the implication of the controversial new hiring policy. As one of the women said, “There is no winner here. There has been a great injustice done to the members of the Fogo Island Co-op”. And as another said, “In the year 2000, this should not be happening”. ■



# A new space

ICSF Secretariat

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

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*A long-standing demand of the women of fishing communities in the region has been to work towards enhancing regional fish trade.*

**F**ish processing and trade have a long tradition in the West African region. Processed fish products—dried, smoked, salted or fermented—are eminently suited to local tastes and cuisines, and provide a rich source of nutrition, even in remote regions.

Activities related to fish processing and trade have significant livelihood, social and cultural implications. They provide diversified marketing and employment opportunities within the fisheries sector, especially to women of fishing communities. They contribute to food security, especially of the poorer sections of society.

Trade in these products is mainly through informal networks. These dynamic and diversified networks, although able to respond to demands for fish products through the region, are constrained by poor transport infrastructure, problems at borders, tariff barriers, poor market facilities, lack of access to market information, among others.

The International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF) has been working in collaboration with fishworker organizations and NGOs in the West African region since 1986. Several workshops have been organized by ICSF in countries of the region, as in Senegal, Ghana and Togo, to discuss issues of concern to artisanal fishworkers.

A long-standing demand of the women of fishing communities in the region has been to work towards enhancing regional fish trade. This demand was further reiterated at the workshop on Fisheries, Social Analysis and Organizational Strategies in Africa

organized by ICSF in Ghana in August 1998. Participants in the workshop included representatives of NGOs working with fishing communities, as well as representatives of fishworker organizations from nine African countries, including six countries from the West African region. To better understand and address these issues, a study on Problems and Prospects of Artisanal Fish Trade in West Africa was undertaken.

It is against this background that the Workshop on Problems and Prospects for Developing Artisanal Fish Trade in West Africa was organized 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). There were 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. While there were two to three delegates from most countries, there were larger delegations from the host country, Senegal, and from Benin and Mauritania.

## **Participants**

Participants included representatives of artisanal fishworker, fish processor and trader organizations, and of governmental

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This report of the workshop on Problems and Prospects for Developing Artisanal Fish Trade in West Africa held at Dakar, Senegal, from 30 May to 1 June 2001, appeared in *SAMUDRA Report* No. 29, August 2001



and non-governmental organizations working with, and providing support to, artisanal fishing communities in the region. In addition, participants included representatives of the FAO-DFID Sustainable Fisheries Livelihood Project (SFLP), DFID, UK, FAO Regional Office for Africa, as well as fisheries departments officials from countries of the region—members of the country-level National Co-ordinating Units (NCUS) instituted by the SFLP project. 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. It was significant that while each group stressed the support that needs to be extended by policymakers and development organizations, they also stressed the vital role and responsibility of fishworkers and their communities in this process, advocating the need for a participatory approach. The need for forming strong associations at the community, national and regional levels was forcefully articulated.

It was evident 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.

### **Statement from the Workshop**

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; and
- 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 processing centres to important markets; improving and renovating rail routes, and building new ones; facilitating the availability of cargo vessels for transporting processed fish within the region, both along sea and river routes.
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- 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.
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- 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.
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- 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.
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- b) Ensure amenities like storage facilities, water, sanitation and power supply at processing sites, as well as childcare facilities.
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- c) Provide training in improved methods of fish processing, packaging and storage, to ensure better product quality.
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- 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 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 organizations, 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. ■

# Gender agenda

Jéssica Alfaro Alvarez

**This is an account of a meeting of women in artisanal fisheries, organized by the National Network of Women: Northern Zone at Antofagasta, Chile**

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The First Meeting of Women in January 2001, Artisanal Fisheries: Northern Zone was held in Antofagasta, Northern Chile from 27 to 29 June 2001. It attracted 37 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. 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 CONAPACH (the National Confederation of Artisanal Fishers of Chile).

During the workshop, women discussed their expectations from the sector and their role in promoting artisanal fisheries. They elaborated on the concept of “sustainable development” and drew up guidelines for “community, economic and environmental development”.

Various public service organizations of Region II, as well as officials from the central level, were represented at the meeting. These included officials from Sernapesca, Dirección de Obras Portuarias, (Port Works Management), Sercotec, Sernam and the UECPS (Unidad Coordinadora del Ministerio de Obras Publicas or the Coordinating Unit of the Ministry of Public Works). They expressed their support towards developing the ideas put forward during the meeting.

The 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.

In January 2001, women from the artisanal fisheries sector in Chile organized themselves into a National Network and selected co-ordinators for each zone. The members of the Network have been meeting regularly, every two months, to discuss strategies to strengthen, broaden and consolidate their 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.

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

One of the main tasks of the meeting was to gauge the expectations of women from such events and to discuss how these could be integrated into the workplan of the National Network of Women. The women gave practical suggestions for achieving concrete results in their respective *caletas* and suggested creating permanent channels of communication between their organizations. There was a strong sentiment in favour of holding more such meetings in future to increase communication between groups and

*In January 2001, women from the artisanal fisheries sector in Chile organized themselves into a National Network and selected co-ordinators for each zone.*

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This report, filed by Jéssica Alfaro Alvarez, Co-ordinator of the Women Weaving Networks Project of CONAPACH, appeared in *SAMUDRA Report* No. 29, August 2001

• to strengthen the movement. They also  
• stressed the need to elect more  
• representatives for better co-ordination.

