



31 Years in Support of
Small-scale Fishworkers

Yemaya

ICSF'S NEWSLETTER ON GENDER AND FISHERIES

From the Editor

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which replaced the Millennium Development Goals, set new targets for sustainable development by the year 2030. Among the SDGs, SDG 14, which specifically calls for the sustainable use of marine resources, is the focus of the upcoming United Nations Ocean Conference, scheduled to take place in New York from 5 to 9 June 2017. This conference is extremely relevant for the fisheries sector, given the large number of powerful stakeholders currently seeking control over marine and fisheries resources. In the context, it is important to emphasise that there are several factors that are crucial in determining the sustainable development of these resources. A major factor is the role of women in fisheries.

Studies of small-scale fisheries across the globe show how women contribute to the sustainability of the fisheries sector. They also show that where women have greater agency, they contribute to improving value addition and productivity in the sector. In the context, SDG 5 that emphasizes gender equality and empowerment of women and children is very important, not only for equity and for the rights of women, but also from the perspective of sustainable economic growth in small-scale fisheries.

Two articles in this issue of Yemaya, by Meryl Williams and Kyoko Kusakabe, focus attention on the relevance of SDG 5 to small-scale fisheries. Both talk about how modernisation in fisheries can lead to increasing inequalities within the sector and act to further increase discrimination against women. Williams highlights how positive discrimination for women in employment might not be beneficial if this is in low paying and exploitative jobs. She points to the various forms of violence within the fish value chain, which need to be specifically addressed if discrimination against women has to end. It is indeed unconscionable that despite growing awareness of the role that women's unpaid labour plays in sustaining the small-scale fisheries sector, it is still ignored in policy decisions. Kusakabe refers to the income instability in the sector and the role played by women in bringing stability and sustaining fisher families. This role is critical and will only intensify with the increasing pressure of modernization, environmental degradation and climate change on the viability of the small-scale fisheries sector. Nikita Gopal's article raises another important point of how discrimination can also be between different classes of women in the same sector. Thus, among women employed in fish processing in Kerala in India, migrant women are paid less, and have fewer rights than the local women.

The stereotype of the fisheries sector is that it is male dominated, and therefore will not allow women to exercise leadership. While this might hold generally, examples like that of the Mercado del Mar, the second largest fishing market in Mexico, show that a different paradigm might be possible. As the article by Carmen Pedroza shows, where women are able to provide effective leadership, and there is a proven record of this leadership, their authority meets little resistance. Women's leadership however needs to be supported and cultivated in ways such as networks like the Fijian Women in Fisheries Network, covered in this issue of Yemaya, are attempting to do.

Patriarchal attitudes might be hard to challenge, but are not unchangeable. The challenge is to take forward the agenda of gender equality as encapsulated in the SDG 5 within the small-scale fisheries sector. **M**



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