

# Building knowledge

## A report on the 13th Women's World & Fazendo Gênero 11 held in Brazil recently

By **Luceni Hellebrandt** (luceni.hellebrandt@gmail.com), Universidade Estadual do Norte Fluminense Darcy Ribeiro, Brasil (UENF), and **Carmen Pedroza-Gutiérrez** (pedrozacarmen@yahoo.com), Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, (UNAM)

The Women's Worlds Congress was organized with the aim of providing a forum for global debate beyond the North-South perspective. Held from 31 July to 4 August 2017, in the Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina (UFSC) at Florianópolis, Brazil, the Congress featured an interesting session on 'Transformations, Connections, Displacements of Feminism: Gender, work, educational formation, and traditional communities,' provided the space for discussions on innovative feminist studies and activism in various walks of life. This session, organized by Dr Maria do Rosário de Fátima Andrade Leitão from the Universidade Federal Rural de Pernambuco, and Dr. Maria Helena Santana Cruz from the Universidade Federal de Sergipe, helped establish a dialogue between the diversity of scientific and popular knowledge.

The scope of the session was defined as "scientific studies analysing the conditions of life in traditional communities, their unequal access to political actions and the space of women in communities of fisherwomen and

fishermen; and the equal participation of women and men at all levels of political decision-making processes in public and private spaces".

Seven studies were presented, analysing the roles and work of women in small scale and artisanal fisheries, and their gendered relations within fishing communities. The studies were located variously in freshwater, lagoon, estuarine, marine and continental ecosystems. From Brazil, Hellebrandt and Galvão made a presentation on women in fishing activities in the South while Abreu and Alencar, and Diógenes and colleagues, talked about women in fisheries in the north; Nascimento and Lima presented a case study from the northeast of Brazil. Further, Pedroza presented a case study of freshwater and marine fisheries in Mexico; and Souza and colleagues presented a bibliographic analysis of the research done in Brazil on women in fisheries.

Pedroza from Mexico described gender relations in the community of Petatán on Lake Chapala as well as in the fishing community in Yucatan. While analysing the role of women along the value chain in the lucrative sea cucumber fisheries, she discussed the social and economic costs borne by them. She described the health consequences suffered by women who remain standing for many hours as they carry out fish processing.

ADRIANA ABREU



At the Women's Worlds Congress held from 31 July to 4 August 2017 in Brazil, participants opined that the role of women in fisheries was devalued because of the lack of recognition for their activities

She also discussed the social impacts of high profit margins, including the effect on families and communities, and of sex work fuelled by the money that sea cucumber fishery generates.

In Brazil, the study by Nascimento and Lima highlighted the role played by the Quilombola women in community struggles, in the Cumbe /Aracati mangrove swamps in the State of Ceará, to defend their territorial and livelihood rights. The Quilombola community is descended from fugitive slaves from colonial days in Brazil. The community's livelihood has been severely threatened by conflicting economic activities, including the installation of wind energy in dune fields, and shrimp farming in mangroves; activities which are a violation of the community's constitutionally guaranteed rights to livelihood.

The issue of access rights to natural resources was also the focus of studies by Galvão and Hellebrandt in southern Brazil. Galvão highlighted the impact of port activities on the ecological system of the Patos Lagoon estuary. She explained how port activities impacted the livelihood of fishing communities in Rio Grande in the State of Rio Grande do Sul. She described the various adaptive strategies that the community's women were engaged in, both in the fishing sector and outside, including taking up temporary jobs. She pointed out how traditional fisheries management perpetuated gender inequality.

Hellebrandt's critique of fisheries management was based on two experiences involving women in a fishing community in Pelotas in the State of Rio Grande do Sul: one, pertaining to a religious festival, and the other, to a cooperative ice-making venture. Thus, the involvement of women in both cultural and economic activities established their identity as fisherwomen, an identity that went beyond the narrow definition of the "professional artisanal fisherman" in Brazil. This definition is used to guarantee social security benefits in Brazilian fishing but excludes a large number of women who do not participate directly in catching fish. She therefore criticized the restrictive boundaries imposed by formal fisheries management systems.

Women's agency was highlighted in the work of Abreu and Alencar. Their study described the construction of the Jaruá Fisheries Agreement, whose purpose was to manage the *pirarucu* (Arapaima gigas) fishery



Women filleting fish in the community of Petatán, Michoacán, México.

in Marimaruá in the State of Amazonas. The authors discussed how daily practices contradicted the formal dichotomy used in most discourses, on water as "space for men" versus land as "space for women". They highlighted the critical role of women act in different stages and spaces of the fishing activity.

In another study on the Amazon region, Diógenes et al. described daily lives of women fishers from the communities of São Sebastião da Brasília e Santo Antônio da Catispera, in the municipality of Parintins in the State of Amazonas. According to the authors, fishing freshwater shrimp was one of the main sources of income in the community, in which women were also involved throughout the value chain, fishing and selling shrimp in the municipal market. However, the role of women was devalued because of the lack of recognition for their activities.

Souza presented a bibliographical review of Brazilian studies on women in fisheries. She updated and presented a status report reviewing texts from the 1970s to 2017. The research addressed many of the themes highlighted in the works described here. ❏

**The involvement of women in both cultural and economic activities established their identity as fisherwomen, an identity that went beyond the narrow definition of the "professional artisanal fisherman"**