

A Historic Journey

This article explores the long road of ten years of advocacy and action to create spaces for women in fisheries and their organizations in European Union policy

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In 1990, the General Body of ICSF committed to developing a programme on women in fisheries for ICSF. The Women in Fisheries (WIF) programme was conceived as an action–research programme that would be executed within, and through, fishers’ organizations that were partner organizations of ICSF. This programme aimed primarily at strengthening the role and space of women in fishworker organizations, and defending their spaces in fisheries.

1994:

The ICSF’s international Women in Fisheries programme took off in Europe! Women in fisheries’ organizations from France and Spain had their first international exposure through participation in international workshops with women in fisheries from Philippines, Thailand, India, Senegal and

Canada. The workshops aimed at making women’s role in fisheries visible through the sharing of experiences, understanding root causes of gender discrimination and encouraging international solidarity linkages.

Participating in this meeting were women from all over Europe: from Spain came Rosa dos Ventos, an association of five women’s action groups of the fisher communities of the Rias Bajas coast in south Galicia, one of the major fishery regions of Spain. Three of the other groups that participated were those of women who supported their husbands who were crew on the distant water fleet and in frequent conflict with ship owners over demands for better working conditions and security of employment. Of the remaining groups, one was a group of net makers and the other of women shell fish gatherers who worked on foot and had come together to protect their rights.

A group of women leaders from the Fishery Survival Committee (FSC) also participated. The FSC was formed in defence of the artisanal fishing sector in France in 1993 when fish stocks were in crisis and the entry of large quantities of fresh fish from outside the European Economic

AKTEA



In 2008, AKTEA organized the 3rd annual European Women in Fisheries and Aquaculture conference at Arcachon, France, from 12 to 14 June

Community (EEC) brought the fish prices down by 50 percent. This movement had its major base in Bretagne (Brittany).

1999:

A session held during the interregional meeting of the European Union's Fisheries Program on women's role in the fisheries sector brought together women from different member states to discuss their participation in fisheries and the support needed for women in the sector to organize. The meeting was called by the Directorate General Fish (DG Fish) of the European Commission.

2001:

The Green Paper on the future of the EU Common Fisheries Policy for the first time mentioned the role of women in fisheries in Europe.

ICSF organized a workshop "Women in European Fisheries" with women of fishing communities and fishworker organizations from the Netherlands, Spain, France and Norway to discuss the review process of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) and to identify common issues for action as contribution to the consultation process of the CFP review, the so-called "Green Paper Process". The key issues that the women wanted to emphasize included the recognition of their work, access to training, integration of women in professional bodies and organizations, and exchanges of women across Europe. The existing systems to manage fisheries did not take into account the problems and particular interests of women. The importance of the participation of both men and women needed to be recognized so as to empower communities to negotiate with political and economic authorities. The recognition of the role of women would contribute towards implementing a fisheries policy that was less aggressive and more sustainable.

These "Issues of Concern for Women in European Fisheries", were presented by the French fisherwoman Danièle le Sauce in the European Parliament, Fisheries Committee Meeting on 20 November 2001. (See [Yemaya 8, December 2001](#))

The DG Fish (European Commission) commissioned a study on the role of women in the European fishery sector, whose recommendations were implemented in 2001. One of the principal recommendations concerned acknowledging, upgrading and expanding women's shore-side support role in their role as "Collaborating Spouses". (

See [Directorate General for Fisheries, European Commission, Final Rep. 1443/R/03/A, March 2002](#))

2002:

A three years research project Programme named FEMMES "Women in fisheries and aquaculture in Europe" (2002-2005) was started by a collaborative group of university departments and fisher organizations with support from the European Commission (EC), under the 5th Framework Programme for Research (CCE-DG Fish, contract n° Q5TN-2002-5th). The programme aimed to promote the recognition of women's role and status in fisheries and aquaculture through networking of researchers and women's associations. Under the FEMMES programme, three workshops were organized where fisherwomen and researchers from nine European countries exchanged experiences, issues and knowledge. The first workshop dealt with fisherwomen's role in the private space, the second with fisherwomen's role in the public space and the third aimed to prepare two agendas, one with action points on enhancing women's role in fisheries, and the second with supporting research needs.

