

Yemaya

ICSF has just begun publishing a newsletter on gender and fisheries. Excerpts from the first issue:

This is to introduce the first issue of YEMAYA ICSF's newsletter on gender and fisheries (those curious about the name, please read the box below). The idea for such a newsletter was first proposed at ICSF's General Body meeting in Trivandrum in February 1998.

It was suggested that the newsletter carry news and views of people working on gender issues in fisheries in different parts of the world. Besides keeping people aware of what is happening, it could help sustain the links between those working on similar issues and help them network when required.

Subsequently, many of you extended support to the idea and agreed to send in periodic write-ups for the newsletter. For the present we propose to publish two issues each year.


This first issue brings to you the voices of women and men of fishing communities from different countries, representing their diverse realities. The work they do within the fisheries differs, as do the issues they confront and the level to which they have organized to deal with these.

What they do have in common, though, is the desire to defend and sustain the artisanal fisheries sector and their livelihoods that derive from this.

We hope that this newsletter contributes to the process of building a meaningful forum for sharing of experiences, views and strategies. At a time when the livelihood of artisanal fishing communities in several parts of the world is under threat, such an effort appears to be particularly vital.

Please do send us any comments and suggestions you may have to make the

newsletter more relevant to your concerns. And please also send us suggestions on other people who could be interested in being part of this initiative.

We look forward to hearing from you and to receiving regular write-ups from you for inclusion in the newsletter. 

The Mother Whose Children are the Fish

Afro-Brazilian in origin, Yemaya is the shortened name for Yey Omo Eja, meaning "Mother Whose Children are the Fish", a mother whose children are so numerous that they are uncountable.

In the Umbanda, Candomble and Yoruba religions of Brazil and Cuba, Yemaya is not only the mother of the waters, she is the mother of all the orixas (gods and goddesses).

Often represented as a mermaid of white and blue hues and sporting long black hair, Yemaya, also called Yemalla, Yemanya, Iemanja, Iamanya, Imanje arid La Balianne, represents fertility, and embodies all the characteristics of motherhood, caring and love.

Though Yemaya essentially epitomizes the maternal force of life and creation, she has many aspects, one of which is Yemaya Okute, a fierce warrior.

In Brazil, on New Year's Eve, her devotees set up elaborate beachfront altars, offering food, flowers (usually seven open white roses) and candles to be washed away by Yemaya with the morning tides.

For us, pondering over issues of gender and fisheries, Yemaya seems to epitomize our concerns.