

Yemaya

IGSF'S NEWSLETTER ON GENDER AND FISHERIES



32 Years in Support of Small-scale Fishworkers

From the Editor

Sixty-eight-year-old Maria Elena is a fisherwoman, catching fish for a living in Mexico's Lake Chapala. Earlier, in order to earn enough to meet family needs, in addition to fishing Maria Elena also filleted fish but her deteriorating health no longer permits this. Despite having fished for over 50 years, she is not a member of the fishers' cooperative in the region and therefore cannot directly access any government benefits. To make matters worse, some time ago, polluted river waters entered the local lake, resulting in a substantial decline in fish availability.

Maria Elena's life typifies the issues faced by women in the sector. They are forced to work in multiple capacities to earn money for the family, and then bear primary responsibility for domestic chores. They are forced into retirement by ill health, often brought about by the pressures of excess work. Declining fish catch and the pollution of fish sources also push them out of traditional occupations. At the end of their working lives, many of them do not have any legal identity and recognition accruing from their occupations, and are therefore excluded from benefits to workers in the sector. At the end of a hard working life, the benefit of even a meagre old age pension requires the proof of identity.

As articles in this issue show, the pressures of competition and declining fish catch on traditional fishing impacts women in fishing communities in different parts of the world, whether among fish vendors in India or fish processors and vendors in Kenya. In India, the competition from modern and mechanized fishing is leading to greater centralisation of fish landings, with women having to travel longer distances to buy fish from ports and transport the fish over greater distances to markets. They face increased competition from men, who have greater access to money and are freer to travel longer distances. In Kenya, with fish stock levels rapidly going down in Lake Victoria, women are forced to engage in *jaboya* or sex-fo-fish to be able to access fish to sustain themselves and their families.

In the context of declining traditional fisheries, women are entering new roles along the fish value chain, including seeking waged employment in fish processing. However, here they face the gender based discrimination which is endemic in the fishing and fish processing industries. A study in 2017 by the International Organisation for Women in the Seafood Industry (WSI) found widespread discrimination against women in the sector (See 'Gender inequalities and the path forward'). It recommended that the issue needed to be addressed seriously by all industry stakeholders, including NGOs and trade unions.

The Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (the SSF Guidelines) call for implementing gender mainstreaming throughout the fisheries sector. This call, echoed in the experiences of women fishers across the globe, is reiterated in all the articles in this issue of Yemaya. Unless their needs are brought to the forefront with governments and the industry, increasing numbers of women working in the sector will continue to face ever-growing levels of marginalisation. ❏



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