2003:

The EC organized a two-day conference on 22nd and 23rd January to discuss ways to enhance the role of women in the fisheries sector of Europe under the newly reformed CFP. It was the first time in history that the EC organized a conference on this subject. The conference was also unique in that participants were largely women of fishing communities (135 out of 200) from EU member states, who got a chance to directly speak with the Commission. This resulted in a lively exchange on women's current roles and potential for participation on various issues like conservation of fish resources, representation of the sector's interests, contribution to social and economic structures in areas dependent on fishing, and contribution to the reformed CFP. That their voice was being heard greatly encouraged the women in their struggle for recognition. (See [Yemaya 12, April 2003](#) for a report of the conference by the Dutch women in fisheries network: VinVis)

2004:

The FEMMES programme organized an international conference: "Women in Fisheries and Aquaculture: lessons from the past, current actions and dreams for the future", from 10 – 13 November 2004 at Santiago de

Compostela (Spain). The conference aimed at extending the networking and association linkages of women of fishing communities from Europe to other parts of the world. It created a unique opportunity for the women of fishing communities to meet with researchers from different disciplines of social sciences working on women-in-fisheries-related issues, and for the researchers themselves to discuss their work. There were more than 170 participants—fisherwomen, shellfish gatherers, fish processors, fish sellers and researchers, administrators, social workers and women activists—from all over the globe. The outcome was a shared agenda with actions needed to support women's role in fisheries and aquaculture. The shared agenda was published in four languages and sent to all members of the European Parliament and also to national policy makers. (See *Samudra Report*, 41, July 2005)

2005:

The FEMMES programme published the Agenda for Research on Women in Fisheries and Aquaculture in Europe. This agenda was the result of the three years interactive research programme with women in fisheries and aquaculture in Europe that had started in 2002 and was circulated to decision-makers in the field of research policy at all levels, local, national and European.

The European Parliament accepted a resolution on [Women's Networks: Fishing, farming and diversification \(2004/2263\(INI\)\)](#). The resolution called on the European Commission and the Member States to launch the necessary actions to secure greater legal and social recognition, and raise the profile of the work of women in the fisheries sector; to support their efforts to obtain better living conditions for their families and communities; and to guarantee, social and economic rights, including wage equality, unemployment benefit in case of interruption of work (temporary or definitive), the right to obtain a pension, the reconciliation of work and family life and access to parental leave, access to social security and free health service, and the protection of safety and health at work.

The resolution also called on the Commission to recognize the importance of supporting the role of women in fisheries networks and their potential to contribute to the socio-economic fabric and well being of fisheries-dependent communities. Their effective participation in advisory fisheries bodies at European, national and regional level, was sought. Financial support, including from the European Fisheries Fund

for fisheries networks was also sought.

The resolution was based on a report by European MP Elspeth Attwool of the Committee on Fisheries of European Parliament.

2006:

The European Fisheries Fund (EFF) Regulation adopted the principle of gender equality. The Council Regulation (EC) No 1198/2006 establishing the EFF framework for the 2007-2013 aimed to:

“help the sector attain the objectives defined as part of the Common Fisheries Policy. Aid granted in this framework must therefore stimulate the development of an economically profitable and environmentally responsible sector that contributes to the wellbeing of the populations dependent on fisheries, in other words, to promote sustainable fisheries and aquaculture. From that perspective, the projects cofinanced by the EFF must help strike a balance between resources and fishing capacity, protect and enhance the environment and natural resources, support the sector's competitiveness and economic viability, improve the quality of life in areas with fishing activity and promote gender equality for those working in the sector.”

The regulation furthermore had a separate article on Equality between men and women (Article 11):

“The Member States and the Commission shall ensure that equality between men and women and the integration of the gender perspective are promoted during the various stages of implementation of the EFF, including the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. The Member States shall ensure that operations to enhance the role of women in the fisheries sector are promoted.”

In May 2006, AKTEA, the European Network of Women in Fisheries and Aquaculture was formally established at Ancona. The objectives of AKTEA were to promote the visibility and recognition of women's role in fisheries and aquaculture, exchange of experiences, problems and resolutions among women in European fisheries and aquaculture; to foster the acceptance of women and women's organization within the fisheries and aquaculture political and institutional frame; to facilitate the enhancement of women's self confidence; and, to promote a sustainable development of fisheries and aquaculture and the preservation of fisheries and coastal communities.

The founding members were: the French networks Femmes entre Terre et Mer (Brittany); CIVAM l'Etang de Thau and

the Association “Femmes de Pêcheurs en Méditerranée”; VinVis of the Netherlands; Estrela do Mar of Portugal; the Pan-Hellenic union of women in fisheries of Greece; Network Kystentil Kamp of Norway; Tyrius Association of Spain; the Italian women in fisheries network Penelope; the Northern Ireland Women in Fisheries (UK) and the North Sea Women’s Network (UK). (*See reports on the founding of AKTEA here and here.*)

2007:

AKTEA organized its 2nd European “Women in Fisheries and Aquaculture” conference at Annalong (Northern Ireland), from 26 to 29 April 2007. Eighty women from eight European countries—the United Kingdom, Ireland, the Netherlands, France, Spain, Portugal, Italy and Greece—representing 15 women in fisheries organizations discussed the future actions of the organization.

