

# Yemaya

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ICSF's NEWSLETTER ON GENDER AND FISHERIES

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## From the Editor

Dear Friends,

In this issue of *Yemaya*, we carry articles and news from various parts of the world. From near Valencia, Spain, we hear of the struggles of a women's association as it challenges the age-old patrilineal system, in which only the male offspring of fishermen can inherit rights to fish. Though the courts have ruled in favour of the women, the real challenge remains, which is to change local social norms and customs. In the meantime, the association continues to face social ostracism.

From Buyat Bay in North Sulawesi, Indonesia, come disturbing stories of the negative health and environmental impact of tailings from gold mining operations by a multinational company, PT. Newmont Minahasa Raya (NMR), a subsidiary of Newmont Mining Corporation, based in Denver, Colorado, USA, the fifth largest mining company in the world. Women, it is reported, have been specially affected by the pollution of the bay with arsenic, mercury and cyanide. They have been reporting constant headaches, pain in the joints, tremors, brain damage, lumps spread on the body and itchiness. The company is said to have done little besides denying the reports. A study released in June 2003 by the Indonesian Forum for the Environment (Walhi) contends that tailings from the gold mining firm NMR contain four times the government-allowed level of cyanide, endangering the health of residents and the environment. The company is due to close operation in 2004, but is required to monitor the site



## Inside Pages

|                   |           |
|-------------------|-----------|
| Spain.....        | 2         |
| Indonesia.....    | 4,6       |
| Sri Lanka.....    | 6         |
| Mozambique.....   | 7         |
| News.....         | 8,9,10,11 |
| Publications..... | 12        |

for the next three years. As the company exits, questions will remain about the long-term environmental, health and economic impacts on local communities.

From Sri Lanka, we hear of the increasing work burden on the women of fishing communities. At a recent training programme organized by ICSF, *Empowerment through Information: ICSF's Training Programme for Fishworker Organizations and NGOs*, there were discussions on precisely this issue. A heated discussion had followed the submission of one of the participants, who maintained that women have a very important and respected place in their communities, as is clear from the number of responsibilities they take on, being virtually the heads of the family in the absence of the men. Another participant pointed out that rights are not the same as responsibilities. While women take on more and more of the responsibility of keeping the family going, there has not been a parallel increase in the rights they enjoy to, for example, land, income and decision-making processes.

There is positive news from Fiji, where fish processors at the State-owned Pacific Fishing Company (PAFCO) won a significant victory, after they struck work for improved wages and working conditions.

We would like to end by wishing you the very best for a peaceful and war-free 2004. We would also like to remind you to send in your write-ups for *Yemaya* by the end of February 2004.

## Europe/ Spain

### Shaking up traditions

*A women's association from El Pamar, Valencia, Spain is challenging the age-old patrilineal system, in which only the male offspring of fishermen inherit rights to fish*

**By Carmen Serrano Soler, The Women's Association of Tyrius, El Palmar, Valencia, Spain**

El Palmar is a small place, with 850 inhabitants, under the administration of the provincial capital, Valencia. It is located on an island in Lake Albufera of Valencia. Forty years ago, it had no overland access. Communication was by boat, and this was the only way to travel to the outside world. From the beginning, the inhabitants subsisted mainly on fishing in the lake. They belonged to the Comú of Fishermen, which has its origins in the Gremial movements at the turn of the 11th century.

For their own benefit and for geographical reasons, a "fishermen's community" was formed, charged with protecting the fishery and the interests of the fishermen members. This began to operate independently from the Comú of Fishermen. Only men could participate in the organization and share the benefits generated by it, and these rights were passed on to male children. Daughters were excluded from any inheritance rights related to the fishery. The interest of fathers was to find a fisherman to marry their daughters off to, so as to be able to continue the community custom. The marriage of a daughter to a forester, or a non-fisherman, was accepted only with reservations.

Thus functioned the organization of fishermen until 1994. That was when the only women's association in the area decided to propose to the fishermen's community the possibility of adopting changes in the constitutional rules. They were asked to consider the possibility of allowing their daughters equal rights to their sons to inherit, enjoy, and pass on fishing rights.

It is hard to understand the reasons for maintaining age-old customs that deny women's participation, especially in a place like Valencia, at such a short distance from the capital. This was what prompted our women's association to claim some of our constitutional rights that we were—and are still—entitled to.

Women had never formed part of any public entity, until the founding of the Housewives Association of Tyrius in El Palmar. Several activities were organized

through this association to improve the situation of women and to escape from the subservience to husbands or fathers. These included training courses, cultural visits, trips and conferences. Women could only operate in private and not in public. They could not even go to the city alone, or go into a bar, as this was not considered acceptable. It was only in religious *cofradiás* that women were given positions of responsibility for organizing social activities in the community. The time had come to raise the possibility of changing this situation of sexual discrimination that women had to put up with. And this was how the contest between men and women started.

