



# Yemaya

ICSF'S NEWSLETTER ON GENDER AND FISHERIES

## From the Editor

**M**any regions of the world, particularly Africa and Asia, have a long history of vibrant cross-border trade in food fish and fish products originating from artisanal and small-scale fisheries, (see article in this issue on Cambodia-Thailand cross-border trade). Many of the traders are women, and trading activities are characterized by dynamism, vibrancy and of course, competition.

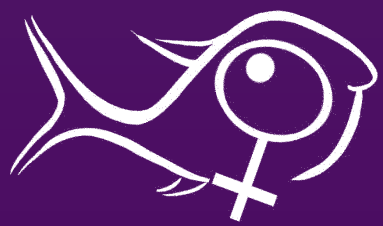
Such cross-border trade in fish and fish products is often vital both in terms of sustaining fishery-based livelihoods and incomes for poor rural producers and for meeting food security needs of low-income consumers in remote regions. Given the nature of this trade, however, there are no clear estimates of the numbers of people engaged with it. It is likely though that the numbers run into tens of thousands. Possibly because of this lack of information about cross-border trade and its importance, little systematic effort has been made to understand and address the problems of those engaged with it.

There is a need to listen to the stories of women engaged in cross-border fish trade. In June 2001, during a workshop on “Problems and Prospects for Developing Artisanal Fish Trade in West Africa”, organized by ICSF in collaboration with organizations in Senegal, women participants identified the major obstacles they faced. These included the large number of customs and other checkpoints, and the associated harassment; the high cost of transportation of products; the lack of information on market prices; lack of infrastructure for processing and storage; and the problems in obtaining credit.

Clearly, issues of cross-border trade between neighbouring countries, being bilateral or multilateral in nature, are complex, and the solutions are not always straightforward. However, given the importance of such trade for livelihoods, food security and income, efforts must be made to deepen understanding about the nature of the trade, the volume and value of fish and fish products traded, and the numbers of people engaged in such trade as well as the problems they face. There is need to analyze the links between imports and locally caught fish—the extent to which imported fish impacts on prices of locally processed and marketed fish. There is need to explore options to facilitate legitimate low-volume trade in fish and fish products of artisanal and small-scale fisheries that contributes to local economies and food security in exporting and importing countries.

In Africa, commitments to facilitate intra-regional trade of artisanally-processed fish products have been made by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), a regional group of fifteen countries, and by the Southern African Development Community (SADC), an inter-governmental organization set up to further socio-economic co-operation and integration as well as political and security co-operation among 15 southern African states. Problems of implementation, however, remain, affecting particularly low-volume traders.

Addressing the problems faced by hundreds and thousands of people engaged in low-volume cross-border food fish trade in Asia and Africa can be beneficial from various perspectives. It is high time that these problems are recognized and steps taken to address them. **■**



Cambodia .....	2
Chile.....	3
Profile .....	6
Brazil.....	7
Milestones.....	8
Q & A.....	11
Yemaya Mama.....	11
Yemaya Recommends .....	12

# Open Borders, Closed Opportunities

**Opening up of the Thailand-Cambodia border to allow for 'official' trade has affected small-scale fish traders, mostly women**

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Cambodia's inland fisheries sector is one of the most productive in the world. The annual per capita catch is 20 kg, against an estimated 4.5 kg in Bangladesh and 0.5 kg in India. More than one million people in the country depend on fisheries for income and food security. Freshwater fish is exported mainly to Thailand, through the border points of Poipet in Cambodia and Aranyaprathet in Thailand. Thousands of Cambodian traders set up stalls on the border, and over 4,000 of them were estimated to have crossed the border each day in 2003. Between June 2001 and May 2002, 10,523 tonnes of fish, worth 349 mn baht (approx. US\$8 mn), were exported from Cambodia to Thailand.

Freshwater fish, especially from the Tonle Sap region, has long been an important item of trade. The French colonialists recognized the economic potential of Tonle Sap, and in the 1870s, the King of Cambodia started to collect payments for fishing rights. All trade activities were halted during the regime of the Khmer Rouge, between 1975 and 1979, when the borders of Democratic Kampuchea remained closed. In the 1980s, however, small-scale fish trade started to flourish. Almost

all the traders were women, who would accompany troops to the border, and risk walking through minefields to trade fish. As the border opened up, trade became more 'official' on both sides, with the establishment of infrastructure and official procedures. Consequently, the opportunities for women fish traders began to diminish.