#### • **Local contexts**

• Gender issues were approached within the  
• context of legitimizing *caletas*, and looking  
• at them as groups that comprise 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  
• spaces 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,  
• respecting closed seasons and getting better  
• prices demonstrated their appreciation of  
• problems arising from overexploitation of  
• marine resources.

• Having discussed the concept of sustainable  
• development and the need to link it to the  
• development of communities, the economy  
• and the environment, the women identified  
• possible areas of intervention.

• For economic development, they highlighted  
• the need to support productive projects to  
• improve the quality of life, based on a  
• responsible use of resources through  
• controlling, for example, the size of fish  
• harvested. They also stressed the need for  
• feasibility studies and training programmes  
• on organizational aspects. Possible projects  
• proposed related to culinary skills, tourism,  
• processing and marketing of shellfish, and  
• making diving suits, among others.

• In community development, they highlighted  
• the need for their better organization into

groups and for establishing alliances with  
other community-based and environmental  
organizations. They also proposed efforts to  
influence public opinion about problems  
faced by communities, through the  
involvement of the media.

The various other problems they faced  
included: poor accessibility of *caletas*; lack  
of transport, especially affecting school-  
going children; 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, either at sea  
or in the caletas.

#### • **School dropouts**

The women expressed concern about the  
significant number of children who drop out  
of school or repeat academic years, and they  
highlighted the need for nursery and other  
schools.

As for the environment, the women proposed  
two broad areas for 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. They  
emphasized the need to keep the community  
informed about these issues through various  
media.

They also proposed other alternatives for  
improving the environment, including  
recycling of organic and inorganic waste,  
developing green belts, controlling pollution  
(wastewater, heavy metals, dregs, etc.),  
effectively enforcing the closed season,  
protecting resources (size and quality) and  
promoting environmental awareness. The  
Antofagasta meeting is 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. 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. They articulate the need to control and manage resources, obtain better prices and improve the quality of products. This reassures us that it is possible to succeed in promoting development initiatives for women in the sector.

Until now, the country and different public services have invested in large-scale capture and production, within fisheries, in general, and artisanal fisheries, in particular. Analyzing the existing level of development of artisanal fisheries, we think it important to integrate women through strengthening their incipient organizations and supporting their plans for socioeconomic development. In the past, although the authorities have always intended 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. In this regard, we believe that we are at a juncture where there is a strong possibility for success on an issue which is highly complex in nature.

At the 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 define strategies and concrete opportunities for the integration of women into the development agenda. ■



# Changing the locks

Bente Aäsjord

**As men hang on to the keys to the future of fisheries,  
Norwegian women find little voice in decision making**

*Fisheries is often regarded as a 'masculine' sector. Most fishers are men, and the fishing industry and boats are run and owned by men. But that doesn't mean that women are not concerned with fisheries*

The marine Arctic is rich in fishery resources. Marine fisheries play a major role in the economy, settlement, history and culture of many Arctic peoples and communities. Four of the Arctic countries—United States, Denmark, Canada and Norway—are also major fish exporters.

Fisheries is often regarded as a 'masculine' sector. Most fishers are men, and the fishing industry and boats are run and owned by men. But that doesn't mean that women are not concerned with fisheries: Many women work in the processing and equipment industry, and a few women are also fishers themselves. In coastal communities, women play an important role in the fishers' families, being both involved in work of a caring nature, and as administrators for the family's fishing boats. Also, women not directly involved in the fisheries sector play a central role in maintaining and changing coastal societies and various social institutions.

For a long time, the different roles of coastal women directly or indirectly involved in fisheries were invisible. But thanks to many studies done in different countries, women's important roles in the fishery sector and coastal communities have been illuminated and documented. In this presentation, I will not focus on where women are present in the fishery sector. I will, rather, focus on where women are not present. That is, not surprisingly, in decision-making processes and other positions of power related to fisheries.

Globally, most fish stocks are either fully exploited or overexploited. Overall, catches peaked in the 1970s or 1980s and have since

declined. This is also the situation in Arctic fisheries. Major fish stocks have declined to a level close to collapse, like the Norwegian spring spawning herring in the 1960s and the North Sea cod and the Barents Sea cod in the late 1980s. Some stocks have totally collapsed, like the Newfoundland cod in 1992.

Collapse or serious declines in major fish stocks are seriously affecting local communities and families dependent on fisheries. This was painfully experienced in northern Norway during the resource crisis in the Barents Sea at the end of the 1980s, but it was still just a little breeze compared with the 1992 cod collapse in Newfoundland.

After an almost total fishing moratorium for 10 years, the cod stock has still not recovered. Hundreds of fishing villages have collapsed, young people have left their communities and many families are socially and economically destroyed. What started as an ecological and economic crisis, fast turned into a social catastrophe.

As experienced both in Norway and Newfoundland, coastal women became 'first-line soldiers' in facing the social consequences of the fishery crisis. Many would agree that women took the main burden in order to cope with the different ways the social crisis hit them: How to handle the family household with a major fall in income? How to support your husband who has lost his daily means of livelihood? How to keep together social institutions in the local community? How to preserve the family's and community's dignity? Faced with the social consequences of the fishery

This slightly edited version of a paper by Bente Aäsjord, presented at the Conference on Gender Equality and Women in the Arctic Council at Saariselka, Finland, appeared in SAMUDRA Report No. 33, November 2002

crisis, in order to get by, women organized families in, and across, local communities. However, what women did to solve these problems, was somehow expected and nothing new. The crisis only made their roles more visible.