We tried to change tradition, imposed by the force of custom and submission. We have been condemned as rebels by the closed society of El Palmar for daring to bring before the courts the local culture that has been passed on from generation to generation. We had shown evidence to the outside world of the local ethnocentricity, which is considered to be above justice and the Constitution.



We had tried to remedy the sexual discrimination that denies daughters the right to inherit fishing rights, either to use them or to pass them on. Above all, it is only the male children of fishermen who may become part of the fishermen's community of El Palmar. This excludes daughters and their children, if they marry outside the community. It does not matter if a fisherman's wife is a local or an outsider, because the only way that fishing rights may be inherited is through the father.

The rest of the local community has denounced the social changes proposed by us. Our women's association had taken the case to the local tribunals,

and, despite having won the court case, until today, July 2003, the judgement, dating October 1998, has still not been fully complied with.

Those of us who have tried to advance the struggle for equal rights have been injured by other women, like ourselves, who have defended the male territory of the fishermen's community. Ironically, even though it is they who stand to gain from our achievements, they are preventing us from enabling them to benefit from equal rights.

We felt that we could use the women's organization, which had now been consolidated, to begin to claim our rights as human beings, as laid down in the Constitution. The restriction on inheriting fishing rights also affected the sons of women who, although they were cousins of fishermen, had no rights to fish because their fathers' were not fishers. We felt that we should act to change such discrimination. And so we did. Our first step was to seek dialogue and consensus. But that proved useless. Having a dialogue with women was not acceptable. The second step was to make an act of conciliation; this proposal was also rejected. And, finally, we instigated legal proceedings on the grounds of sexual discrimination. We won on all legal counts in our country.

Our proceedings have not been free of incidents. All kinds of restrictions were imposed on us to force our acquiescence to the fishermen's community. Demands that were impossible to fulfill, expulsion of fishermen who supported the position of the women petitioners, street demonstrations to have us thrown out of the community, graffiti, insults...we were subjected to a degree of social ostracism hard to imagine. We were being isolated from the social milieu in which we were born and raised. This also affected our closest family members, fathers and children. Even our friends suffered due to their friendship with us.

Men assert that fishing is only a man's work, and women should look after those aspects needed to carry it out. Even daughters and wives defended this male worldview.

The most unexpected response came from the very women for whom our petition was intended. In 1999, they formed a women's association parallel to our own, with the single objective of attacking us and defending the position of the fishermen. Those belonging to this collective were actually those who stood to benefit from the gains we had achieved. People who were prepared to make a written apology, atoning for defending our

position, were forgiven and were allowed to become part of the fishermen community. The most grievous injuries came, and continue to come, from women defending either their husbands or the fishermen community. The most regrettable aspect is that, at the local level, the authorities were closer to the other group's position than to ours.

People were afraid to approach us, for fear of being attacked by the opposite side. They were afraid of being on the receiving end of the rejection that we were daily subjected to. Fear, repression and lack of information were ideally suited to keep the rest of us subjugated to those who shouted the loudest. Women who dared to raise their voices were silenced or castigated. Most worrying was that these reactions did not come only from the older generation. Even the younger generation, included schoolgoing boys and girls, accepted and copied the behaviour of their fathers or mothers. We were made unwelcome and prevented from entering certain public places.

We sometimes ask ourselves if it is still necessary for a group of people to go through what we have suffered to succeed in getting fair treatment. It may be incomprehensible, but the specificity of situations requires cases to be analyzed separately. And what comes out of a situation may be totally unexpected. We are women who have pushed for changes. We brought to justice a hierarchical social organization that marginalized a group of people, and we are paying a very high price for that.

Despite everything, we believe that it has been worth the trouble to shake to its foundations an institution with outdated customs, and to open its eyes so that it can look at itself in today's context. It reassures us to know that people in different places, entities and institutions recognize what we have done. We are encouraged to know that people in many diverse walks of life share our opinions. We have been awarded very important distinctions, prizes, recognition... all this for the struggle that our association took up. But our neighbours neither accept nor recognize the work that we initiated, and what we achieved through an association of women.

(This article has been summarized from the presentation made by Carmen Serrano Soler at a recent workshop organized by the European-level FEMME network in Vaasa, Finland. It has been reproduced with permission from the author.)

*Carmen Serrano Soler can be contacted at carserso@teleline.es*

## Asia/ Indonesia

### “Pay for it”

*People in Buyat Bay, North Sulawesi, Indonesia, have been affected by the mining operations of PT. Newmont Minahasa Raya, a subsidiary of Newmont Mining Corporation, based in Denver, Colorado, USA*

**By Suwiryo Ismail, an activist working on issues of environment and human rights in Indonesia.**

Surtini Papatungan is a 40-year-old cookie-and-fish-seller living in Buyat, a small village at the Buyat Bay, in a remote region of Indonesia. From Jakarta, the capital city of Indonesia, it takes four hours by plane and then around three hours by bus to get there.