In 1990, as the border conflict subsided, the Kampuchea Fisheries Import and Export company (KAMFIMEX), a State monopoly, opened an office in Poipet. All fish traders had to pay KAMFIMEX a fee, which increased their operational costs. Better roads and a cessation of fighting led to an increase in fish trade. Simultaneously, formal and informal checkpoints cropped up, as well as customs and other government offices. One study found that fish traders had to make 27 types of payment to 15 institutions in 16 locations, from the fish landing site on the Cambodian side to the market on the Thai side of the border. Most of the traders' earnings went into meeting these payments.

Between 2001 and 2003, small-scale fish traders and transporters organized protests and petitions. In 2003, traders and transporters won a legal case against fee collection by KAMFIMEX, which led to a decrease in fee collection in other places as well. However, inspections and import restrictions became more stringent on the Thai side of the border. As regulations became stricter, Cambodian small-scale fish traders, dependent on official imports by Thai nationals, had to pay higher fees on the Thai side of the border. Large-scale fish traders, mostly men, were able to take advantage of the volume in trade to negotiate lower fees.

The steep increase in fees, the proliferation of the fish trade, and the entry of large players have made it difficult for small-scale fish traders to procure fish. Most of them buy fish from other merchants, not from fishers directly, since they are unable to extend credit to fishers.

Large fluctuations in fish prices also harm the small fish traders. The price of a kilogramme of fish can drop from 85 baht (US\$2.5) to 45 baht (US\$1.3) in one day. Some of the bigger traders

UBOLRATANA SUNTORNRATANA



Women fish traders transporting fish on carts from Cambodia to Thailand

store fish and choose not to sell when the prices are low. Thai traders too stock fish in cold storage when prices are low. Cambodian small-scale traders, however, have no access to these facilities, including mobile phones to track markets and prices. Cambodian traders often rely on their relationship with their Thai counterparts to get better prices and an assured market.

Over the last three decades, petty trading in fish, which provides a livelihood for many Cambodian women, has undergone drastic changes. Small-scale women traders who lack access to resources and facilities and have little bargaining power lose out when borders open up to allow the entry of large players. It is indeed ironic that for small traders, 'open' borders mean 'closed' opportunities. ❏

**"It is indeed ironic that for small traders, 'open' borders mean 'closed' opportunities."**

## SOUTH AMERICA CHILE

# Under a Salmon Dictatorship

**Crippled by outbreaks of infectious disease, Chile's multinational-dominated salmon industry has dipped in productivity, leaving women with little protection**

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**G**ladys, 33, expecting her fourth child, lives in the coastal city of Calbuco, in an archipelago of 15 small islands in the south of Chile. For almost ten years she has worked in various jobs in national and multinational companies that rear, process and export salmon to Japan, the United States and the European Union.

In less than two decades, the industrial monoculture of salmon, started in the 1980s by Norwegian, Spanish and Japanese multinationals, has transformed this South American country into the second-largest producer of salmon in the world, providing 37 per cent of the global supplies, behind Norway, which leads with 42 per cent. Salmon is an exotic species introduced into the waters of the southern regions of Chile.

Today, one in four farmed salmon fillets consumed worldwide comes from the cold regions where Gladys and her colleagues work for up to ten to 12 hours a day.

In 1990, the salmon industry in Chile exported 24,000 tonnes of trout and salmon, worth US\$116 mn. By 1999, exports had increased to over 200,000 tonnes, worth US\$810 mn, and by 2007, just before the outbreak of the current infectious salmon anaemia (ISA) virus disease, production rose to 665,000 tonnes, valued at US\$2,400 mn.

To reach such levels of production, salmon companies employed around 35,000 workers who came from the regions of Chiloé, Aysén and Magallanes, in addition to migrant workers from other regions of the country.

The fish-processing plants, installed mainly in Puerto Montt, employ a workforce that is around 70 per cent female, who work eight-hour shifts in the Norwegian company, Mainstream/Cermaq. Three shifts are normally operated: one from 8 am to 4 pm, the second from 4 pm until midnight, and the third, throughout the night and early morning.

Many of the women workers in Mainstream/Cermaq, in which the Norwegian State owns a 43 per cent share, are not formally educated. Says Vanesa Ojeda, a worker and union leader: "Previously, they used to have courses for women who were on long-term contracts to help them complete their education. But for the past two years these courses are no longer being provided."