What was new—at least in Norway—was that women entered new roles by challenging the political mismanagement that led to the crisis. Fisheries management was no longer accepted as a monopoly for men. Fisheries management was no longer limited to biology or economy.

Fisheries management became highly politicized. Overfishing has to do with unsustainable development. Overfishing has to do with taking risks. Overfishing has to do with stealing others' livelihoods. Overfishing is giving rights to some, and marginalizing others. Overfishing creates winners and losers. The victims of overfishing are not necessarily those who caused it. In Norway, these assumptions were, for the first time, challenged by women. But their demands and questions were not always welcomed by the establishment.

A common perception regarding fisheries management is that scientific knowledge about the marine environment, along with management models and catch control, is crucial for sustainable resource management. Indeed, it is in the Arctic countries that you find the world's most expensive and advanced fishery research and management systems. But in spite of this, people in the coastal Arctic are facing serious fisheries mismanagement and resource crises.

The Barents Sea crisis 12 years ago was mainly a result of too much fishing pressure. The joint Norwegian-Russian Fishery Commission's policy was simply too risky. It ignored and exceeded the scientific quota recommendations that were too optimistic and based on too many uncertain factors. A similar situation was present in Canada. The scientists overestimated the cod stock, while

the authorities ignored the uncertainties. Unregulated fishing by European Union (EU) vessels beyond the Canadian exclusive economic zone (EEZ) made the situation even worse. It is necessary to note that neither Canadian nor Norwegian and Russian marine scientists knew the critical level for collapse of the cod stocks. I don't think they know it today either. What we know for sure is that the Newfoundland cod collapsed. The Barents Sea cod got one more chance.

### **Barents sea crisis**

How did the Norwegian and Russian authorities utilize this chance? The Barents Sea crisis was followed by political promises of a more sustainable fishery management. The Norwegian government and parliament promised that control would be strengthened, overcapacity in the fishing fleet reduced, and scientific recommendations followed when setting future quotas. It all started well. The cod stock recovered after a few years, and the Norwegian government even stated that Norway was the number one fishery manager in the world. Optimism rose in the fishery sector. So did the investments. On the Russian side came the market economy, and the increasing importance of cod as a source of export revenue.

What really happened in the 1990s was that the Barents Sea cod stock recovered and then declined, at a tempo we have never seen before. The fishing pressure reached its highest level ever—almost three times higher than the level recommended by the researchers. For the last five years, the cod stock has been beyond safe biological limits, or below the precautionary level set by the researchers. In addition, spawning has failed in the same period, according to the International Council for the Exploration of the Seas (ICES). How was a new period of mismanagement allowed to happen?

To put it in simple facts:

1. The scientists are still systematically overestimating the stock and thus recommending too high quotas.

2. The tendency to set the total allowable catch (TAC) higher than that recommended by the scientists has increased during the 1990s.

3. The authorities fail to control the fishing effort: The catch is systematically higher than reported and thus exceeds the TAC.

In 1997-98, both the Norwegian parliament and the joint Norwegian-Russian Fishery Commission decided that the quota setting and fishery management should be based on the precautionary approach. But, paradoxically, the discrepancy between recommended and agreed quotas reached its highest level after this. So did the fishing pressure.

Figures showing the level of fishing mortality and the discrepancy between quotas recommended by ICES and the TACs agreed on, illustrate the will to take risks in the management of the northeast Arctic cod.

Fishing mortality is a measure of how many of the cod between five and 10 years of age are fished during the year. The precautionary level of fishing mortality recommended by ICES is at or below 0.42. The fishing mortality level associated with stock collapse is defined to be at or above 0.70. For 16 of the last 20 years, the fishing pressure has been in the latter category.

The crisis in Canada established three important recognitions. The first is the possibility of extending or causing a long-term collapse in a fish stock. The second is the uncertainty connected with scientific marine research.

The third is that fisheries management is not only affecting fishers and the industry, but also families, entire communities and ways of life. The latter can be illustrated by the change in birth rate after the Newfoundland cod collapse. From being the North American region with the highest birth rate 10 years ago, Newfoundland and Labrador now have the lowest. The first Barents Sea cod crisis, and the collapse of the

Newfoundland cod stock, could—to a certain level—be defined as a result of lack of knowledge.

But the mismanagement of the Barents Sea cod stock in the 1990s happened openly, in spite of economic logic, in spite of drastic experiences, in spite of scientific recommendations, and in spite of knowledge about scientists' tendency to overestimate the stock. Paradoxically, the will to take risks has increased after the crisis, and, at the highest level, after the adoption of the precautionary approach.

### Quotas set

An important question then is: Who set the quotas? Who has got the right to define the level of risk taken to manage natural resources that so many local communities depend on? The quota policy in the Barents Sea is decided in yearly bilateral negotiations between Russia and Norway. In both countries, representatives from 'concerned groups' are not only consulted, but participate directly, both in the national process of preparing the negotiations, and during the negotiations themselves.

A study I did in this field showed that concerned groups represented in the Norwegian quota policy play a crucial role in defining the Norwegian position before and under the bilateral quota negotiations. A similar study on the Russian decision-making process, done by other researchers, gave the same conclusions. In both countries, 'concerned groups' have exercised a major pressure in order to get higher quotas.

The 1992 United Nations Agenda 21 states that women, together with indigenous peoples, small-scale fishers and local communities, are important groups for a sustainable fishery management.

The 1995 UN Agreement on Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks requires that concerned groups should be given access to information and participation in decision-making bodies managing straddling and highly migrating fish stocks.



