



27 Years in Support of
Small-scale Fishworkers

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Yemaya

ICSF'S NEWSLETTER ON GENDER AND FISHERIES

From the Editor

In today's context of a highly unequal, rapidly warming and globalized world, any form of organizing among marginalised communities poses a formidable challenge. This is much more so in the case of women of small-scale fishing communities who find themselves battling not just a capitalist structure that denies them visibility, just wages and basic services, but also the patriarchy of the fisheries sector and of their communities and families. The process of organizing is both challenging and often involves making strategic compromises.

This issue of *Yemaya* highlights three models of organizing, occurring under three different arrangements of political economy. Whether it is the National Articulation of Women (ANP) in Brazil or AKTEA in Europe or the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in India, the common thread that runs across all three organizational forms is that of federation. All three models underscore the point that while isolated organizing efforts are important, after a certain stage it is only through federating that organizations can gain maximum political leverage by reaching out to other like-minded organizations and building collective strength based upon a common language, common objectives and common strategies.

The need for sustenance is another common thread that runs across all three models of organizing, highlighting the fact that without support, be it social, political or economic, the process of organizing can be seriously threatened. Thus, while today the European network AKTEA battles a significant resource crisis, the emergence of the ANP can be traced back to the more politically conducive context of Brazil under the Lula government. In India, on the other hand, SEWA seems to have built economic viability into its very structure, generating funds through its diverse spectrum of self-sustaining co-operative activities.

Each of the organizing efforts however also faces its own share of challenges. Some of the challenges may be internal, related to organizational structure and functioning, some external, stemming from the unrestrained free trade and the unregulated 'marketization' that the globalized, neoliberal world economy of today aggressively seeks to promote. In the case of Europe, the commercialization of the fisheries has already led to such a high degree of marginalization of the small-scale fisheries that maintaining the groundswell of support needed to keep fisheries organizations well networked and active is a challenge for networks like AKTEA. In India, on the other hand, for a co-operative-based model of organizing such as SEWA, an important challenge would be to avoid mirroring the private sector model in its functioning. Finally, the experience of the ANP meeting in Brazil suggests that organizational representation might need to be broad-based beyond just the top leadership to ensure participative decision making in federations and networks.

Across the world today, through autonomous organizations, unions, networks and co-operatives, women in the fisheries are organizing for change. Despite the compromises that might have to be made in this highly significant process, as organizations become larger and begin to network for strength, retaining democracy and equality remains a fundamental challenge. ■



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