

Interview with Joana Rodrigues Mousinho, 61, fisherwoman, fisher representative and member of the National Articulation of Fisherwomen (ANP) and the Movement of Fishermen and Fisherwomen (MPP), Itapissuma, Pernambuco, Brazil

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Please tell us something about yourself.

I come from a family and region of fishers, and I've been fishing since I was eight. For six years, earlier, I used a net to fish—the only woman amidst male fishers—but today I mainly harvest blue crabs. I love fishing. When I go “to the tide” early in the morning, I feel well. Just seeing the sun rise or feeling the wind on my face makes me happy. I also try to take care of the environment, quarrelling with those who throw garbage and collecting waste plastic bags.

What are the main issues facing fisherwomen in Brazil?

After the 1979 struggle for recognition of fisherwomen in Brazil, today, the biggest challenge is to get fisheries officials to issue valid documentation—an activity currently suspended by this government for both men and women. In addition, we are working very hard for official recognition of fisherwomen's occupational health problems. Another urgent need is to have fishery statistics record fish production by sex. This is a big challenge nowadays, since, regardless of gender, no official fishery statistics are being collected currently in Brazil. Discrimination against women in fishing is probably greater than in other professions. Many men still do not accept women as fishers' union leaders or as movement leaders. Finally, the anti-poor social security reforms being carried out currently, pose a real threat to us.

How are women organizing to deal with these challenges?

We are participating in meetings, events and struggles in defence of our rights. Our organization has grown in strength. We are proud that Itapissuma was the first city in Brazil where women gained fishing licences, thanks to the struggle we waged with support from the Catholic Church, particularly the nun Nilza, who gave me and others much encouragement. Not only has this spread to other locations via a national policy, but also, today, in Brazil, we have two new and organized forums to hold our discussions: the MPP and the ANP.

What recent developments have been of importance for women in fisheries in Brazil?

First and most importantly, would be the unity as well as the participation of women in fisheries movements and discussions. The involvement of the Ministry of Health in our work of identifying occupational diseases is also very significant. 📌