Lately, the trend is to include gender distribution as one of the social indicators that define sustainable fishery management. Hence, it is in accordance with international legislation and international norms to include women in fishery management.

As a modern coastal State and a country well known for its progressive gender policy, Norway—many would expect—would include women in fishery management, not only because of the international legislation and norms just referred to, but also because of the Norwegian equal opportunities law, which states that 40 per cent of each gender shall be represented in public committees and decision-making processes. Yet, the entire Norwegian fishery sector is heavily dominated by men.

At the resource management level, the Norwegian government is living with permanent exceptions from the equal opportunities law. Neither in decision-making processes on total quotas nor in processes where national quotas are distributed, are women among the actors representing the concerned groups. Resource management is simply none of our business, it would seem.

### **Concerned groups**

The reason for this is seen in how the authorities define the concept ‘concerned groups’ in fisheries. Concerned groups who are consulted and given the right to participate in the quota policy are defined as owners of the fish processing plants, the fishermen’s association and the labour union organizing the trawler crew. This means that ‘concerned groups’ are limited to some particular interests that are directly involved with fisheries. These particular interests are all dominated by men.

As a result, women are not regarded as a ‘concerned group’ in resource management. In addition, major parts of the decision-making processes have no transparency. To sum up, women are not only excluded from being able to influence resource management, they are also denied

information about the decision-making process.

Knowledge is power. But the right to define knowledge and to define the need for knowledge brings even more power. Who is controlling the knowledge level in the Norwegian fishery sector?

In spite of many well-educated women in fishery research, men control major parts of this field. Two years ago, the government established the Fisheries and Aquaculture Research Foundation. This foundation is yearly managing and distributing around 100 mn Norwegian kroners (around US\$13.3 mn) for fishery research.

Indeed, the money used for different kinds of fishery research plays a major role in the definition of political perspective and focus on the fishery sector. Should, for example, the bulk of the money be reserved for export- and technology-oriented research projects, or should it rather be used for projects oriented towards long-term resource management and development of rural areas dependent on fisheries?

Of course, the determinant factor is who the government asks to sit on the foundation board. They found only one woman, against six men. They had to set aside the equal opportunities law. Here again, the reason is how the authorities define ‘concerned groups’.

Also, at the knowledge level, ‘concerned groups’ are defined as particular groups directly involved in the fisheries, and hence dominated by men. In other words, in the definition of the knowledge needed for the future marine sector in Norway, women are not regarded as a ‘concerned group’.

A similar example can be given from a scenario project called ‘Marine Norway 2020’, promoted and financed by the Norwegian authorities and the fishing industry. The aim of the project was to define three different visions for marine Norway in 2020. Only five women were among the 45

• persons who gave inputs to the process. The  
• importance of this project is not for its  
• prediction of the marine future. The  
• importance is based on how the process is  
• defining ideas and perceptions for the future  
• fisheries, which, in turn, will influence the  
• sector's policy development. What will be  
• legitimate ideas and perceptions, and what  
• will not? Anyhow, Norwegian women were  
• not regarded as relevant contributors in  
• developing the visions for the future marine  
• Norway. Can we hope to be included after  
• 2020?

• Capital and leadership are also sources of  
• power. Not surprisingly, the Norwegian  
• fishing industry is owned by men. It is also  
• men who administer the sector. But what  
• about the new and booming aquaculture  
• industry? Isn't it modern? Hasn't it included  
• women?

• Well, the new leader of the fish farmers  
• association is a woman. Other than that, the  
• sector is heavily dominated by men. Along  
• with the rationalization and industrialization  
• in the 1990s, most of the women disappeared  
• from the sector. It was mainly women with  
• routine jobs who became redundant. At the  
• top level, there are few women. When the  
• leaders are recruiting new leaders, they often  
• do it as an internal process. When they make  
• external announcements, they ask for  
• leadership experiences in the fish-farming  
• sector. As a result, it is very difficult for  
• women to get top positions in the sector.

### • **Fish farming**

• The Norwegian fishing industry is the second  
• largest national export industry. With the  
• booming fish farming, the sector has also  
• become ambitious, even with a vision of  
• taking over the economic role of the oil  
• industry when the oil boom era is over.  
• Similar roles and visions are present for the  
• fishery sector in other Arctic coastal States  
• and areas too. At the same time, coastal  
• Arctic people have experienced that the  
• fisheries sector is extremely vulnerable, not  
• least because of challenges to the  
• management of the resources. A common  
• feature for many fishing communities in the

Arctic is marginalization, caused by both  
overfishing and liberalization of fisheries  
legislation. In particular, these processes hit  
the traditional and small-scale communities,  
indigenous peoples and the social structures  
keeping coastal communities together.

In marine Norway, men control the natural  
resources, the major terms of knowledge  
production and leadership. They have the  
whole bunch of keys to terms and choices  
for the future marine Norway. Without  
having studied the situation in other Arctic  
countries, I will not state that Norway is  
representative of gender distribution in the  
entire Arctic fishery sector. But my feeling  
is that the situation is more or less the same.

For example, the Canadian Fisheries  
Resource Conservation Council, established  
in 1993, consists of 13 men. The council's  
objective is, to quote the mandate, "help the  
government achieve its conservation,  
economic and social objectives for the  
fishery". This includes public  
recommendations to the Minister on such  
issues as quotas for the Atlantic fishery as  
well as Canada's position in international  
management bodies such as the Northwest  
Atlantic Fisheries Organization. Further,  
according to the mandate, "members are  
chosen on merit and standing in the  
community".