Surtini is married and has four children. She is poor, like other villagers in her community. Her family's life depends on a small boat without motor, simple fish hooks and a net. Such tools can only be used for short-distance fishing, when the sea is calm, during October to February. The sea used to be rich with coral fish. Buyat Bay provided coral fish as living resources for its neighbouring villages.

At the peak fishing season, Surtini sells in the village market fish caught by her husband. When there were strong winds, no one goes fishing, and Surtini then sells home-baked cookies. Her earnings are only enough for a simple living. Sometimes, the family had to borrow money from neighbours and buy food on credit at the village's small store, all to be repaid, with luck, from the earnings of the next catch.

The lives of that poor fisher community with 53 households—around 240 persons—took a turn for the worse as a gold mining company, PT. Newmont Minahasa Raya, a subsidiary of Newmont Mining Corporation, based in Denver, Colorado, USA, the fifth largest mining company in the world, got a mining license from the Indonesian government in 1994 for around 500 hectares of land. Newmont started to operate an open-pit mine in 1996 and daily disposed around 2,000 tonnes of tailings (mining waste) directly into the Buyat Bay. It used a technology called ‘Submarine Tailing Disposal’ (STD), only about 82 m below sea level. Leaks of the pipe have occurred several times. Some studies by researchers from the university in North Sulawesi, Agriculture Institute in Bogor and the Indonesian government environmental impact monitoring agency, showed that Buyat Bay is

now polluted by heavy metals such as arsenic, cadmium and mercury.

The only sources of livelihood of the community are polluted and destroyed, coral reefs are damaged, and many fish have been found rotten on the beach. It is now more difficult to get fish. Even when they are caught, nobody wants to buy the fish because they are afraid to eat poisoned fish. The life of Surtini and her family became more difficult because her husband could not afford a motorboat to go farther from the bay to the still unpolluted fishing grounds.

Surtini stopped baking and selling cookies in 1998, as she started to suffer pain in all her joints. Her whole body became numb, and she suffered headaches, myopia, hearing disorder and speech difficulties. The worst was in 1999, when she became paralyzed for about three months. Even touching her hair became very painful. The village clinic could not explain what was wrong with her. The doctor provided by Newmont stated that nothing had happened to her, though a couple of weeks later a team from Newmont came to take blood samples of Surtini and other villagers.



A year later, following pressure from national and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to disclose the result of that blood examination in a laboratory in Santa Monica in USA, Newmont admitted that the blood of the villagers was contaminated with arsenic, mercury and cyanide.

Surtini stopped eating fish from Buyat Bay because she realized that her health was getting worse when she consumed it. She eventually overcame the paralysis and got better. The pain in her joints and headaches

often returned, in particular after eating fish from Buyat Bay, which could not be avoided as she had no other alternative food.

In October 2001, Surtini was brought to Jakarta by NGOs to have a medical check-up, and she stayed for one week in hospital. Doctors could not explain her sickness. This also showed how difficult it is to deal with illness from contamination by heavy metals. No hospital in Indonesia can deal with it. When Surtini gave birth to her fourth child in September 2002, her condition was so weak that she couldn't produce milk, and she had no money to buy milk for the baby. She merely suckled her baby to calm her, giving her tea and water instead. In June 2002, Surtini met two forensic doctors who informed her that her illness was a symptom of arsenic poisoning.

Surtini is not the only case in Buyat. Fifty-one other villagers—80 per cent among them women—have suffered the same symptoms as Surtini: constant headaches, pain in the joints, lumps spread on the body and itchiness. A blood examination of 19 villagers by two Indonesian environmental networks (Walhi and Jatam) showed a high accumulation of arsenic and mercury in their blood.

“Tailings is the worst crime to me, my children and my community,” stated Surtini in her testimony in a workshop on Women and Globalization during the People's Forum in June 2002 in Bali prior to the Preparatory Committee Meeting of the UN World Summit on Sustainable Development. Since 1997, Surtini has been part of the movement in her village against Newmont. She was in the villagers' delegation to the local and provincial government and provincial parliament to submit complaints. She delivered testimonies in various meetings and conferences on mining and submarine tailing disposal.

All efforts have so far been fruitless. The provincial government of North Sulawesi and Newmont always insist that the tailings are safely piled on the sea floor, and that there is no pollution. They have branded villagers as subversive agents against foreign investment. Moreover, international NGO campaigns, including an intervention in the shareholder meeting of Newmont in Denver, USA in 1999, led to more oppression of villagers.

The Indonesian government fully supports foreign investment by, among other thing, providing military, police and civil bureaucracy to oppress people in

safeguarding the projects. USAID has threatened environmental NGOs that it will stop its funds if they campaign against Newmont, and will not fund NGOs working against the operation of US companies in Indonesia.

