
FROM EUROPE/France**Stressing their roles**

by Sylvie Roux, vice president of the Comité local des pêche of Audierne (Southern Brittany), and member of FIFEL-Bretagne.

The role of women in fisheries is very important, but often not recognized. It seems this is somewhat characteristic of France. In some Nordic countries, the role of women is better recognized, probably because it is not rare to find women as crew members on board alongside their husbands. In France, women are active in shore-based activities—one man at sea means one woman working on shore. In the artisanal fisheries sector, one job at sea creates four jobs on shore.

Women in fisheries are involved in pre-harvest activities such as preparation of gear, boat management, liaising with the administrative services, and in processing and marketing fish.

In December 1994 (at the time of the crisis in the fisheries sector), in Brittany, women played an essential role in defending fishermen's rights. Formal and informal movements appeared and, at that time, a women's group was created, based on solidarity. From the start, women felt the need to be better informed and better trained about what was happening in the fisheries sector. This is why their first request was to obtain the status of "fisherman's wife" in order to benefit from social security (retirement) provisions, professional rights, and professional training.

This was achieved with the Fisheries Orientation Law (18 November 1997). Fishermen's wives were given the status of spouse with the rights to retirement benefits, to represent their husbands on economic councils, and to training sessions.

The eight regional organizations of women formed an inter-regional federation of coastal women (FIFEL) in May 1998. Through this association, women from coastal communities aim to underline their role as agents of economic development.

More than the recognition of their role in coastal communities, women members of FIFEL want to promote the survival of livelihoods from the sea through a renewed and global vision of social, economic, cultural and environmental issues in the sector. The objectives are to defend their social rights, facilitate the training and integration of young people into coastal society, and participate in the review of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) in 2002.

This review is a major issue for the sector and it is crucial that women be involved in the process. Will the rights to the fisheries get privatized, as some in the European Parliament suggest? Or will the access to the sea remain free for artisanal fishermen? Will fishermen and their wives have any say in elaborating these policies?

On its side, FIFEL has already engaged in a reflection on these issues and has asked for: implementation of European rules (the same for everybody, which is not the case at the moment) and a system of sanctions if these rules are not respected; definition of artisanal fisheries based on length of boats and horsepower; harmonisation of fishing gear and fishing practices; European collective agreement; harmonisation of training and qualification at European level; and coherent resource management.