Note that the council and its mandate were  
defined after the 1992 cod collapse, in a  
situation where the social catastrophe had  
become apparent. Haven't women enough  
merit and standing in coastal Canada to be  
regarded as appropriate advisers in the  
management of fishery resources? Is  
resource management none of their  
business? Why are fishery policy and  
resource management Arctic women's  
business?

Because women in the coastal Arctic depend  
on fisheries, just as much as men do. Because  
all of the Arctic countries are democracies,  
where women count as half of the citizens.  
Because UN recommendations and  
legislation state that 'concerned groups'

should have access to information and participation in resource management bodies. Because the gentlemen managing the fish resources today haven't really convinced us that they do a good enough job. Because the future fishery sector and the well-being of the communities dependent on fisheries are not sufficiently taken care of by a monoculture of men, joining together in meeting after meeting, confirming their own perceptions. It is neither democratic nor healthy.

### **Sustainable development**

Gender distribution is a matter of sharing power, responsibility and resources. It is also a matter of promoting welfare and sustainable development. The latter is at the core of the ideas of the Arctic Council. I challenge the members of the Arctic Council to initiate a project to focus on Arctic women's role in resource management.

First of all, we need to collect data to document and compare Arctic women's role in natural resource management. Secondly, we need to develop new models for the design of management bodies, in order to include women in the development of the Arctic natural resource-based sectors. The Arctic future depends on how we are able to manage our natural resources. As we so dearly have experienced, a fishery is more than mere boats, export value and tonnes. Fish is community, fish is family, fish is food. Fish is history and future, business and culture. Fish is power and welfare, conflict and peace, sorrow and happiness, rights and obligations.

This calls for a widening of our perceptions about the scope of the fishery sector. That includes a change in the definition of 'concerned groups' in the design of decision-making bodies shaping the marine Arctic future.

As long as women are disregarded as a 'concerned group' in the fishery sector, we will not be able to influence the development of the fisheries. As long as men control all the keys to the marine Arctic future, coastal

women's role is limited to facing the consequences of men's decisions.

So, what do you do when somebody has taken all the keys? You change the locks! ■



# Partners in mutual trust

Modesta Medard

**Globalization has opened up new opportunities, but it has also undermined many women's economic independence**

*The process of globalization in fisheries is transforming the structure of markets and gender relationships. Social, political and economic processes now operate locally and globally.*

The process of globalization in fisheries is transforming the structure of markets and gender relationships. Social, political and economic processes now operate locally and globally. Women in the Kagera Region of Lake Victoria, in northwestern Tanzania, face major challenges in the fishery, due to the growing demand for Nile perch in the export market.

This article looks at the relationship between globalized markets for Nile perch and gender relations in the Lake Victoria fisheries of Tanzania. It explores the challenges women have faced and describes some of their responses to them. Particular attention will be paid to the Tweyambe Fishing Enterprise (referred to as the Tweyambe Group), a well-known women's group based in Kasheno village in Ruhanga subvillage (a *kitongoji* comprising 150-200 families) on the shores of Lake Victoria in the Muleba District of the Kagera Region.

The Tweyambe women, like those in other districts, at present face great challenges within the fishery. These include limited access to capital, interference by men in their activities, theft of fishing gear, and sociocultural problems. This article will explore their responses to these challenges, discuss the potential for new gender-based relationships linked to initiatives like the formation of the Tweyambe Fishing group, and explore the relevance of this case study for future initiatives intended to promote greater gender equality.

Lake Victoria is the second largest freshwater lake in the world, with a surface area of 68,800 sq km. It is shared between three

countries: Tanzania (51 per cent), Uganda (43 per cent) and Kenya (6 per cent). Lake Victoria has a catchment area of 258,700 sq km and a mean depth of 40 m. The shoreline is approximately 3,450 km long, of which 50 per cent (1,750 km) is in Tanzania. 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 the country, yielding 122,000 tonnes in 1995. They also contribute to the country's foreign exchange coffers, generating about US\$60 mn in 1997. These fisheries provide income and employment for over 32,000 full-time fishers. An estimated 500,000 people are employed, formally and informally, in fisheries-related activities.

The Kagera Region is located northwest of Tanzania and shares borders with Uganda in the north, Rwanda and Burundi in the west, and the administrative regions of Kigoma, Shinyanga and Mwanza in the southwest. The region is isolated from the rest of the country by poor transportation and communication networks. Kagera is subdivided into six administrative districts: Bukoba Rural, Bukoba Urban, Muleba, Biharamulo, Karagwe and Ngara. The total population of the region is estimated to be 1.6 mn. The livelihood of over 90 per cent of Kagera's population is derived from agriculture and fishing. Inhabitants from the Haya ethnic group make up 95 per cent of the population of the Kagera Region.

## Poor recognition

Women comprise 51 per cent of Kagera's population, but contribute 70 per cent of all the labour input to farming, the region's

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dominant economic activity. Despite this, women's contributions are poorly recognized and greatly undervalued. Women assume an inferior position within certain customs, taboos and within the sexual division of labour. Research on Lake Victoria suggests that women dominate the fish trade. If true, this would mean that the fishermen are dependent on women to convert the fish into money and to buy other food. However, recent work on the Tanzanian sector of Lake Victoria suggests that women no longer dominate: out of 198 fish traders and respondents interviewed in 1998, 78 per cent were male.