Surtini and many villagers who joined the struggle suffered, on the one hand, by intimidation by the local government, and, on the other, by hatred from villagers who embraced the community development programme provided by Newmont. The programme has successfully divided the struggle.

Surtini's take on globalization during the abovementioned workshop is illuminating: “It is a conspiracy between multinational corporations and our government in Jakarta, in Menado, and in the regency up to the village. Our lives are determined by Newmont, because government serves only its operation, and does what Newmont says. This conspiracy has caused suffering to us: women, children and men. We have lost everything—our livelihood, food, health, bay and land. Our children have no future. And women are the most victimized by Newmont because more women are affected by the pollution.”

This awareness encouraged Surtini to mobilize women in her village to discuss their situation, attend advocacy training by women NGOs, and take part in seminars and conferences where they delivered their testimonies, telling other people their experiences.

During the medical check-up in 2001 in Jakarta, Surtini visited several women's groups and asked for solidarity. She gave all her testimonies while suffering severe headaches. Surtini and other women pleaded with the other villagers to reject the community development programme offered by Newmont in the awareness that the struggle against the mining giant should be started by rejecting everything offered by Newmont.

Right now, Surtini and villagers of the Buyat Bay are conducting an assessment to identify what they have lost economically, socially, culturally and environmentally due to the presence of Newmont, which will stop operation in North Sulawesi in 2004. She says, “They cannot just go away leaving the damage with us. They have to pay for it”.

[This article was earlier carried in People's Voices (Preliminary Volume), Asian Social Forum 2003]

*Suwiryo Ismail can be contacted at claras@mailcity.com*

**Asia/ Indonesia****Share our fare**

*The following demands were put forward by the Buyat Bay Fisher communities to the shareholders of PT Newmont Minahasa Raya and Newmont on 11 May 2002*

Based on the various sufferings that we have experienced, we, the Buyat Bay Fisher Community, residing in Kotabunan Sub-district, Bolaang Mongondow Regency, North Sulawesi, submit the following calls for immediate action by PT Newmont Minahasa Raya and Newmont Shareholders:

1. PT. Newmont Minahasa Raya (PT NMR) must immediately stop dumping waste into the Buyat Bay and must immediately rehabilitate the environment after the company has finished their operations.
2. All forms of pollution in the Buyat River must immediately be recovered/rehabilitated to sanitary conditions for the Buyat Bay community.
3. Compensation must be paid to the community who has experienced a decline in their fish catch since PT NMR began dumping wastes into the ocean. This compensation must be based on the average fish catch decline amount (50 per cent) from Rp. 500,000, the income of fisher folks per year for each family head and then must be multiplied three times for each year of PT Newmont Minahasa Raya's production.
4. The company must make available permanent facilities of clean water to the public and lamp poles in the Buyat Bay fisher community village.
5. Health check-ups and services for the community and the payment of all medicinal costs for ailments caused by the activities of PT Newmont Minahasa Raya must be provided.
6. Roads starting from the bridge at the Buyat-Ratatotok Village border to the Buyat Bay fisher village must be immediately improved and paved.
7. Losses and destruction of fisher community tools, including fisher nets and boats that have been rendered unusable up until now because

the fishing grounds have become further away as a result of the dumping of mine waste into the Buyat Bay must be compensated.

8. Marshlands located behind the Buyat Bay community settlement must be immediately reclaimed. These lands have become mudholes as a result of water overflow and flooding that occurs with heavy rains.
9. Once PT Newmont Minahasa Raya's production/operation has ended or during the post-mining period, all post-mining activities must be transparent and involve the Ratatotok and Buyat Bay fisher communities.

We bring forth these demands based on what has occurred in our local community and what has been experienced and felt by the community.

These demands are expected to be answered by the head of PT Newmont Minahasa Raya and its shareholders.

(see <http://www.moles.org/ProjectUnderground/mining/newmont/buyat0502.html>)

**Asia/ Sri Lanka****Valuing women's labour**

*Women in the fisheries sector in Sri Lanka find it increasingly difficult to compete with recent developments and modern technology*

**By Geetha Lakmini of National Fisheries Solidarity (NAFSO), Sri Lanka**

At an international conference in 1995, the guest speaker happened to ask a question of the males present in the audience: "How many of your wives are employed?" Only a few replied in the positive. The second question was "How many of you have a domestic aid?" At this juncture, most of the men felt embarrassed to say that it was their wives who attended to the domestic chores. The real situation was analyzed at this point: women's labour in Sri Lanka is underestimated.