In 2007, Chile's salmon industry faced its first major crisis, as a result of two decades of poor environmental and sanitary practices, triggered by the complicity of government officials, weak legislation and a lack of political will.

At the start of 2009, there was an infestation of sea lice (*Caligulus spp*), an ectoparasite found naturally, to a small degree, in native fish species. However, the high densities of salmon in the floating cages, above the maximum permitted levels, combined with the concentrations of rearing centres and the irresponsible use of chemicals, caused this parasite to proliferate, resulting in the loss of up to 30 per cent of the biomass in the salmon centres.

Added to that, in June 2009, the spread of ISA from eggs imported from Norway devastated the Atlantic salmon-rearing centres, and there was a 50 per cent fall in the overall production of the industry, triggering the layoff of almost 40 per cent of the industry's workforce.

In response to this crisis, the salmon companies, which only last year made public their enormous debts—around ten times their investment—are asking the State for new loans. They are also lobbying for a bill that will allow them to become owners in perpetuity of aquaculture concessions, provided free of charge by the State, for mortgages. The companies owe Chilean and foreign banks more than US\$2,500 mn.

Prior to 2007, salmon workers earned average monthly salaries of 250,000 pesos (around US\$470). Their salaries were based on the legal minimum wage of 159,000 pesos (around US\$300). The remainder was made up from various bonuses related to production and time at work, calculated both on a collective and individual basis.

Today, however, in the middle of the ISA crisis, there is no production bonus, and salaries in the salmon industry have been halved. In Mainstream/Cermaq “the salaries are now only the legal minimum as no fish is coming in for processing”, affirms William Rebolledo, the president of the trade union. Says Vanessa Ojeda: “We always used to earn the minimum salary plus production bonuses. But now with no salmon in the plant, they are asking us to do cleaning work for not a single extra peso.”

In the first three months of 2009 alone, Mainstream/Cermaq had net earnings, before tax, of US\$25 mn, as reported by the Chief Executive Officer, Geir Isaksen. Workers fear that the current crisis is serving as an opportunity for the company to get rid of its regular, organized workforce. “No salmon is coming to Mainstream/Cermaq but we believe that it’s being taken to other processing plants,

because they want to close this plant, lay off everyone, and then contract in workers who are neither organized nor have a trade union,” says Vanessa Ojeda.

These fears are not baseless. Recently, along with Gladys, 15 other pregnant workers were fired illegally from Cermaq/Mainstream. Layoffs of pregnant women are common in several salmon companies, despite labour laws that protect trade union leaders and pregnant women. To circumvent the law, several companies make women undergo pregnancy tests before hiring them. According to a study carried out by the National Labour Directorate, “in the specific case of women, some trade union leaders indicate that the companies prefer ‘young women, but not too young’, so that their reproductive age is not incidental to their entry and exit from the labour market.”

“It’s disgusting that a fillet of salmon should be worth more than a pregnant woman”, says William Rebolledo. “All these women have scarce means. Most of them are single mothers with no social protection. Some have told us that they have been victims of sexual harassment, but have chosen not to complain for fear of being dismissed and left jobless”, he adds.

The workers brought the layoffs to the attention of the Labour Ministry’s Inspectorate of Work and, on 13 May 2009, inspection officials visiting Mainstream/Cermaq found that a “legal separation of functions” applied to pregnant workers. For this, the salmon company was fined 7.7 mn pesos (US\$13,110). An additional fine of 2.2 mn pesos (US\$4,120) was imposed for “not providing work as contracted”.

The company reacted by taking the 15 pregnant salmon workers to court in an attempt to lay them off legally, demanding, in addition, withholding of salaries for the duration of the case. However it lost the legal battle in the Calbuco Tribunal. It then appealed to the Puerto Montt Appeals Court, which reviewed two cases but ruled in favour of the workers.

Unable to lay off the pregnant workers, the company increased harassment levels. Gladys says that on various occasions, but especially in the last month, “all the pregnant women at Mainstream/Cermaq were sent to work in the packing section, where temperatures are below freezing.”

“Now that there was no production, the bosses were sending the pregnant women, whom they had not been able to lay off, to the toilets section to wash the equipment with

MAINSTREAM TRADE UNION



Pregnant women during a break in the factory canteen of the multinational, Mainstream/Cermaq, at Calbuco, Chile

chlorine”, recounts Vanessa Ojeda. The pregnant women were provided neither gloves nor masks. Many refused but some women, cowed down by an abusive middle management, worked without any protection.

