



26 Years in Support of
Small-scale Fishworkers

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ICSF'S NEWSLETTER ON GENDER AND FISHERIES

From the Editor

Opinion is divided on the outcome of the recently-concluded United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, also known as the Rio+20 Conference. While the UN declared the Conference to be a success, women's groups, NGOs and other civil society representatives have been more critical. Rio+20, they say, was not a step forward but two steps back. From the point of view of women in the fisheries, which of these views is closer to the truth?

The 1992 Earth Summit at Rio had led to the development of Agenda21, a blueprint of action for the new millennium. It had delivered the three Rio Conventions: the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), which in turn cleared the path for the Kyoto Protocol, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). The Conference agreements clearly recognized the vital role of women in environmental management and development and Agenda21 outlined a set of objectives, activities, and means of implementation for national governments to achieve the 'full, equal and beneficial integration of women in all development activities'.

Twenty years since the first Rio Conference, levels of impoverishment and injustice around the world have soared. For the majority of women, whose continuous and largely unrecognized work keeps families, communities and ecosystems going, daily life has come to represent a condition of crisis. Yet twenty years down the line, is the harsh reality of women's lives being taken into account seriously by policy-makers? Many would argue that it is not.

The theme of this year's Rio+20 Conference was 'sustainable development' and a main focus area was the 'green economy'. This concept has been slammed by women's groups the world over for its market-based solutions to poverty eradication and sustainable development and for embodying the agenda of neo-liberal corporate forces seeking to monetize every aspect of life. The Conference outcome document, titled *The Future We Want*, largely failed to incorporate well-established principles and commitments such as gender equity and women's reproductive and other human rights. It also failed to set targets, timelines and others mechanisms of accountability and implementation. The perspective of women's groups in which sustainable development is inseparable from gender equality, equity and human rights, found little echo in the outcome document.

On a more optimistic note, however, a significant outcome of Rio+20 was the establishment of, one, a high-level, intergovernmental political forum to oversee the implementation of established sustainable-development commitments, and two, a working group that will, by 2013 propose a set of sustainable-development goals (SDGs) towards implementing and mainstreaming sustainable development in the UN system as a whole.

As far as the fisheries sector is concerned Rio+20 recognized the contribution of fisheries towards the promotion of sustainable development; it recognized the importance of healthy marine ecosystems and sustainable fisheries and aquaculture in maintaining millions of lives, and, in this context, made several new commitments towards the conservation and sustainable use of marine resources. Thus, Rio+20 builds upon the recognition of the small-scale artisanal fisheries in Agenda21 and to that extent, offers ground for cautious optimism. For women in the fisheries however the recognition and valorization of their specific contribution to the sector is a hard battle that remains to be won. ❏



Analysis	2
What's New Webby?	3
Gambia	4
Profile	6
Tanzania	7
Milestones	8
Analysis	10
Q & A	11
Yemaya Mama	11
Yemaya Recommends	12