



29 Years in Support of
Small-scale Fishworkers

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Yemaya

ICSF'S NEWSLETTER ON GENDER AND FISHERIES

From the Editor

We are happy to present to you the 50th issue of *Yemaya*. The occasion is unfortunately, however, more sombre than it is celebratory, in a world beset by war and disaster.

Since its launch in April 1999, *Yemaya* has regularly covered gender issues in the fisheries. It has systematically documented the various forms of gender based inequality and discrimination that prevail in the sector. It has also documented the steady erosion of the livelihood base of artisanal fishers as threats to small-scale fisheries (SSF) continue to grow.

On this occasion, it would be fitting to recall the Shared Gender Agenda that ICSF had released in 2010, with wide endorsement from representatives of fishing communities and fish worker organizations from across the world. Some of the points from the Shared Gender Agenda are worth noting in today's context.

First, it is women's labour, unpaid or poorly paid, which sustains the existing model of development. Their invisible labour subsidizes capitalist exploitation.

Second, specific forms of discrimination cut across all aspects of women's lives—labour, sexuality and fertility—undermining their dignity, sense of self-worth and self-confidence. As a result, women have very little bargaining power to push for better wages and terms of engagement with capital.

Third, the existing model of development is based on the unsustainable extraction of natural resources. This leads to environmental degradation and erodes the very basis of life and livelihood in fishing communities. Similar experiences are encountered when coastal lands are acquired for state-led developments at the expense of people's access. As the resource base is compromised, women's access to productive assets is further reduced and their burden of unpaid labour increased.

The Shared Gender Agenda declared, "If the logic of such market based development is not questioned and indiscriminate capital investment is not regulated, fishing communities and small-scale and artisanal fisheries will cease to exist." In the current issue of *Yemaya*, Meryl Williams predicts that "if left only to the market, the current trends and their gendered impacts will intensify".

Many of the articles in this issue of *Yemaya* focus on women's work in fisheries. We note from one of the articles from South Africa that even as women in fishing communities are increasingly moving out of traditional, community based occupations to seeking employment in the labour market, the feminization of labour at the bottom of the supply chain, and the informal nature of the work allows employers to flout all responsibility. Another article explains that at the intersection of gender, fisheries and economics are systemic anomalies that mask the cost of fish production by underestimating women's labour.

This issue of *Yemaya* calls for suitable actions, starting with the effective implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines). It calls for regulations to "establish fair labour codes for paid employment, affirmative action for women's rights of access to fish, and long overdue attention by fisheries economists to gender". It also calls for the extensive adoption, promotion and implementation of the principles of the Shared Gender Agenda in order to ensure women's rights in the fisheries.

As we go to press, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) concludes in Paris against the backdrop of increasing vulnerabilities facing the SSF—vulnerabilities that are greatly exacerbated by the growing threat of climate change, with glaciers melting and coral reefs being bleached at unprecedentedly fast rates by ever warmer oceans.

The clock is ticking ever faster for marginalized fishing communities. The time to oppose the present unsustainable development model is now! **M**



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