The important issues for AKTEA were recognition of the status of the collaborative spouse according to the Council directive 86/613 EEC; the application of the principle of equal treatment of men and women engaged in any activity in a self-employed capacity; and protection of self-employed women during pregnancy and motherhood. The term ‘self-employed’ included spouses not being employees or partners, where they habitually, under the conditions laid down by national law, participated in the activities of the self-employed worker and performed the same tasks or ancillary tasks.

Since July 2007, France is the only EU state to have made the collaborative status, as per the EU directive 86/613, mandatory for all French fishers and shellfish farmers’ wives contributing to the activities of enterprises of less than 20 employees. Spouses could choose from three types of status: wage earner, associate spouse, or collaborative spouse. The law came into force from the 1st of July 2007.

French fishers and shellfish farmers’ wives now have the right to represent the family enterprise, to be elected in the boards of fishermen’s organizations and also to join a social security scheme. (*See related reports here and here.*)

2008:

The European parliament published the report “[The role of women in the sustainable development of European Fisheries Areas](#)”. Several AKTEA members contributed to it. The report highlighted the important role of women in fisheries, including fishing, aquaculture and the processing of aquatic products. Women were also recognized as

major agents in the diversification of income from fisheries, especially in areas affected by the decline of fishing. They were active in self-organizing and networking to promote gender equality in many areas across Europe. Nevertheless, they faced many constraints and barriers. The report reviewed a variety of best practices to enhance women’s role in the fishing areas of fourteen EU countries. It also recommended actions for the European Fisheries Fund to promote initiatives for women in European Fisheries Areas. The report also made recommendations for policy makers and fisheries organizations.

Also in the year 2008, AKTEA organized the 3rd annual “European Women in Fisheries and Aquaculture” conference at Arcachon France, from 12 to 14 June. The Conference discussed the involvement of women’s organizations in Regional Advisory Councils –Fisheries (RACs). Four members of AKTEA participated in four different RACs: the North Sea Women’s Network is a member of the North Sea RAC, the Scandinavian women’s network belongs to the Baltic Sea RAC, Mnana Mara of Ireland is a member of the North-western Waters RAC, and Estrela do Mar of Portugal is part of the South-western Waters RAC. (*See related reports here and here.*)

2009:

The European Commission published the Green Paper “Reform of the Common Fisheries Policy 2010-2020”. This did not have any reference to women’s role in fisheries, or the principle of equal treatment of men and women, which were part of the Green Paper of 2001.

In response, AKTEA highlighted the important role women played in fishing communities in Europe, and expressed its disappointment over the absence of recognition of this role in the latest Green Paper. It regretted that despite EU parliament recommendations and various EC reports, there were still no gender based statistics on fisheries at the EU level. It noted that many women working in fisheries were not included in the statistics as they were not recognized as fishers. Women throughout Europe wanted recognition of their role in fishing enterprises in order to access social benefits and representation. The “collaborative spouse” status (EU directive 86/613) was a major step forward, but this status has not been applied to women in fisheries in most member states of the European Union. AKTEA also explained how the quota system in EU fisheries discriminated against women and

had a negative social impact in fishing communities. AKTEA appealed to the EC to develop social indicators to assess the social impact of new fishery regulations on fishing communities. (*Read AKTEA's response [here](#).*)

AKTEA's 4th annual meeting and its conference on "European Women in Fisheries and Aquaculture" was held from 27 to 31 October, 2009 at Sines, Portugal, hosted by the Portuguese network Estrela do Mar. The response by AKTEA to the Green Paper was the main issue on the agenda. The AKTEA network also responded to the consultation on the EU Roadmap for Equality between Women and Men 2008-2012. It commented that while the Roadmap has several articles referring to the rights of women working with their spouse in the family fisheries enterprises, implementation of these in fisheries policies was practically absent. (*Read the meeting report [here](#).*)

2010:

The European Parliament adopted a resolution on the Green Paper on the reform of the Common Fisheries Policy (2009/2106 INI of 25 February 2010). It stressed as a fundamental objective the full involvement of women in activities in the sector, on an equal footing with men, and for this objective to be reflected in all policies and measures adopted for the sector.

The resolution mentioned several issues important for the social protection of women in fisheries. It called on the Commission and the Member States to cooperate in order to promote the principle of equal opportunities at the various stages of the implementation of the European Fisheries Fund, as provided for in Article 11 of Regulation (EC) No 1198/2006. Furthermore the Commission was urged to ensure that the most vulnerable groups in the fisheries sector, especially working women, fisherwomen and women shellfish gatherers were not disadvantaged in access rights, and to encourage their participation in the RACs. (*Read the resolution [here](#).*)

ICSF Europe and AKTEA together organized a workshop "Strengthening the voice of women of fishing communities in Europe", on February 13, 2010, to prepare inputs from Europe for the international workshop "Recasting the Net: Defining a Gender Agenda for Sustaining Life and Livelihoods in Fishing Communities", organized by ICSF at Mahabalipuram, India, during 7-10 July 2010. AKTEA members from Spain, Portugal, France, Greece, Italy, Netherlands and Northern

