

# Yemaya

No. 1

ICSF'S NEWSLETTER ON GENDER AND FISHERIES

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## From the Editor

Greetings! We are happy to bring to you the first issue of YEMAYA, ICSF's newsletter on gender and fisheries. The idea for such a newsletter was first proposed at ICSF's General Body meeting in Trivandrum in February 1998. It was suggested that the newsletter carry news and views of organisations and individuals working on gender issues in fisheries in different parts of the world. Besides keeping people aware of what is happening, it should help sustain the links between those working on similar issues, and help them network. At present we hope to publish two issues each year.

This first issue brings to you the voices of women and men of fishing communities from different countries, representing their diverse realities. The work they do within the fisheries differs, as do the issues they confront and the level to which they have organized to deal with these. What they do have in common, though, is the will to defend and sustain their communities, the artisanal fisheries sector and their livelihoods.

This newsletter should help to build up a meaningful forum for sharing of experiences, views and strategies. At a time when women and men of artisanal fishing communities in several parts of the world are organising to defend their interests, we believe that such an effort is particularly vital.

## Why 'Yemaya'?

Afro-Brazilian in origin, 'Yemaya' is the shortened name for Yey Omo Eja, meaning "Mother Whose Children are the Fish", a mother whose children are so numerous that they are uncountable.

In the Umbanda, Candomble and Yoruba religions of Brazil and Cuba, Yemaya is not only the mother of the waters, she is the mother of all the *orixas* (gods and goddesses). Often represented as a mermaid of white and blue hues and sporting long black hair, Yemaya, also called Yemalla, Yemanya, Iemanja, Iamanya, Imanje and La Balianne, represents fertility, and embodies all the characteristics of motherhood, caring and love.

Though Yemaya essentially epitomizes the maternal force of life and creation, she has many aspects, one of which is Yemaya Okute, a fierce warrior. In Brazil, on New Year's Eve, her devotees set up elaborate beachfront altars, offering food, flowers and candles to be washed away by Yemaya with the morning tides.

For us, pondering over issues of gender and fisheries, Yemaya seems to epitomize our concerns.

## Inside Pages

Senegal  
Ghana  
France  
Denmark  
India  
Canada  
Brazil