

## FROM LATIN AMERICA/Brazil

### A gender workshop

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(Translated from the Portuguese by **Rène Schärer**)

Profound changes are taking place in fishing communities in the state of Ceara in northeastern Brazil. And the pivot of these changes lies in a small community with the romantic name of Prainha do Canto Verde (Little Beach at the Green Corner) and in the creation in 1994 of the NGO, Instituto Terramar.

Abandoned for decades and plagued by high levels of illiteracy, lack of organization and participatory citizenship, the state of Ceara is being shook awake, thanks to the women who are playing a prominent role in the changes taking place.

Inspired by ICSF's Women in Fisheries programme and a meeting of women from fishing communities that took place during the International Seminar on Responsible Fishing in Ceara in 1997, the first gender workshop took place in the community centre of Prainha do Canto Verde on 28 and 29 November 1998. The aim was to discuss the role of men and women as partners in the pursuit of improving living conditions. The 16 participants included fishermen, women, community leaders, teachers and adolescents.

Given the total absence of women's organizations in fishing communities as well as the multiplicity of women's occupations, there was some difficulty in attracting a great number of women to the two-day workshop. The strategy was to awaken their interest in the issue and to create an awareness of the importance of discussing certain taboos in the presence of men. The proposal was understood and the challenge accepted by both men and women. This contributed to a rich and profound discussion, both in group work sessions, plenary sessions and in role plays.

The following themes were discussed, with the active participation of everyone :

- the differences between men and women, and the social aspects of these differences;
  - the necessity for women to assert their own identities and discuss their anxieties openly, instead of adhering to their traditional roles of submission; and
  - the need to strengthen the participation of women beyond their household and communities.
- At the suggestion of the participants, it was decided to explore the possibility of holding further workshops to discuss these issues, initially with the participation of community leaders from 11 villages of the region, who are already in regular contact through the monthly meetings of the Fishermen's Forum against Predatory Fishing. Subsequently, we plan to hold several more workshops. These will include three preparatory meetings in the municipality of Centre, one in the municipality of Fortim, and finally, a regional workshop on gender relations in Prainha do Canto Verde.
- We hope that these workshops will become one more instrument in the struggle of fisher populations to influence the social and democratic changes taking place in Brazil.
- the identity of women and men;
  - sexuality and equality in gender relations;