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 were more likely to participate in fish trading in the eastern portion of Lake Victoria, than in the central and western portions. Traditionally, the Sukuma from the central portion were mainly farmers, and the Haya from the western portion did not value fish-related activities. 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, which tended 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 are transport and the availability of funds. However, both quantitative and qualitative data indicate that most fish suppliers in the

Nile perch fishing industry are men. In 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 to the access men have to the capital needed to buy boats, provide seed money and hire labourers. Other advantages for men are their ability to travel frequently, having better access to business collateral, and being more aggressive than women in persuading owners to grant them loans and advances for fish procurement.

### **Other work**

There are important differences between men and women in 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 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 them. To eliminate this cost, factories began selling them to local processors. Women were the first to look for Nile perch byproducts 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 byproducts 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, 4-7 tonnes of fresh fish frames  
• cost Tshs60,000-90,000 (US\$75-112.50)  
• wholesale. After processing (smoking and  
• sun-drying), the processed *punk* could be  
• sold for Tshs100,000-120,000 (US\$125-150).  
• Women used the revenue from this activity  
• to build houses, feed their families, buy  
• clothing, and pay for school fees and 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 *punks* in locally made mortars  
• to feed their chickens.

• More recent changes in this sector have  
• further eroded the capacity of women to  
• generate livelihoods from fish frames. In  
• 1996-97, processing *punk* for animal feed  
• got commercialized, resulting in new  
• investments in local fishmeal factories.

#### • **Fishmeal products**

• 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, the higher  
• standards of hygiene required by the  
• European Union (EU) encouraged Nile perch  
• factory owners to seek wholesale buyers for  
• their byproducts.

• This ensured that the factory doorways were  
• quickly cleared, reducing congestion by both  
• humans and byproduct waste. 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 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 with illegal gear. The minimum  
weight for legally harvested Nile perch is half  
a kilogram. Purchasing this fish requires  
access to capital to compete with the factory  
agents, who are the main buyers. These  
agents are not allowed to purchase juvenile  
Nile perch of less than half a kilogram. Since  
legally harvested fish has become more  
expensive for the small traders who serve  
the local markets, and because falling  
incomes among local consumers limit the  
price they can pay for fish, the women traders  
have resorted to buying fish harvested with  
illegal, small-mesh gear.

Studies at Ihale beach in Tanzania indicate a  
preference for illegal beach-seines and nets  
with a mesh size below the recommended  
minimum mesh size of 5 in (127 mm). The  
fishermen claim that smaller mesh sizes  
earned them higher incomes from their fish  
sales 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 who can offer higher prices.

Some women fish traders have resorted to  
staying in the beach-seine fishing camps  
overnight 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.

Women also work in the Nile perch  
processing factories. Women processing  
workers tend to be segregated into the low-  
status, poorly paid types of work commonly  
associated with 'caring' professions such as

laundry work, fillet trimming, packing, sweeping and cleaning. Men dominate the highly paid jobs, including those involving fish procurement, quality control, environmental engineering, accounting, production supervision, ice machine operation, administration, and fish filleting and skinning.

Women workers were poorly represented among support staff and in actual production, compared to men. The most valuable Nile perch byproduct is processed and dried swim bladders. Swim bladders receive a high price in export markets. Of those who process and dry these bladders, 81.4 per cent were women, while 18.5 per cent were men. Only one factory employs 10 women on a permanent basis.

An interview with one of the factory owners, however, suggested that filleting and skinning are regarded as rough jobs that men manage better than women. In contrast, women are considered to be better than men at trimming and packaging. The employer considered this work required greater attention because mistakes could result in the rejection of an entire shipment in the foreign markets.

Kagera's women have sought to solve their multiple burdens by organizing into groups. However, their socioeconomic situation makes it difficult for them to do so. They face multiple household roles with heavy workloads, capital shortages and minimal access to credit. They are also ill-educated, often lack confidence and have to confront socially accepted 'bad' beliefs concerning women.

### **Shared trust**

On the positive side, women have identified several factors that have contributed to their successful organization. Central to their success have been the trust they share, a characteristic that is lacking in men's groups.

Women from Ruhanga put forth several reasons for being unsuccessful in obtaining loans and credit from the revolving credit

funds. These include the fact that women typically lack collateral; that men often interfere in their wives' attempts to apply for these funds; and that men are better able to more aggressively pursue loans. In addition, women often do not know how to apply for the loans, while men bribe loan officials. Also, the new men entering the fish business tend to lower women's chances of getting loans. Among those women whose loan applications were successful, some quarreled with their husbands over the loans, ending up divorced for their refusal to surrender the loans to their husbands. Other women found themselves unable to fully repay their loans because the funds were mismanaged or misused by their husbands

The Tweyambe Fishing Group started as a self-help group for women in Ruhanga, Kagera. The living conditions are tough in Ruhanga village, which has no primary school, hospital or reliable shops. Women's workloads are heavy and comprise responsibilities for work in the household, agriculture and in the fisheries. The women spend much of their time on farms located on the slope behind the village. The fishermen's work routine determines the daily pattern of household activities in many fishing communities. Fishermen leave at night or in the evening, while their wives work during the day. Men have little or no opportunity for family life and this adds to women's responsibilities and work. The women sell fish to supplement their incomes. They are forced to accept the prices offered by buyers on the beaches and want to change this. One woman said: "We can't afford to sell the fish in the distant markets. Transport is a big problem, accompanied by the lack of a well-established market in our village." Ruhanga's women thought that if they could acquire some kind of transportation, like a mini-bus, they could get a better price for their fish. In order to do this, however, they needed a way to raise the capital to buy the vehicle.

