



27 Years in Support of
Small-scale Fishworkers

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ICSF'S NEWSLETTER ON GENDER AND FISHERIES

From the Editor

Behind each boat there is a woman, a family and a community—this apt motto of AKTEA, the European Network of Women's Organizations in Fisheries and Aquaculture, a network promoting the role of women in European fisheries, was quoted by Maria Damanaki, European Commissioner for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, on the occasion of International Women's Day on 8 March 2013, to draw attention to how supporting women in fisheries means providing support to both families and communities.

The critical role that women play in fisheries has been in the spotlight in recent years. For example, according to the State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture (SOFIA) 2012 report of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), information provided from 86 countries indicated that, in 2008, women made up at least 50 per cent of the workforce in inland fisheries, while as much as 60 per cent of seafood is marketed by women in Asia and west Africa. Moreover, case studies indicated that women may comprise up to 30 per cent of all those employed in fisheries, including in primary and secondary activities. The report stresses that the figures provided are only estimates, given that no comprehensive data, on a sex-disaggregated basis, is available. This lack of data is consistent with the bias observed in other sectors of the economy—women's roles and significant contributions, particularly in the informal economy, continue to be underestimated, undervalued and largely invisible.

The consequences of this 'invisibility' are evident, if unacceptable. Studies and field experience indicate that women engaged in fisheries, particularly small-scale fisheries, face various forms of discrimination, compounded by the discrimination faced by the small-scale fisheries sector in general. Women engaged in small-scale fisheries, for example, are known to suffer from lack of even basic facilities in markets and landing centres. Their access to credit, to sustain their livelihoods in the face of rising competition, is poor, at best. They are exposed to sexual and other forms of harassment on a regular basis. Women engaged in fisheries are often not recognized as workers; not surprisingly, they lack social protection and access to social security. They are poorly represented in organizations, in decision-making processes within the family, in the community and in fisheries governance. Their communities lack access to basic services such as those related to education, healthcare, water, and sanitation. In such difficult circumstances, the burden of giving care and providing food falls mainly on women.

A focus on addressing the systemic and systematic forms of discrimination that women in fisheries face is critical to ensuring that their basic human rights are protected. Such a focus is also critical for achieving food security, poverty eradication, and equitable and sustainable development.

The International Guidelines on Securing Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries being developed by FAO offers an important opportunity to provide clear direction for achieving these objectives. It is imperative that concrete proposals to protect women's rights to a dignified life and livelihood are integrated into each section of the Guidelines (see article on page 9), and that processes of implementation, monitoring and evaluation systematically maintain this focus. Can States rise to the challenge and go beyond paying mere 'lip service' to gender issues in fisheries? ■



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