



# Yemaya

ICSF'S NEWSLETTER ON GENDER AND FISHERIES

## From the Editor

On International Women's Day, 8 March 2010, the United Nations Development Programme released a report titled "Power, Voice and Rights—A Turning Point for Gender Equality in Asia and the Pacific". It highlighted, among other things, the problem of "missing girls"—in East Asia 119 boys are born for every 100 girls—a chilling reminder of the pervasiveness of female infanticide, one among the various forms of violence girl children and women face in our societies. Women, the report notes, face discriminatory treatment in healthcare and access to nutrition throughout their lives.

The United Nations defines violence against women as any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life. It is recognized that such violence, known to be common in almost all societies, is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women, which has led to domination over, and discrimination against, women by men.

While violence against women is a larger societal problem across the world, it is pertinent to note that women of small-scale fishing communities link the increase in certain forms of violence against them to changes in the way fisheries are being developed and managed, or rather poorly managed. In several east African countries, for example, the rise in HIV/AIDS has been linked to the increasingly vulnerable livelihoods from fishing, as women have turned to selling sex to get access to fish to sell and process.

Two recent workshops on women in fisheries, held in South Africa and India, also made similar connections (see reports on pages 2 and 9). At the workshop in South Africa, participants noted that many women have been forced into sex work and drug work as a means of surviving economically. They perceived the present individual, quota-based approach to access rights as a primary contributor to the current crisis in their communities, pointing out that this system has contributed greatly to the breakdown of social ties and has caused divisions between those fishers fortunate enough to get access rights and those who were left out. Poaching of marine resources, including by dispossessed fishers desperate to survive, and fuelled by drug money, is on the upswing. In such a context, women, especially young women, are experiencing extremely high levels of poverty-and drug-related violence.

In another part of the world, at the workshop in India, women participants noted that the higher investment in boats, engine and fuel, needed to survive in the technology- and fuel-intensive fisheries development model being pursued, is creating new forms of oppression of women. Increasing costs of fishing operations, growing pressure on resources and uncertain incomes, is leading to greater violence and alcoholism within families and communities, and, in some cases, even to demands for high dowries.

Such stories have also been heard from other parts of the world. In Canada, for example, women from small-scale fishing communities drew the link between policies that favour the 'professionalization' of the fishery, large fishing corporations, and environmentally destructive practices, at the expense of a small, sustainable inshore fishery and viable fishing communities, to greater violence against women and higher levels of stress and despair within families (see Special Issue of *Yemaya*, August 2000).

The voices of women of fishing communities, facing such forms of violence and oppression, need to be taken seriously, particularly by fisheries managers. Perhaps it is important to ask how fisheries development and management systems can be geared to sustaining resources and promoting community wellbeing, rather than focusing on the narrow objectives of increasing production and 'economic wealth', often of individuals, at any cost. **■**



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