

# Blind to Sector and Gender

**A recent workshop highlighted the European Commission's blindness to the importance of women and fisheries**

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"Our sector can be viable, sustainable, and with a promising future, if given fair treatment and due recognition." These words, from the preamble of a statement drafted by participants of a recently-held workshop, held in Brussels, Belgium on 28 September 2009 and attended by over 60 participants from eight countries highlight a major stumbling block to achieving responsible and sustainable fisheries in Europe. Although it is the majority sector, Europe's small-scale, artisanal, low-input fisheries is poorly understood and inadequately documented. This means that the contribution of the sector to sustainable development is hardly recognized let alone valued.

The theme of the workshop was "Common Fisheries Policy Reform in the European Union and Small-Scale Fisheries: Paving the way to sustainable livelihoods and thriving fishing communities". The workshop clearly highlighted how, if the European Union's Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) is blind to the existence of small-scale fisheries thereby discriminating unfairly against the sector, the situation is much worse for women.

Women workers from the Spanish shellfish sector, gear riggers, French shellfish farmers, and collaborating spouses; women academics, activists and NGO workers were among the highly diverse group of workshop participants from Iceland, the Azores, Madeira, Canary

Islands, Galicia, Cantabria, Asturias, Basque Country, the Mediterranean and Atlantic coasts of France, the South and South West of England, Wales, Ireland and the Netherlands.

In her talk, Katia Frangoudes, the Animator of the European Network of Women's Organizations in Fisheries and Aquaculture (AKTEA), highlighted how rare it is for women's representatives to participate in consultation and decision-making processes in the fisheries. It was, she pointed out, the European Commission's blindness to the importance of women in the fisheries that led to the setting up of AKTEA in 2001.

The 2002 Green Paper on CFP Reform mentioned the word 'women' only once. Now, after seven years of lobbying and advocacy work by women's organizations amongst the European institutions, women find no mention whatsoever in the Commission's 2009 Green Paper on CFP Reform! This is despite the fact that Articles 3 and 4 of the Treaty on the European Union, mandate equality for men and women in all EU policies.

Representing the Galician Association of Shellfish Gatherers (Asociación Galega de Marisqueo a Pie (Areal)), the President of Areal, Dolores Bermúdez, observed that the shellfish-gathering sector in Galicia had been struggling for years to get organized and ensure the sustainability of shellfish beds. In 2007, about 3,952 women and 231 men were recorded as shellfish gatherers. Women thus constitute 95 per cent of the total workforce. The importances of the sector is also reflected in the high value of shellfish in Galicia.

Dolores pointed out that despite the importance of the sector at both the EU and the member state level, the 2009 Green Paper makes no mention whatsoever of shellfish gathering, adding that this lack of recognition means a lack of access to EU funds.

Annie Castaldo, a shellfish farmer from France, voiced concern about the sustainability of shellfish gathering. Shellfish farming along the French coast too is heavily dependent on women's labour. Seventy per cent of the workers in the sector are women, working eight hours a day, both onshore and in the water. On the coast where Annie works, there is no fishing and all the runoff water from agricultural lands passes into the lagoons and sea in the area. Fisheries management here, she pointed out, cannot therefore be carried

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Round Table at the Brussels workshop on 'Common Fisheries Policy Reform in the European Union and Small-scale Fisheries'

out independent of the management of the surrounding land areas.

The workshop declaration called upon the Maritime and Fisheries General Directorate (DG Mare) of the European Commission, on the European Parliament, on the Council of Ministers, on the Fishing Industry representatives, on the Trade Unions, on NGOs, on scientists, and on National and Regional Fisheries Authorities to provide small-scale fishers with fair treatment and fair access to resources. The declaration included the following demands:

1) Marginalized groups, including small-island communities dependent on fishing, women in fishing communities and independently organized fishers and fish farmers should not be unfairly discriminated against in the allocation of access rights to resources and their views must be included in policy matters in the fisheries.

2) The CFP reforms should recognize and valorize the contributions made by small-scale fishing activities towards social, cultural, economic and environmental sustainability.

3) The role of women in fisheries should be recognized and respected and their contributions to the fisheries and the wider community must be valorized. Women should be accorded proper status as collaborating spouses and economic actors, and the importance of their social, cultural and economic activities must be recognized.

4) The inherent vulnerability and resilience of fishing communities must be noted in the reform process. There should be detailed impact assessment studies and baseline community profiles on the basis of which alternative activities and livelihood diversification schemes, which take into account local realities and capacities for change, should be promoted.

5) Particular attention must be paid to the role of women in fishing communities to ensure that alternative livelihood options do not increase women's existing workload.

A special website ([http://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/reform/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/reform/index_en.htm)) has been set up by the European Commission to gather submissions from EU citizens with an interest in the future of Europe's fisheries: fishermen, fish processors, retailers, environmentalists, consumers and taxpayers. Being solicited is their vision of Europe's fisheries and ideas on how that vision can be realized. "The mosaic of views that will be collected will pave the way for a substantial overhaul of the way that EU fisheries are managed", states the website.

It is vital that the voices of the small-scale fishing sector are heard in the CFP Reform process. But time is short. A public consultation is being organized on this issue by the European Commission on December 31, 2009. All interested parties should submit their views before this date. ❏

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