Ireland contributed to the workshop. The workshop report covered women's work in fisheries, access to decision making, views on rights to coastal and fishery resources and fishery management. (*See the workshop report [here](#) and AKTEA's presentation [here](#).*)

The European Parliament and European Council enforced the [European Directive 2010/41/EU](#) on the principle of equal treatment of men and women engaged in self-employed work, on July 7. The principle also applied to spouses or life partners who has established business together. A national social protection system for self-employed workers, and spouses or life partners of self-employed workers was also mandated. Member States could decide whether the social protection was implemented on a mandatory or voluntary basis. Accordingly Council Directive 86/613/EEC was repealed.

The European Parliament organized a public hearing on December 1st 2010 on "[Women and the Sustainable Development of Fisheries Areas](#)". Several women in fisheries organizations, most of them members of AKTEA, presented their work and role within the European fisheries sector. The public hearing highlighted that the EP recognized the important role of women in the fisheries sector, but women needed to get more support. (*Read the report of the public hearing [here](#).*)

AKTEA had her 5th annual meeting on 2nd December 2010 at the EU Parliament and the future of the network was discussed. The European Commissioner proposed to finance a European Network, more institutionalized than AKTEA. It was discussed if AKTEA should become part of, and guide the establishment of, such a network. Members agreed that the network should move towards institutionalization because it needed public subsidies to ensure its expansion and develop its activity in all member states. AKTEA decided to request a meeting with the Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (DG MARE) to discuss the possibilities of becoming the official European network. (*Read a report on the 5th annual meeting of AKTEA [here](#)*)

2011:

The interim evaluation of the European Fisheries Fund (2007-2013) concluded that regarding Article 11 on Gender Equality, very little was achieved. Women in Fisheries' organizations were hardly involved in the Monitoring Committee (MC), representing between 0 to 8 percent of total members. Only seven of 23 Member States surveyed

(Ireland, Greece, Spain, Cyprus, Malta, Portugal, and Romania) had representatives from women's organizations on the MC. The maximum in any committee was a single woman representative. Further, the implementation of Axis 4 had really taken off only in 2010 and impacts were barely perceivable at this stage.

The selected projects fell under Article 44.1 (support the sustainable development of fisheries areas), while measures under 44.2 (improvement of professional skills, and equal opportunities for women) had not yet been implemented. (Read the Interim Evaluation Report [here](#).)

2013:

The European Parliament Committee on Fisheries commissioned a note "[Women in fisheries: a European perspective](#)". It recommended how the new European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) could better integrate gender equality in its operational programme.

The European Parliament organized another public hearing on "[Developing the role of Women in European Fisheries and Aquaculture](#)", on October 14. The hearing was co-organized by the Committee in Fisheries and the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality. AKTEA and several of its members participated.

AKTEA's 6th annual meeting and conference "European Women in Fisheries and Aquaculture" was held on October 15, at Brussels. Women from member' organizations from Portugal, Ireland, Spain, France and the Netherlands discussed the future of AKTEA. They unanimously decided to continue the network even without funding. The recognition of the network at EU level was seen as helpful for strengthening the national organizations. However, it was also noted at the meeting that most member organizations had difficulties recruiting new members, in particular young women. Strategies like the use of social media were

seen as options to reach new women and expand the network.

2014:

The new European Maritime and Fisheries Fund: 2014-2020 (EMFF) included references to gender equality and making available funds to supports projects for women in fisheries.

Article 8 of the [EMFF regulation](#) stated: *The Union should, at all stages of implementation of the EMFF, aim to eliminate inequalities and promote equality between men and women, as well as to combat discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation.*

To promote human capital, the creation of jobs and social dialogue, the EMFF calls on Member States to support "*networking and exchange of experiences and best practices between stakeholders, including among organizations promoting equal opportunities between men and women, promoting the role of women in fishing communities and promoting under-represented groups involved in small-scale coastal fishing or in on-foot fishing*" (ibid.). This action referred to fisheries and aquaculture articles (29 and 50).

For the first time the EMFF opened its funding support "*to spouses of self-employed fishermen or, where and in so far as recognized by national law, the life partners of self-employed fishermen, under the conditions laid down in point (b) of Article 2 of Directive 2010/41/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council. The same principle is available in fisheries and aquaculture*" (ibid.).

The regulation gave examples of the specific actions towards women through some of its articles, such as in article 31: "*In recognition of their role in fishing communities, spouses and life partners of self-employed fishermen should, under certain conditions, also be granted support for professional training, lifelong learning and the dissemination of knowledge, and for networking that contributes to their professional development*". ❏