



26 Years in Support of
Small-scale Fishworkers

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ICSF'S NEWSLETTER ON GENDER AND FISHERIES

From the Editor

The need to recognize and incorporate women's traditional knowledge, to build capacity among women and to include the gender dimension in all aspects of planning and implementation for conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity were some of the key points raised by the Women's Caucus at the recently-concluded Eleventh meeting of the Conference of Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (COP11), held in October 2012, in Hyderabad, India.

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), which evolved out of the historic Rio Summit of 1992, was established to address the worrying decline in biodiversity across the planet. This legally-binding treaty sought to promote the conservation, sustainable use and equitable sharing of benefits from biodiversity, in keeping with the overall objectives of sustainable development.

However, the last 20 years have only seen alarming declines of biodiversity. World leaders have been accused of failing to deliver on commitments made in 2002 to reduce the global rate of biodiversity loss by 2010. During COP10 in Nagoya, Japan in 2010, world leaders agreed on a new set of targets—the Aichi Targets—for the period 2010-2020. The need to reverse loss of coastal and marine biodiversity figures prominently in these new targets.

It is well known that the loss of marine and coastal biodiversity due to unregulated commercialization of the coast, persistent chemical pollution, climate change, ocean acidification, overfishing by industrial fleets and a host of other threats impacts most adversely the small-scale artisanal fishing communities by eroding the basis of their life and livelihood. Neoliberal models of economic growth pursued by country after country today have succeeded in greatly accelerating the destruction of the natural resource base.

For women, the loss of resources, traditional lands and occupations dramatically increases the working hours spent on domestic and wage labour even as economic and social entitlements are cut back further. The problem is compounded by gender-blind fisheries management policies, which, together with existing patriarchal practices, often increase the disadvantages that women face in terms of rights and access to resources or introduce new handicaps in women's lives.

In the face of increasing vulnerabilities, women in small-scale fishing communities continue to bear the primary responsibility of meeting the food security needs of their families. Food security and livelihood sustenance are deeply linked to biodiversity. Significantly, the women of fishing and coastal communities, as a result of the work they have done for generations, are equipped with vital traditional knowledge and technical expertise on how natural resources may be sustainably managed for the use of present and future generations. It is a matter of concern, therefore, that biodiversity policies continue to be framed without heed either to the vast storehouse of vital information on marine and coastal biodiversity that women in small-scale fishing communities possess, or in fact to the conditions of their lives and daily work.

The commitment to gender equality enshrined in the preamble of the CBD must not remain a mere token but be fully realized in every aspect of the planning, decision-making and implementation of the Convention. Unless gender is firmly brought on board, achieving the goals of the Convention may continue to elude us. ❏



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