

Women in fisheries

International Collective in Support of
Fishworkers (ICSF)

ESA Fish Workshop, Tanzania,
14 to 17 March 2006

Focus on women within ICSF

- Important role of women in fishing communities was acknowledged at the first *International Conference of Fishworkers and their Supporters* in Rome in 1984.
- The term `fishworker' was used explicitly to include women and men in the harvesting sector, as well as in the pre- and post-harvest sector, thereby also acknowledging the need to look at fisheries as a system.
- **long-term objective** of strengthening the participation of women within fishworker organizations and in decision-making processes at various levels.

The Role of Women in Fisheries

- As workers within the fisheries (paid and unpaid)
- As workers in processing plants
- As those responsible for the family and community
- As workers outside the fisheries
- Within fishworker movements

Women's roles: Undervalued?

- The roles women play differs by region, by religion and culture, by age, by levels of economic development, by proximity to urban centers etc.
- Common factor is that it is rarely seen as `productive`, extension of `domestic` space
- Available data does not capture the work of women and its multidimensional nature
- Roles played by women dynamic, changing in response to various developments

Are women organized?

- Women tend to be more active at the local and community levels in most countries. Rarely well represented at the national/ regional levels
- Women's participation, where present, has strengthened the larger organization and broadened its agenda, bringing in issues of women as workers and women as members of communities.
- Most significantly, women have raised issues that concern the quality of life within fishing communities—issues such as access to health, sanitation and education. *They have brought in a community perspective to the fisheries debate.*

Women organizing: some issues

- Even when the importance of women's participation is emphasized, little is in fact done to make this possible
- Women tend to undervalue themselves, lack self-confidence and are hesitant to take on active roles within organizations
- Attitude towards women's participation patronizing. At most, women are seen as actors supporting the agenda of their men
- Where women have organized and have become a force, this has even been perceived as a threat, and has become a divisive issue.

Women organizing: some issues

Women need to be better represented within organizations.

However....

- They need to make sure that their issues are taken up
- To clarify what form of organization would best achieve their objectives
- To clarify what they want to achieve being part of organizations

Feminist perspective in fisheries

Participation of women in organizations should lead to

- a questioning of the mainstream concept of production, that excludes work related to reproduction
- greater valuation and recognition of work of women and reshaping of gender relations
- maintaining the community basis of fisheries
- sustainable use of resources, and questioning of development that is based on overexploitation of natural resources for short-term profit