



40 Years in Support of
Small-scale Fishworkers

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ICSF'S NEWSLETTER ON GENDER AND FISHERIES

From the Editor

Across communities, countries and continents, a singular thread ties this issue of Yemaya together: how women experience fisheries developments differently than men because they occupy different social, economic and political spaces within fishing communities. Consequently, fisheries policies, programmes and political decisions rarely affect women in the same ways they affect men. Yet too often these differences, and the ways women navigate them, remain invisible, overlooked by institutions that continue to design fisheries around a predominantly male-centric understanding of work, livelihoods and governance.

Whether in the fishing villages of Rameswaram and Cuddalore in India, coastal communities in Sri Lanka, or remote harbours across the United Kingdom, women shoulder responsibilities that extend well beyond what conventional fisheries statistics capture. They process and market fish, manage household finances, care for children and elders, preserve ecological and cultural knowledge, sustain local food systems and hold families together through periods of uncertainty. Much of this labour remains invisible, unpaid, informal and unrecognised, despite being indispensable to the survival of fisheries and coastal communities.

The articles in this issue demonstrate that fisheries development and policy interventions often deepen existing gender inequalities when women's realities are not explicitly taken into account. The relentless march of modernisation, and the Blue Economy, may create new opportunities for some, while simultaneously eliminating the post-harvest livelihoods upon which many women depend. Climate change, biodiversity loss and environmental degradation increase food insecurity, health risks and economic precarity, yet women often have fewer resources, less access and less mobility to adapt. Political decisions, such as maritime boundary enforcement, can devastate households in ways that are experienced most acutely by the women left to manage financial collapse, emotional distress and family security. Even well-intentioned conservation and climate initiatives risk reinforcing inequalities when women are excluded from decision-making or treated merely as beneficiaries rather than partners.

Yet the stories in these pages are not narratives of victimhood. They reveal women responding to challenges and developments in ways that frequently differ from men – precisely because their responsibilities, access to opportunities and various other constraints are different from those of men. Women build savings groups, establish support networks, create alternative livelihoods, organize community leadership, restore ecosystems, transmit traditional knowledge, mentor younger generations and advocate for policy change. In so doing, they transform care into resilience, solidarity into collective action, and lived experience into practical solutions that strengthen both communities and ecosystems.

Perhaps the most important lesson emerging from this collection is that women possess knowledge that fisheries governance cannot afford to ignore. Their perspectives illuminate impacts that remain invisible in conventional policy debates, while their responses demonstrate forms of leadership rooted in community well-being, long-term stewardship and social cohesion. Accounting for women's roles and recognising their contributions is therefore not simply a matter of empowerment or equality; it is fundamental to building fisheries that are gender-just, economically resilient and environmentally sustainable.

For policymakers, researchers, NGOs and FWOs, this presents both a challenge and an opportunity. Gender-responsive fisheries require more than increasing women's participation at meetings or acknowledging their contributions in policy documents. They demand genuine engagement with women's lived experiences, systematic collection of gender-sensitive data, recognition of unpaid and informal labour, investment in women's organizations and leadership, and the willingness to redesign policies that deepen inequalities. The efforts of the World Forum of Fisher Peoples to this end finds mention in this issue.

The women featured throughout these pages remind us that every fisheries policy has gendered consequences, whether recognised or otherwise. As to women's roles in shaping fisheries futures, a pressing concern is whether institutions are prepared to listen, learn and act. Lasting change will come only when women's voices influence the decisions that shape fisheries – and when those decisions consciously and deliberately address the different realities faced by, and the needs and aspirations of, women. Only then can fisheries governance become truly equitable, resilient and sustainable for all. **M**



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