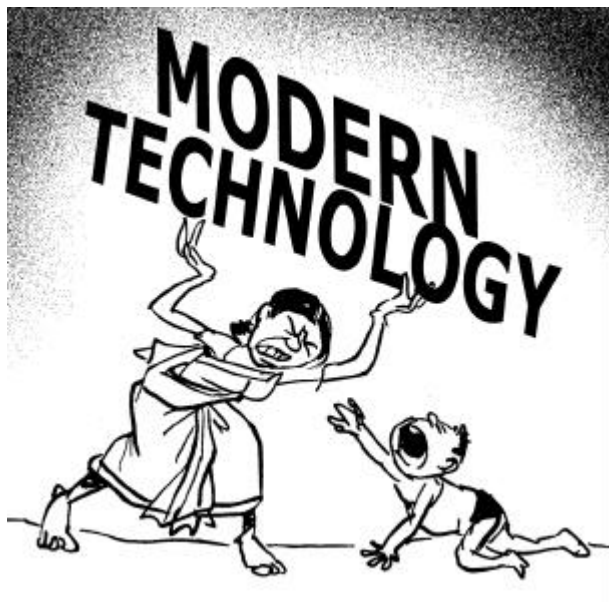
No consideration is given whatsoever to the labour of housewives who have to attend to all the household chores. Apart from that, there are disparities in income in some fields of employment, for example, in the estate sector, garment manufacturing and in manual labour.

In fisheries, it would be true to say that women labour in the fisheries yesterday, today and tomorrow. In the past, fishermen and their wives worked together. They used simple methods like cast-nets, hooks-and-line and cages, and simple traditional boats such as the *theppam* and *vallam*, without engines. All household chores such as processing and selling the fish were done in close co-operation.

Women's labour, at that time, was highly valued. This was the case despite the fact that, in the south, women were not allowed to fish due to the myth that they were impure.

The situation today is entirely different due to larger social and economic changes. Globalization processes, combined with advanced technology, make it possible to utilize resources for maximum profit, through the use of efficient boats and gear. These processes simultaneously lead to the underestimation of the labour of women, who primarily use traditional technologies.

As people from outside the community enter the fishery, fisherwomen and fishermen are negatively affected. Increasingly, they become employees under these new traders, receiving payments on a daily or monthly basis.



Today, women are often no longer, directly or indirectly, part of this industry. As earnings decline, they seek some form of self-employment, such as in the coir industry, weaving mats, and so on.

At the same time, the high prices of fish make it difficult for women to access them to earn an income through fish processing—preparing maldivian fish, dry fish and *jaadi*. Consumers today are more accustomed to

purchasing imported forms of dry fish, maldivian fish and canned fish.

Like most other women in our society, women in the fisher community too struggle hard to exist. They have to shoulder all the problems of the family. The situation is further aggravated by government policies inviting foreign vessels to fish in our seas. At this rate, it will not be long before our fish is truly endangered.

*Geetha Lakmini can be contacted at fishmove@slt.lk*

## Africa/ Mozambique

### A more central role

*The women in the Bay of Maputo are at the heart of the local fisheries economy. However, despite their vital economic role they have not yet been given their rightful place in local fisheries management.*

**By Rouja Johnstone, Consultant on Gender in Artisanal Fisheries**

The Bay of Maputo is an example of how modern urban life in Mozambique has influenced the local artisanal fisheries communities and has contributed to an increasing recognition of the role women play in the local economy. Due to the proximity of city markets and a growing demand for fish products, fisheries is good business for many local men and women.

The Bay of Maputo has five main fishing centres—at Costa do Sol, Muntanhane, Catembe, Matola and Inhaca Island. In all of these, both men and women are engaged in fishing or fish marketing. The majority of the women collect crustaceans and inter-tidal bivalves, which are destined for the city markets and door-to-door selling as well as for family consumption.

As a result of their successful economic activities and interest in reinvesting their savings into artisanal fisheries, more and more women are now boatowners, forming about 25 per cent of all boatowners. They employ local fishermen and thus create a job market that is dynamic and also perceived to be fair.

Most women who own boats, fish or trade at the beach, are part of a complex chain of intermediaries (*maguevas*) and form an important socioeconomic network that supplies the city with fresh fish. Some of these women have developed partnerships amongst themselves whilst others work on their own but all

benefit from the close proximity of the urban market economy.

The economic activities of women fish traders are dependent on the successful harvest by local fishermen as well as their interest in doing business together. In the case of Inhaca Island for example, fishermen claim that they prefer to do business with the local women, as they see them as trustworthy and reliable partners, whose activities ultimately benefit their own local communities.

The existing complementary division of labour and responsibilities is an important element of the life of artisanal fisheries communities. The socioeconomic links that underpin it are informal and often based on traditional or family relationships.

Thus, for this balance to be preserved and prosperity to be sustainable, these factors have to be taken into careful consideration in any development intervention. For example, project interventions that encourage the private sector to wholesale fishery products directly from the fishermen, have had a negative impact on women's economic niche, resulting in loss of livelihood.

Despite their economic contribution, women are not formally organized or represented in fisher associations or co-management committees. They are not yet recognized as important players in the artisanal fisheries sector and are often not consulted in the decision-making process.

