

# Voice of a Brighter Future

A 15-year-old girl from an Irish island attended a workshop on small-scale fisheries for the first time. A first-person account of her excitement, of tough realities and hope

**M**y name is Amelie Bonner. I am 15 years old. I love art, film, reading and music. I speak French, English and Irish. I am from Arranmore Island off the coast of Ireland. It is a beautiful island and is currently home to around 500 people. The community is small. My grandfather is a fisher and my father is the secretary of the Irish Islands Marine Resource Association (IIMRO). As you can imagine, fishing plays a very significant role to me and to my people, the majority of whom come from fishing families, which is to say that the culture and traditions of fishing have been passed down through the generations. It is vital that we do not lose this knowledge.

to the meeting, but I got to know the attendees quite quickly through the week; I felt welcomed straight away. It is not as common to see people of the younger generation partake in the likes of fishing conferences. Yet I think it is important to get involved and to take in as much information as possible, since all of the work happening currently will be left to my generation down the line.

The workshop consisted of presentations, discussions and a field trip. The first day was an introduction to the workshop and to each other. We all paired up and interviewed each other for five minutes, after which we had to introduce the interviewee to the rest of the group. I liked this exchange; it put me with someone that I wouldn't have spoken to at the time had we not had to do the exercise. Introducing my partner was nerve-racking since the room was brimming with participants. Everyone showed respect and listened attentively.

We took part in an exercise with Equalsea, a group of researchers who specialize in biology, economy, marine sciences, fisheries management, equity and governance. For this, we split into groups, mostly staying with people who spoke the same language. We had to choose three current topics of fishing and to write what progress we would like to see in the future in those areas. We then looked at the topics we chose and connected recurring themes together. Moving on from this, we created a story with fictional characters relevant to our previous work. This activity aided me in learning more about the main problems that small-scale fishers face and what needs to be accomplished for these problems to change. For example, the recognition of the traditional knowledge of small-scale fishers and the fishworkers,

**It is not as common to see people of the younger generation partake in the likes of fishing conferences. Yet I think it is important to get involved...**

I had the opportunity to attend a regional workshop on the International Year of Artisanal Fisheries and Aquaculture (IFAYA) in Galicia, Spain. Held in Vilanova de Arousa on November 13-16, 2023, the workshop aimed to come up with a plan of action around what needs to be done to improve the conditions for fishers. I met many people from around the world, including representatives from India, Cyprus, Finland, Norway, Uruguay, Brazil, Portugal, France, Scotland, England, Poland, Italy, the Netherlands and, of course, Spain.

I was there as an observer to understand and learn about small-scale fishing. I knew nobody prior

*This article is by Amélie (seamus@iimro.org), a student at Gairmscoil MhicDiarmada, Ireland*



Group photo from Europe IYFA Regional workshop: Getting the story straight and envisioning a fair future for small-scale fisheries in Europe, 13-16 November 2023, Galicia, Spain

inherited and experiential, is essential for informing fisheries management decisions.

As someone without the same level of experience and knowledge in fishing, I found listening to others educational and eye-opening. These are not discussions I hear on a daily basis and I really enjoyed being allowed into a space where I could learn from all the people I was with.

Language barriers were a huge obstacle. Throughout the workshop, there were translators doing simultaneous translation from Spanish to English and vice versa. A couple of people translated for those who spoke only French. The workshop couldn't have happened without the tireless effort of the translators and I applaud them. Since I speak English and French, I could converse with most of the participants. I have a basic knowledge of Spanish, but not enough to carry on a conversation, although I found that being submerged in the language helped improve my Spanish.

On the second day, we went on a field trip to visit the Mulleres Salgadas,

an organization of local women who gather a variety of shellfish and clams in the Ria de Arousa. These women take great pride in their work. They are admirable. Whilst collecting shellfish, they simultaneously pick up rubbish on the beach, helping to keep the beach clean. We were given a tour of the production of the shellfish. First they grade them by hand, using small hand-held tools that look like rulers. Then they send the shellfish to the factory where they are graded once more through a shaking machine into three sizes. They are then put into appropriate containers and sold. I thought the process to be thorough and well-organized. I really enjoyed getting out of the conference room and seeing the area, which we hadn't previously had the opportunity to do. The landscape reminded me of home.

One of the main problems small-scale fishers face is industrial fishing and trawlers. I knew prior to the conference that trawlers caused huge damage. Listening to the real impacts on small-scale fishers and the environment made me realize the

extent of this problem. Apart from the trawlers, I also learned about the quota system, of which I knew nothing beforehand.

Another issue that came up frequently was diversity in fishing. When speaking of this topic, three groups of people often came up: women, youth and indigenous communities. As a young person, I found that people were very keen to talk to me about fishing. I was the youngest participant. At first I found it slightly strange because I didn't think anything of it. But I realize that it is quite unusual for someone so young to be involved with fishing.

On the final day, representatives and observers of the Mulleres Salgadas joined us in a panel discussion on 'Women in Fisheries'. The panel included select participants from the workshop. This was probably one of my favourite discussions. I think it is extremely important to highlight the gender-based struggles and inequalities in industries; the fishing industry is no different. Not only are there women in the industry of fishing itself, but women outside the industry who support fishermen often go unrecognized, without credit. A panel member mentioned that there is no gendered word for 'fisher' in Gaelic. The term used is 'iascaire'; 'iasc' being fish and the suffix changes it to 'one who fishes'. I like this word because it escapes any disagreements about the word fisherman and fisherwoman. Many of those who spoke at the panel mentioned that they didn't feel discriminated against in their place of work, but felt it once they had moved to higher positions.

I got to know of a law introduced in 1995 in Spain that prevents women becoming members of the management of organizations they were a part of rightfully; meaning they could only remain workers. This penalization has put women at a disadvantage. One panel member was not allowed to become the president of her organization because of this law. She appealed since she had a majority vote. But to no avail. Unfortunately, no political parties in Galicia are interested in changing this law. I think that denying women

their place in the fishing industry is an injustice to all the women who contribute to it. These women want to be heard and represented. I don't think misogynists realize the positive impacts and contributions that women have on the fishing industry. For too long women have been left unpaid, uncredited and unrecognized for their work in fishing. They have been gathering shellfish, fishing, buying parts for boats and equipment, managing the administration, selling fish, and doing so much more. Fishing would be nothing without women.

In our last hours at the workshop, we worked on a declaration. It was to be sent to politicians and government officials in the hope that they take action. The contents of the declaration are a list of points that everyone agreed were essential for a just future for Europe's small-scale fishers. Much of this part of the workshop went into overtime because everyone was fatigued. Nonetheless, they all put in a big effort to get the declaration finished before the end of the night.

### Loving to learn

I am so thankful for the opportunity to learn and contribute to this workshop. I loved learning about the participants, their lives and their relation to fishing, as well as meeting new people. Socializing at dinner was always a pleasure. If there's one thing I learned, it is that fishers love to chat! I hope to see a brighter future for small-scale fishing and I think this conference was a step in the that direction. 🍷

#### For more

**IYAFA Regional workshop: Getting the story straight and envisioning a fair future for small-scale fisheries in Europe, 13-16 November 2023, Galicia, Spain**

<https://www.icsf.net/resources/europe-workshop-iyafa-2023/>