

Q & A

Interview with Cleonice Silva Nascimento from Brazil, a fisherwoman and leader of the National Articulation of Fisherwomen (NAF) and of the Movement of Artisanal Fishermen and Fisherwomen of Brazil (MAFF)

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At what age did you begin working and what kind of work do you do?

I am now 38 years old. I have been in fishing since the age of seven. When I started out, resources were still plentiful and my grandfather used to fish using a beach-seine in Shangri-la, a fishing community in the Paraná Coast in the South Region of Brazil. I would help load the fish. It was like play for me. As an adult, my work has been in the fish market of my community, cleaning and selling fish that my husband catches at sea. And at a certain moment in my life, following the example of my grandfather, I gradually got involved in the defence of the artisanal fishing sector.

As a woman, what difficulties do you face, particularly in the fishermen's organization of your community?

The fact that fishing is a predominantly masculine world often means that our work is not seen as work, and our opinions and participation in decisionmaking are not accepted. As a result, there have been certain moments when I have suffered discrimination at the hands of fishermen and sometimes even at the hands of my own female companions. This was worse earlier; now, as we are becoming more successful, the discrimination is decreasing.

In 2006, the National Articulation of Fisherwomen of Brazil was created. What is the importance of having a women's organization?

A taboo has been broken, showing to the world of fishing and all of society that women can understand the fisheries and that we can make a difference in decisionmaking. The care with which women look at things is very precious—we look with both our hearts and minds. We are like tigers, defending tooth and nail what is ours. Artisanal fishing has stories, cultures, values, wisdom, beliefs, wealth, love and faith. If we don't defend and care for these, they can be snatched away from us. I am so proud to be a part of this organization.

In 2009, the new Movement of Artisanal Fishermen and Fisherwomen was created, where the main leaders are women who have real weight in decisionmaking. How did this happen?

I believe that this new movement reflects the strength of women's organizing power. Our role as leaders has broadened and strengthened the base of the movement. We have also added new partners from various sectors, not just the fisheries, to the movement. The male leadership had to recognize this, as we were occupying and effectively using new spaces and becoming stronger day by day. But retaining this recognition is not easy—it requires us to fight for our rights every day and everywhere. **NA**