Their exclusion from the formal organs of local management is in sharp contrast with their social and economic contribution and it reflects a traditionalist and outdated form of community-based management further supported by the nature of government and other external interventions that overlook the issue of gender.

At the formal level of community organization, women are still poorly represented or invisible, while at the informal day-to-day level, in many of the fishing communities relations between men and women have changed.

Due to their increasing economic power and the need for a joint effort in providing for the family, women need to become more visibly involved in public life, and their dynamic and complex role in fisheries recognized.

This lack of involvement does not always stem from the attitudes of the fishing community but is also a

characteristic of outside interventions by NGOs and government institutions. The main objective of these is to promote sustainable development and support the organization, and effective functioning of, local management bodies. However, government interventions in formalizing and strengthening these management bodies largely disregard the gender division of labour and overlook the crucial role women play in fisheries.

In conclusion, based on the observations made regarding the fishing activities and community organization in the Bay of Maputo, there is an urgent need for a gender debate and the elaboration of a gender strategy that could guide sector interventions and which, above all, ensures the promotion of a sustainable and equitable development.

This will benefit the community as a whole and should further strengthen existing socioeconomic realities. Women can no longer be marginalized in the decision-making process and now need to take on a more central role in existing management structures.

*Rouja Johnstone can be contacted at roujaj@hotmail.com*

## News/ Fiji

### Strike for a hike

***Workers in the State-owned Pacific Fishing Company (PAFCO) win a significant victory, after they struck work to demand improved wages and working conditions.***

About 350 workers struck work at the State-owned Pacific Fishing Company (PAFCO), on the island of Levuka on 4 August 2003. The strike was to demand improved wages and working conditions. The workers, mainly indigenous women, were amongst the lowest paid in Fiji, earning about US\$42 per week, wages well below poverty line. Over the past eight years, there had been a string of arbitration rulings ordering the company to improve pay and working conditions, but both the government and the employer had appealed these decisions.

These include arbitration rulings in 1996 by former Permanent Arbitrator and Judge of the High Court, high chief Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi, and in April this year, by Arbitrator G.P. Lala. There has also been a High



Court judgement in January 2002 in the workers' favour. However, PAFCO's only response was to drag the matter back to court.

To support the cause of the workers, two NGOs, the Pacific Network on Globalization (PANG) and the Ecumenical Centre for Research, Education and Advocacy, called for an international consumer boycott of PAFCO products. They urged consumers not to buy PAFCO products with labels such as Sun Bell, Koro Sea, Ovalau Blue and Old Capital Special. They also planned to launch an overseas campaign to boycott Bumble Bee's products, which include the Bumble Bee and Clover Leaf brand labels.



It is worth noting that PAFCO underwent a significant overhaul in 2000 after Bumble Bee, North America's largest canned seafood company, signed on as a strategic partner. Bumble Bee has a seven-year agreement with PAFCO for the processing of 30,000 tonnes of tuna loins a year.

The strike was finally resolved after nearly two months, on 24 September 2003, after Pacific Fishing Company (PAFCO) agreed to pay out an additional FJD\$2 million (US\$1 million) annually in wages. Unskilled workers are now to receive a new hourly rate of FJD\$2.75 (US\$1.50) and skilled workers of FJD\$3.50 (US\$1.90). The company claims that, with this new deal, workers here will be among the highest paid in the industry and in any developing country.

*This article has been compiled from various sources, including media releases from NGOs, Pacific Network on Globalization (PANG) (pang@connect.com.fj) and Ecumenical Centre for Research, Education and Advocacy (ECREA).*

## News/ Fiji

### Shameful indictment

*A speech by Senator Atu Emberson Bain in the Fiji Senate on 12 September 2003, described in graphic detail the conditions of workers in PAFCO.*

Yet another example can be found in the government-owned tuna cannery at Levuka, where between 800 and 1000 indigenous people, mostly women, work. A sizeable proportion have worked at PAFCO for between 20-30 years, and it is these same women who are now entering the sixth week of an industrial strike against the company. They are mostly mothers, from villages all around Ovalau extending as far as Lovoni in the interior, and along the coast from Bureta all the way down through the Qalivakabau network of villages, then across to the other side of Levuka as far as Rukuruku.

With wages well below the poverty line, PAFCO's women carry the heavy burden of feeding their families, sending their children to school, and meeting all their church and traditional obligations. Many have dependent husbands. They struggle under the weight of large debts to the bank. These have resulted from a highly questionable system of unsecured loans arranged by PAFCO with Westpac many years ago to supplement (or should I say subsidise) its low wages. The bank loans have condemned many women to a vicious cycle of indebtedness, particularly during the years when interest was set at a crippling 16 per cent.

