

# Yemaya

No. 12

ICSF'S NEWSLETTER ON GENDER AND FISHERIES

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## From the Editor

Dear Friends,

Greetings from ICSF! This issue has a special focus on women in European fisheries. We carry a report of a meeting organized by the European Commission (EC) to discuss ways in which to enhance the role of women in fishing communities. As is noted, this was the first time such a meeting has been organized by the EC. It is positive to note that there is finally recognition being given to women's roles in the fisheries, not only as workers in fish processing, marketing, aquaculture and fishing, but also to their support roles within the family and industry. But, as women pointed out at the meeting, more recognition is needed of the roles women play within the family and community, especially in fostering community links and sustaining its social and cultural fabric.

It may well be asked why words like community, cultural fabric and social cohesion figure in a fisheries debate. As the importance of institutional factors, in the face of increasing stress on fisheries resources in various parts of the world, is increasingly realized, the answer to this question becomes, in a sense, obvious. It is becoming evident that where cohesive and strong community institutions exist/ are fostered, it is easier to sustain/ set up effective and equitable management systems for sustainable management of fisheries resources. It is also clear that institutions become even more vital in times of crisis. Can we then afford to disregard these aspects or to disregard the role women play in sustaining



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families and community institutions, in promoting social links and cohesion? And especially in a sector like fisheries where it is well known that men spend a large part of their working life on sea, leaving women to handle much of all else?

At another level, where women have been given spaces within decision-making processes, they have brought in a community perspective into the fisheries debate. Women have not only extended support to issues raised by fishermen and highlighted issues of relevance to themselves as workers in the sector; more significantly, they have raised issues that concern and impact on the quality of life in the community as a whole, be it education, health, decent housing, social security or drinking water. This should not come as any surprise given that the well-being of the family and community are very much women's responsibility. Women have thus brought in a perspective that puts improving quality of life and fisheries-based livelihoods as the bottom line. Technical and ecological ('fishery') aspects are seen as inextricably linked to socioeconomic ('non-fishery') aspects, as they surely are. There is clearly a case for adopting a perspective that recognizes and prioritizes these interconnections and that ensures that both women and men are given their rightful place in decision-making processes. And finally, we would like to remind you that we look forward to receiving articles for *Yemaya* No. 13 by 15 July 2003.