



34 Years in Support of
Small-scale Fishworkers

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ICSF'S NEWSLETTER ON GENDER AND FISHERIES

From the Editor

According to the State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2020 (SOFI 2020) released in July amidst the devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of people affected by hunger is steadily rising globally. People with higher risk of food insecurity include those with the lowest levels of income and education, the unemployed, those with health problem, those living in rural areas, and those separated or divorced. The report, which carries recent and authoritative estimates of hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition around the world, also revealed disturbing gender specific aspects of hunger: moderate to severe food insecurity is more prevalent among women than men; there is a growing gender gap in accessing food; and the most disadvantaged and vulnerable are often adolescents, women and children living in the poorest households in rural areas but also urban areas. When viewed in the context of a pandemic induced global economic crisis, these findings have serious implications for the lives of women in the small-scale fisheries.

Half of the global fish catch and two-thirds of the fish consumed by people come from small-scale fisheries. The sector provides not only full- or part-time employment to millions but also opportunities for seasonal and occasional fishing, which, in difficult times, are a survival lifeline for destitute millions. Women, equally significant participants in the small-scale fisheries as men, in addition to earning incomes in post-harvest and harvest work are also tasked with the primary responsibility of household care-giving. The pressure of feeding the family, no matter how adverse the conditions – how little the income or how difficult the access to food – further stretches the work day of poor women, adding to the burden of health. Women and children are among the most vulnerable sections of fishing communities, for whom rising food insecurity exacerbated by the pandemic related economic slowdown, would have extremely worrying consequences. The articles in this issue do bear out this fact.

Over the last few months, the pandemic has thoroughly disrupted fish supply chains, deepening existing fault lines and vulnerabilities of fishing societies. As one article from Indonesia points out, incomes from both harvest and post harvest have dried up, leaving fishers in the lurch and adding to the anxieties of women who must make arrangements to survive from one day to the next. The harsh economic impact has forced ageing fishers in Costa Rica to return to subsistence fishing. In Mexico, as in other countries, forced sheltering at home has led to increased domestic violence against women.

Meanwhile, women are organizing themselves at various levels in response to the new challenges. A fishing cooperative in the Mexican Caribbean has turned to door-to-door sales of seafood products; others to vegetable farming. Along the Negro River in the Amazon basin, a region woefully lacking in public health facilities and home to diverse indigenous fishing populations, networks such as the Association of Indigenous Communities of the Middle Negro River (ACIMRN), with initiative from women leaders, have lobbied with the government to be part of the official COVID-19 response to ensure that no fishing community is left out of relief distribution.

As Pencum, Sénégal points out, it is imperative that states extend all possible support to fishing communities, particularly to women and other vulnerable sections in order to mitigate the dual challenge of growing food insecurity amidst the spread of COVID-19. Further, as Nicole Franz of the FAO states, the role of international guidelines – like those developed by the Committee on World Food Security in building international agreement on more inclusive, equitable and sustainable food systems – cannot be overemphasised. **■**



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