The working environment also falls short in many respects. I have walked through the production process, both before and after the recent renovations, and seen the lines of women standing on the production line throughout the shift, their hands working furiously to skin and clean the tuna, or to label and package. There are no allowances made for pregnant women. They also have to stand for hours on end. The heavy blanket of heat, the deafening noise of machinery, and the stench of fish meal, are part of the daily work routine. So is the pressure to work at a frenzied pace for fear of losing their jobs.

The renovations of a few years ago have brought some improvement, but the problems of heat and continuous standing remain. There is now a child-care facility funded by UNIFEM and run by PAFCO, but it levies a weekly charge of \$7.50 or \$30 a month per child, which is automatically deducted from pay-packets. When a

child is sick and stays at home, or during paid or public holidays, I am told that the deductions remain the same. The mothers still have to pay \$7.50 per child.

Sir, the role of these village women in the development of Ovalau has long been recognised by chiefs of the island. For some, including the chiefs of Lovoni, Bureta, Tukou, Draiba, and Toki, there is a deep sense of sadness, shame and indignation about the way their women have been treated by the company. I know this because I have recorded their views. Active support from a number of chiefs for the current strike testifies to just how strongly they feel. And it is not the first time they have done this.

Sir, the treatment meted out to PAFCO's women is a shameful indictment of our so-called development process, and the wage policies of successive governments. These are Fijian women who are the backbone of growth in our industrial fisheries sector, and who are employed in a 'government' owned tuna cannery, yet they are consigned to poverty wages of less than \$80 gross a week in 2003.

The fish they process is marketed in places like the United Kingdom and Canada, under well known labels like Sainsbury and John West, so there is no question of it being a low grade product. It is at the top of the international market. Yet our women are paid a pittance.

Sir, the women of PAFCO and their union have been forced to engage the industrial relations machinery against PAFCO, and to resort to much more costly legal proceedings in the High Court in order to seek remedy for unfair dismissals and exploitative wages. They have had a number of important judgements delivered in their favour, notably arbitration rulings in 1996 by eminent former Permanent Arbitrator and Judge of the High Court, high chief Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi, and in April this year, by Arbitrator G.P. Lala. There has also been an important High Court judgement in January 2002.

The G.P. Lala arbitration tribunal awarded a substantial wage increase, an increase in allowances, and equal wages for both men and women employees.

But instead of implementing these rulings, which would have brought long overdue justice to this group of workers, PAFCO's response has been to oppose them, and to drag the matter back to court.

In fact, none of the awards in favour of Fijian workers at PAFCO have seen the full light of day, because each

one of them has been challenged by this government company. It is now over one and a half years since the High Court judgement of Justice Byrne, and six years since the Arbitration award was granted by Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi. The GP Lala award has met a similar fate.

Sir, PAFCO is a government company accountable to the public. It should not be allowed to play games, use delaying tactics, or circumvent court judgements it doesn't like. This is tantamount to abusing the legal process. Where is the justice when a state company goes to such lengths, and at considerable cost to taxpayers, to deny workers a decent living wage and dignified conditions of employment? What kind of affirmative action or blueprint is this when the government would rather go back to court to defeat a wage increase for Fijian workers living below the poverty line?

Sir, much more can be said about the disgraceful situation at PAFCO, but I will save this for later in the week, when we debate a motion that I have filed on PAFCO, along with Senator Felix Anthony who spoke at some length on the current strike. I am convinced that the Senate can play a constructive role here.

*Senator Atu Emberson Bain can be contacted at fonumelino@connect.com.fj*

## News/ Uganda

### Stricken by AIDS

*A study finds that in Uganda, as a result of HIV-AIDS, men's involvement in fishing declined by 14 per cent and that of women in fishing processing by 24 per cent*

*By Esther Nakkazi of The East African*

The high prevalence of HIV-AIDS among Uganda's fishing communities has adversely affected the sector, leading to a sharp drop in production. Quoting a study released recently by the National Agricultural Advisory Services of Uganda (NAADS), the Minister of State for Agriculture, Kibirige Ssebunya, said that 26 per cent of the 3,879 people in the study's population were infected with HIV-AIDS and related illnesses, with 486 having died over the past five years. The study was carried out by the NAADS with support from the UN Food and Agriculture Organization's Integrated Support to Sustainable Development and Food Security

Programme. The aim was to assess the non-health effects of HIV-AIDS on individuals, households and communities.

The study was based on a survey of smallholder agricultural rural households at six sites in the Lake Victoria Crescent agro-ecological zone, representing the fisheries and pastoral agriculture subsectors. Households were asked to provide comparative data for the five-year period between 1997 and 2002. Forty-three per cent of affected households reported a reduction in the annual catch, a figure higher than that for unaffected ones by 20 per cent.

The survey found that men's involvement in fishing declined by 14 per cent, while that of women in fish processing went down by 24 per cent. Households were spending six per cent less time on fishing and making up the shortfall with male hired labour.