In 1992, a group of 14 women came together to form the Tweyambe Fishing Group. They agreed on the following objectives: to co-

• ordinate women's economic and day-to-day activities; to improve the household dietary status and socioeconomic condition of communities in Ruhanga by investing in fishing activities; to protect all women's rights; to help each other and to solve the road transportation problem in their community.

• **Maximum membership**

• They also agreed that 14 would be the maximum membership for their group and that all of these members had to be married women, settled in Ruhanga. This requirement was intended to avoid the potential negative effects migration could have on the group's success. Finally, all members had to be mature and trustworthy.

• In February 1993, the group collected US\$82 from the revolving credit scheme and supplemented this with weekly membership fees of approximately 40 cents per woman. Members sold bananas, groundnuts, handicrafts and grass for roofing and home 'carpeting'. (The Haya communities cover their floor with grass, which they will normally change every two weeks.) They used the money raised to invest in smoked and fried-fish processing, bought six nets and hired a boat.

• Towards the end of 1997, the group applied for a loan from the Kagera Fisheries Project to buy a vehicle to solve the transport problem. The application was rejected by the Fisheries Department on the grounds that running and maintenance costs for the vehicle would be high in view of the bad roads in the area.

• The Department suggested the group consider developing alternative transport solutions, in particular, water transport. The women agreed, and obtained a loan of Tshs3,580,000 (US\$4,475), with which they were able to buy a 25-HP outboard engine and a transport boat. This investment has since yielded dividends. Income from fish sales between 9 June 1998 and 29 September 1999 was Tshs2,309,600 (US\$2,887), while expenditures amounted to Tshs1,559,600

(US\$1,950), leaving the group with a clear profit.

Women generally confront many challenges in their trade and household work. In order to sell their fish, they have to make prior arrangements with male buyers to assure a guaranteed market. This is particularly the case during the farming season, when many buyers return to their farms. In the fish trade, women's main competitors are men. Most of these male buyers are fishermen, and there is an understanding between them and the other fishermen that the male buyers would help them out if they ran into trouble with their boats while on the lake. These male buyers control the fish auctions at the landing site and have come to dominate fish trading activities at the site. The Tweyambe women acknowledge that they cannot easily compete with the men, and could possibly get destroyed.

Another challenge occurs when the EU closes the markets for Nile perch, for whatever reason, causing prices to drop so low that they barely cover production costs. Women understand the extent to which they rely on export markets and so want reliable alternative markets for their Nile perch. Export bans and intense competition can destroy their savings. Tweyambe Group members also complain of lack of funds to expand their businesses.

The Group's water transport business has faltered and their income from this source has been halved because of competition from men who have also invested in water transport. The Tweyambe Group has also had to cope with gear theft. Competition and theft have forced some women to drop out of fishing or to shift to less competitive and less remunerative parts of the fishery.

Absentee owners are particularly likely to be cheated of their catch and gear. Since most women hire out their fishing gear to fishermen and do not take part in fishing activities away from the shore, they are most at risk of gear theft. This risk limits the number of units each woman investor is



willing to operate. Women often employ men who are related to them or their own sons, in order to avoid theft of nets and catch. In Ruhanga, for example, the women employed their sons as crew. Despite such precautions, in 1997, profits dwindled when 45 of the group's gill-nets, valued at Tshs1,350,000 (US\$1,688), were stolen. These nets had targeted Nile perch, the group's most profitable fish. In some cases, women fishers have arranged for night patrols on Lake Victoria, and have selected times for fishing and landing that make it easier for them to monitor their catch and gear.

### Poor training

A fish marketing study conducted along the Tanzanian part of Lake Victoria in 1998 indicates that the extent of training amongst fish traders and processors was low. Out of 198 fish traders and processors interviewed in this area, only 6 per cent were trained in bookkeeping and only 2 per cent in fish processing. Of those with training, only three (2 per cent) were women. These women, like others, believe that education plays an important role in directing their lives and limiting their opportunities.

However, any information received by the leaders was conveyed to the members of the group in both *Kiswahili* (the language spoken all over Tanzania) and *Haya*, thereby diffusing, to some extent, the knowledge that they had acquired. They believed that mutual trust and teaching one another have helped the group survive in a competitive environment.

Members of the Tweyambe Group perceive themselves as primarily responsible for the economic well-being of their families. Their domestic and work responsibilities made it hard for them to find time for their group activities. In response, the women looked for ways to create some free time for themselves, for example, by establishing a nursery school. The Tweyambe Group has a schedule of activities that ensures each member allocates time for group activities as well as for her farming or domestic

activities. In contrast, the women who work in the fish-processing factories have had little opportunity to budget their own time. In all the six factories we studied, women worked both day and night shifts. They were hired as casual labourers, and thus denied access to holidays, maternity and emergency leave. Some women factory workers are reported to have quarrelled with, and even divorced, their partners in order to comply with the factory rules, while others found it difficult to marry because men would not accept them working night shifts or taking time away from their household duties.

Tweyambe Group members have adopted a strategy of income diversification, so as to protect their households from hunger. When income from the fishing business is down, the women independently sell *matoke*, groundnuts, cassava, yams, second-hand clothes, tea and burns (candies), fresh beans and sweet potatoes at the village market.

