

Yemaya over the years

This article explores the role and significance of *Yemaya* over the years as a newsletter that tries to enlarge the space for women's perspectives, issues and struggles in the fisheries

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Over the years, *Yemaya* has brought together articles from all over the world about struggles of women fishworkers as well as their initiatives and efforts to organize and create their own space.

Women's perspectives have been documented through direct interviews and at times, written contributions, often from fisherwomen themselves. These are integral to



Yemaya as they present stories and struggles through powerful personal narratives, giving fisherwomen a space to voice their views and recount their personal stories. These are women who have made important contributions to their community, organizing perhaps as solidarity networks, community groups, associations and federations to defend their own rights and community interests.

One of our earliest articles was about a courageous woman, Lourdinha Rodrigues of the *colônia* of Ponte de Pedras Goiana in Recife, in the north-eastern state of Pernambuco, Brazil, who worked to give women fishworkers a voice and helped them discover their own identity in a system that did not know the value of their work. Lourdinha helped her fellow fisherwomen to create their own national organization, overcoming resistance from their families and even other women. *Yemaya* has also carried personal accounts of women from various other parts of the world; women who have struggled

to acquire basic rights such as right to social security and maternity and unemployment allowance, for women fishworkers.

Over the years *Yemaya* has detailed several of the key problems being articulated by women of fishing communities. Articles, for example, have focused on the impact of globalization. While globalization has opened up new opportunities for some women, it has also undermined their economic independence and increased the challenges they face in supporting themselves and their families. An article on the Asian Fisherfolk Conference of 2002 described how participants felt that globalization had led to loss of income and livelihood, dislocation from fishing grounds, denial of access to rights and loss of traditional knowledge systems among other impacts.

Often women are the first affected when it comes to natural or manmade calamities and environmental degradation, given that their work is often concentrated on the shore and in nearshore areas, such as mangroves and estuaries. This is why developments such as the destruction of mangroves due to shrimp culture, impact their lives the most. They are also the first to be affected by coastal tourism and industrial developments that not only create an ecological imbalance, but also affect coastal access. For example, an article in *Yemaya* from India describes the impact of one India's first and largest amusement parks, on fishing communities inhabiting the area—it damaged the mangroves, polluted the coastal resources and destroyed the boats and nets of fishermen fishing in the nearby creek. From Indonesia, *Yemaya* carried an article on the impact of gold mining on fishing communities. The disposal of tons of mining waste into the sea polluted the water and destroyed coral reefs. It also devastated the only source of livelihood of coastal communities. Importantly, the article also traced the journey of a woman whose livelihood and health suffered due to the consumption of harmful chemicals that were in the fish she was eating.

Yemaya has also carried articles that highlight the difficult working conditions faced by women in fish processing plants, from countries as diverse as Chile, India, Pakistan and Canada. These articles describe how women's health is often adversely affected due to the poor and unhygienic working conditions and also due to the weak enforcement of labour laws. In Newfoundland and Labrador, many women workers have contracted work-related illnesses such as Snow Crab Occupational Asthma (SCOA).

Articles in *Yemaya* have importantly often captured struggles of women fishworkers, as for supportive legislation. In France, for example, the Fisheries Orientation Law passed on 18

November 1997 was achieved as a result of the demands of fishermen's wives in Brittany, following the crisis in the fisheries sector in the country. Women demanded the status of 'fisherman's wife' in order to benefit from social security (retirement) provisions, professional rights and professional training.

Movements and networks of women fishworkers and women's participation in fishworker organizations have been covered extensively in *Yemaya*. Articles have covered, for example, women's participation in Confederacion Nacional de Pescadores Artesanales de Chile (CONAPACH), a major artisanal fishworker organization from Chile that instituted its Women's Department in 1998, women fishworkers in Senegal who organized as part of Collectif National des Pêcheurs Artisanaux du Sénégal (CNPS), women of Nova Scotia, Canada, who formed the Coastal Communities Network, and women of Katosi, Uganda, living around the shores of Lake Victoria, who organized to form the Katosi Women Fishing and Development Association (KWFDA). There have also been articles on women's participation in unions, such as in Kerala, as part of the Kerala Independent Fish Workers Federation (KSMTF).

Yemaya has fostered a sharing of experiences and views of women from all over the world. It has always been receptive to information in any form—there have been quite a few poems—whether scholarly articles, real life stories or reviews of interesting books and of films, such as the documentary film 'Darwin's Nightmare' on the Nile Perch fisheries. It has attempted to foreground the struggles, aspirations and efforts of women in fisheries, to build better livelihoods for themselves and their communities. This will surely continue to be the direction for *Yemaya* in the coming period. ■