



28 Years in Support of
Small-scale Fishworkers

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ICSF'S NEWSLETTER ON GENDER AND FISHERIES

From the Editor

The adoption of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Small-scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines) at the 31st session of the Committee on Fisheries (COFI) in June this year marks an important event in the history of small-scale fisheries. This is a significant, even if long overdue, step forward in recognising the rights of the millions of fishers, especially women, who constitute half of the employment in the sector, and whose work unrecognised and undervalued. The challenge today is to ensure that the SSF Guidelines are adapted to the local context, and States made to enact appropriate legislation and policy changes. The challenge is also to educate and empower women in fisheries on the benefits of the SSF Guidelines, and therefore the need to organise around bringing pressure on States.

It is important however to discuss the changing structure of the fisheries, including the small-scale sector. Globally today, the youth of traditional fishing communities are abandoning the employment of their forebears to seek more lucrative jobs elsewhere. The average age of the fishing population in fishing communities is increasing, with older members forced to carry on the fishing and related employment, as the example of oyster shucking in Japan from the lead article in this issue highlights. Will legislation in such situations be able to effectively address the needs of an ageing working population in fishing?

The lead article also highlights the migration of labour in fishing with young Chinese women being employed as seasonal migrants in Japan's fishing communities. While the migration, in this case, is facilitated through a government bilateral programme, the migrant workers have less regulatory protection and work longer hours with higher work intensity. The use of such migrant labour has already introduced disparities in some instances, with smaller enterprises shutting down, and elderly Japanese women losing employment. Even as women in the community question the sustainability of work dependent on migrant labour, there are other larger issues of concern. Within globalisation, is there not a danger that a model dependent on unprotected migrant labour to boost local production might become the norm, thus lowering labour standards? The provisions of the SSF Guidelines related to migrant fishers and fishworkers, such as respecting their role in fisheries, facilitating their fair and adequate integration and adopting effective protection, should be incorporated into legislation and policy. However, would the elites in traditional fishing societies, in their new role as employers of migrant workers, be willing to countenance the protection of the rights of the workforce?

Another problem highlighted in this issue, also a consequence of globalization, is related to the global trade in fish. The case of fish trade in The Gambia shows how pro-poor strategies linked to export-oriented trade promotion can adversely affect the poorer and more vulnerable sections of society, in this case, by reducing the access of women fish traders to raw materials for their businesses, and consequently, compromising local food security.

In the context of the ongoing preparations for the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN ESCAP) review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action to be held in 2015, these are important areas of campaign and education for civil society organisations to address. ■



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