As a result of HIV-AIDS, men had resorted to shallow-water fishing with reduced night-time fishing. Women fisherfolk, on the other hand, were producing a lower quality of smoked and salted fish or altogether abandoning these processes because they are labour-intensive and detrimental to health. Instead, they were shifting to sun drying. Sun-dried fish has a lower market price than the salted or smoked variety, leading to an overall lowering of income. Due to poor smoking, a significant proportion of the catch was rotting and being turned into animal feed, which fetched lower prices.

The study also revealed that, because of limited resources, HIV-AIDS-affected households could not invest in modern technology, fishing boats and gear.

*This piece is based on Esther Nakkazi's article in The East African (Nairobi), 1 December 2003*

## News/ Nigeria

### Caring for the little ones

*Efforts are on in Edo State, Nigeria, to develop nurseries for the children of women fish vendors*

**By Okechukwu Kanu of This Day**

Fish markets in most parts of the developing world, including Nigeria, are unhygienic and difficult places for small children accompanying their fish-vending mothers. In almost no market are there any facilities to cater to the needs of the children of market women.

It is in this context that the Edo State Women's Association (ESWA) came up with an idea to build a market traders' day nursery. ESWA plans to work with market women's associations to set up and manage in Edo State markets, daycare centres for children up to four years of age.

According to ESWA, "Markets are not child-friendly places. Traders and female porters who are mothers of young babies and toddlers cope as best as they can, but often to the detriment of the children. Provision of childcare is often too expensive for many of market women, and the hours are also unsuitable."

ESWA further observes that, because many of the children are strapped to their mother's backs for long periods, they are slow to meet their developmental milestones such as crawling, walking and running.



"On the whole, hygiene conditions in markets are not conducive for the health and growth of young children. Some traders and porters have resorted to leaving their babies at home or in the market in the care of underaged girl-children between the ages of 5 and 14. The implication for these girl-children is that they are unable to attend school, with grave poverty implications for them when they grow up," ESWA says. ESWA has held preliminary talks with leaders of the market women's association and they have agreed to pilot a small-scale nursery/ crèche for up to 40 children. The association is also seeking funding to get the project on track. Already, some French delegates have shown interest in the project and are looking at ways to collaborate with ESWA.

*This is summarized from an article by Okechukwu Kanu in This Day, Lagos, 7 October 2003*

## Publications



### Telling Their Stories

A recent press release (<http://www.prweb.com/releases/2003/10/prweb86003.php>) talks of a book on gender and fisheries in the Pacific, to be published shortly

An exciting research project underway at the University of the South Pacific (USP) will see a new book published on gender and sustainability in Pacific fisheries in 2004 as part of a joint South Pacific–Canada collaboration. The project, which involves researchers from Fiji, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Samoa, Tuvalu, Kiribati and the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), has brought together USP graduate and post-graduate students as well as fisheries officers, rural development staff, researchers attached to regional organizations and NGO staff, and is funded by the Canada-South Pacific Ocean Development Program (C-SPOD).

The first phase of the project took place in July, when 15 researchers drawn from eight Pacific Island countries came to Suva for an intensive two-week workshop with Dr. Joeli Veitayaki (Marine Studies Program, USP) and Dr. Irene Novaczek (Institute of Island Studies, University of Prince Edward Island, Canada). They learned about research methods, gender-sensitive research frameworks for fisheries, and techniques for developing their own research work plans.

At the conclusion of the workshop, the researchers returned to their countries to develop a case study on some aspect of fisheries important to the Pacific region. They will spend about six months in the field documenting their work.

For more information contact:

Fiji: Dr. Joeli Veitayaki, USP: 679 321 2890;  
Canada: Dr. Irene Novaczek, UPEI: 902 964 2781;  
Dr. Kenneth MacKay, C-SPOD: 250 656-0127 loc 217

Websites:

Pacific Fisheries Case Study Writing Project:

<http://www.upei.ca/islandstudies/pacific>

Marine Studies Program, University of the South Pacific:

<http://www.usp.ac.fj/marine>

Canada-South Pacific Ocean Development Project:

<http://www.c-spodp.org>

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International Collective in Support of Fishworkers  
27 College Road, Chennai 600 006  
India

Tel: (91) 44 2827 5303

Fax: (91) 44 2825 4457

Email: [icsf@vsnl.com](mailto:icsf@vsnl.com)

Web site: <http://www.icsf.net>

### Edited by

Chandrika Sharma

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Please do send us comments and suggestions to make the newsletter more relevant. We would also like names of other people who could be interested in being part of this initiative. We look forward to hearing from you and to receiving regular write-ups for the newsletter.

Writers and potential contributors to YEMAYA, please note that write-ups should be brief, about 500 words. They could deal with issues that are of direct relevance to women and men of fishing communities. They could also focus on recent research or on meetings and workshops that have raised gender issues in fisheries. Also welcome are life stories of women and men of fishing communities working towards a sustainable fishery or for a recognition of their work within the fishery. Please also include a one-line biographical note on the writer.