



**30** Years in Support of  
Small-scale Fishworkers

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# Yemaya

ICSF'S NEWSLETTER ON GENDER AND FISHERIES

## From the Editor

The recently-concluded 6th Global Symposium on Gender in Aquaculture and Fisheries (GAF6), held in Bangkok from 3 to 6 August, underscored the need for the effective implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (the SSF Guidelines)—a key demand uniting women across the small-scale fisheries sector today. In session after session, various presentations on gender in the fisheries made the case for a speedy, sustained and meaningful implementation of the Guidelines. At the same time, there was agreement that far from being a uniform strategy, implementation would in fact be a challenging exercise, involving regional specificity and local adaptation.

A key issue that complicates the task of implementation is the lack of official statistics and data across countries on women's work in the SSF. This scarcity of data is in turn the result of how fishing as an economic activity is defined, emphasizing only production or the act of catching fish, with the rest of the full spectrum of activities, from net-mending and bait preparation to cleaning, processing and selling the catch, being largely ignored. In Brazil, as we see in this issue of Yemaya, the use of such a narrow definition has led to the exclusion of women from critical aspects of social security coverage. This skewed and partial view, which renders invisible the labour of women and of other marginalized sections, such as that of the migrant workforce, is clearly rejected in the SSF Guidelines, which call for the valorization of the entire fish value chain.

The exclusion of women therefore is a structural phenomenon, rooted at the level of policy, which often is framed in ways that suggest that women in the SSF either do not exist, or that their labour does not matter. While the process of enumeration and policy-making can and often does exclude women, presentations at GAF6 revealed that even where women are formally included in the mainstream of SSF policy, they remain marginalized at the grassroots due to a range of reasons, including systemic capacity deficits such as lack of funds, or cultural taboos and societal prejudices. For example, as we see in this issue of Yemaya, in Lao PDR, despite the promulgation of a national gender equity policy, the fisheries sector, starved of funds and opportunities, continues to uphold traditional gender divisions of labour, while in the Kiribati fisheries, a peculiar amalgam of "cultural norms, traditional governance structures and the gender-blindness of fisheries authorities" impedes the inclusion of women in government-initiated fisheries' co-governance models. Again, in this context, the SSF Guidelines provide guidance, suggesting entry points for women in the fisheries to exercise, and demand the recognition of their rights, in all aspects of the fish value chain.

Addressing gender inequalities and the concerns of women is an urgent need in this context. The SSF Guidelines are an important starting point towards this agenda. The next steps would be to take forward the campaign to include provisions of the Guidelines as part of policies for small-scale fisheries, particularly for the recognition of women and their rights within the sector. ■



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