### Non-fish products

Women also travel long distances to the beaches in the early morning. Once there, they sit under the trees with their commodities for exchange, while waiting for fishermen to come out of the lake. Intense competition for fish has encouraged the women to resort to bartering for other, non-fish products along the beaches. Firewood, fruits, tomatoes, maize and cassava flour are commonly exchanged for fish. Bargaining is common. These independent activities, the women argue, have helped their husbands and children understand that the Tweyambe Fishing Group is not an extension of their households, which they can exploit, but a separate entity.

Economic hardship and the important roles played by these women in supporting their households have changed men's attitudes. Group members say that men have realized that they can no longer provide for their families by themselves, and that the prevailing economic conditions are forcing both men and women to devise strategies for their mutual survival. However, problems persist. In the words of one woman, "When

• we buy and prepare the meals, pay school fees, buy clothes for the children and sometimes buy small gifts as a surprise, men see and realize our potential, although they don't appreciate it. Quietly, they feel offended by our initiative.”

• Tweyambe Group members continue to depend on men for many things, including advice and access to fish. Although the group has gained local respect through their association with donor agencies and the government, this association and their financial success and investments have also caused some members of the community to be very jealous of them. Women from polygamous households sometimes complained that it was difficult for their husbands to care for all their wives and children and some wives were neglected. Such women work extra hard to bring up their children. Some of the men in Ruhanga have demanded full involvement in their women's Nile perch fishing activities, defining it as a project for the entire community, including both members and non-members.

• Men have also tried to participate in the selection of crew members and engine operators. Members' husbands have demanded to know the exact income of the women's group and have interfered with planning and operations related to their investments. One woman explained: “I almost broke my marriage because of group funds. My husband forced me to give him Tshs100,000 (US\$124) for his court case, but we eventually resolved the dispute.” In Vihiga District of Kenya, according to one study, many of the men who belonged to, or were associated with, women's groups as 'advisors' were considered to be 'crafty' and 'sly'.

• Further research is needed to investigate the various issues that concern women's groups. Research topics should include ways to increase women's economic productivity and reduce the burden of their traditional household responsibilities; and ways to increase the participation of women in

decision-making, as well as in access to, and control over, various resources. Women's time constraints will need to be taken into account too.

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. 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 ghettoizing women in poorer paid occupations within industrial fish processing as contingent, vulnerable workers. As elsewhere, gender divisions of labour in households and communities within Ruhanga have persisted.

### **Post-harvest activities**

Most development efforts in Tanzania, as in other parts of the world, have tended to discount the potential contributions of women to economy and society, and have thus failed to mobilize this vital human resource. The idea that those who fish are fishermen and that fishing predominantly involves men going fishing in boats has generally not been challenged by the institutions extensively involved in Tanzania's fisheries.

Women are thought to engage only in post-harvest activities (smoking, drying and marketing), where they earn less profits than those earned by fishermen, particularly the owners of fishing equipment and gear. The case study of the Tweyambe Group shows the importance of integrating women into fishery programmes and development projects. This should be done in ways that address women's dual responsibility for income generation and family care.

Women's interests should be built into the design of programmes aimed at obtaining sustainable resource management. Several indicators confirm the value of the Tweyambe Fishing Group for its members and the larger community. Group members report that face-to-face interaction allowed them to get to know one another, build a reputation and develop trust. Openness on the part of the members helped them to resolve small conflicts within the group. In many cases, they have managed to separate project from individual activities and thereby helped to insulate the group from wider household pressures.

These features of the group point to its relevance for community organization initiatives, such as the development of co-management regimes designed to respond to the often larger-scale economic and social dilemmas affecting fishing communities affected by globalization.

When people consider themselves to be a member of a group, they are able to collectively achieve more. The benefits that accrued to the community as a whole support women's groups in their attempts to break through some of the constraints they face, particularly within an industry that is dependent on export markets and global processes. This means providing women with support not just for income-earning opportunities, but also for advocacy, mobilization in the public sphere and empowerment. It means ensuring that women's voices are heard in all the main decision-making processes, and not just in a small, isolated, women's office. Available evidence suggests that by working with more women's groups, the reach of extension services can be doubled and costs reduced. The result would be greater food security for rural families. Women's needs and interests are more likely to be satisfied if they are made the primary beneficiaries of certain welfare programmes. Examples like the Tweyambe Group remind us that donor organizations and governments must understand that people, especially poor women, are capable of promoting their own

development if their efforts and initiatives are recognized and supported.

A gender-sensitive approach to development that assesses and monitors the impact of rules and regulations at all levels on women, men and gender relations is more than a political imperative. It is, in fact, a basic condition for sustainable economic and social progress. It requires radical changes, particularly in areas where the belief that women are inferior to men continues to prevail. It would be advantageous for men and women to collaborate in the development of a gender-sensitive approach in order to avoid problems and conflicts. However, in order for this to happen, men would need to learn how to work in partnership with women. ■

# Gender Agenda

Women in fisheries:  
a collection of articles from *SAMUDRA Report*

Throughout the world, women of fishing communities play a central role in the fisheries and in maintaining the social fabric of their households and communities. However, they remain largely invisible, and the roles they play, largely undocumented. Policy interventions meant to support them have been few and far between, contributing to their systematic marginalization within the fisheries. Where women have been given spaces in organizations and processes, they have brought in a perspective that puts improving quality of life and fisheries-based livelihoods as the bottom line. For them, life is the goal, not fishing, as this dossier of articles from *SAMUDRA Report* reveals.

ICSF 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.