Union leaders allege that the conditions of work have caused an increase in spontaneous abortions. The acclaimed documentary on intensive salmon-farming in Chile, “Ovas de Oro” (Golden Eggs), records the case of a woman worker who suffered an abortion from having to do heavy work in below-freezing temperatures.

Another woman worker in Mainstream/Cermaq, Claudia, had a spontaneous abortion when she was hit by heavy salmon being offloaded onto a table. “At the end of December

2007, I was working in the classified area where salmon of between 4 and 9 kg were being dumped on a large table. These salmon rebounded and several of them hit me in the belly. I felt a lot of pain and had to go home”, she recounted. Throughout January 2008 Claudia had symptoms of miscarriage, suffering such losses of blood during night shifts that she had to retire from work. The abortion took place in early February at the regional hospital at Puerto Montt; Claudia received blood transfusions.

Puerto Montt’s women salmon workers are today united in calling for an end to anti-union practices, double standards, low salaries, heavy workloads, as well as the systematic violation of labour, environmental and sanitary laws. ❏

**“All these women have scarce means. Most of them are single mothers with no social protection.”**

## Save India’s Beaches

In June 2009, a popular television news channel in India, NDTV, aired a series called ‘India’s dying beaches’. These reports drew attention to some of the major threats facing India’s beaches, and the impact both on the ecological integrity of coastal areas and on fishing communities, the traditional inhabitants of the coast.

These reports, now available on YouTube, a video sharing website, highlight key issues from different locations along the coast—mangroves, that protect coasts from erosion and fishing communities from storms, are felled to make way for ports in Gujarat; beaches in Kerala are shrinking due to illegal sand mining and rampant tourism; Orissa’s fishing hamlets as well as the nesting grounds of the endangered Olive Ridley turtles have been adversely affected by artificial breakwaters and ports; sand dunes and vegetation on Goa’s beaches have been wiped off due to tourism and other industrial forces; and an elevated highway threatens the Marina Beach in Chennai. The worst hit are the fishing communities living along India’s vast coastline.

The series shows how thousands of livelihoods are being affected each day by development activities on the coast and stresses the need to safeguard the

lives and livelihoods of those who depend on the sea, as well as to protect the environment from further destruction.

“India’s dying beaches” was aired against the backdrop of strong protests from fishing communities, environmentalists and non-governmental organizations against moves to replace the 1991 Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) Notification with the controversial Coastal Management Zone (CMZ) Notification 2008, which, many feared, would open up the coasts for economic development activities on a large scale, destroying coastal ecosystems and displacing fishing communities. In the face of relentless protests, the draft CMZ Notification was allowed to lapse in July 2009. India’s fishing communities consider this as a major victory.

These videos can be accessed on YouTube through the following links:

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=QDSlqnQSsIU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QDSlqnQSsIU)

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=5YgjZ8HwBLg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5YgjZ8HwBLg)

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=BOpeF63EJ-0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BOpeF63EJ-0)

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=DjU1UQCQjfg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DjU1UQCQjfg)

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=THGANb5FBvA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=THGANb5FBvA)

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=-V6RIIB2KGY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-V6RIIB2KGY)

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=1J8078xerpk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1J8078xerpk)

**What’s New,  
Webby?**





**PROFILE**

## Sunant Jewton

**Sunant Jewton, President of a women's group in Baan Tung Prai, Thailand, has helped link conservation with income generating activities**

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**M**eeet Sunant Jewton, president of the local women's group in Baan Tung Prai, a village in southern Thailand. In just four years, she, along with the other women of this group, have not only managed to regenerate a dying species of local palm but also to position handicraft made from the palm as highly-prized local souvenirs.

Theirs is a story of hardship and resourcefulness, crisis and opportunity; of conservation efforts leading to additional income generation in ways that do not destroy local livelihoods but benefit the community as a whole.

Baan Tung Prai is located in a brackish water area on the Palian Estuary of Trang province in southern Thailand. A small community, 60 per cent Muslim and 40 per cent Buddhist, comprising fishers and rubber-tappers, lives here. In the past, Baan Tung Prai was a victim of intensive shrimp farming that overran mangrove forests as well as forests of a local palm—the Nypa palm—resulting in great hardship for the community whose livelihoods were completely dependent on the resources these forests provided.

The shrimp farm industry which had boomed during the 1980s, collapsed in the 1990s with global outbreaks of shrimp disease. Most shrimp farms in the Baan Tung Prai region were abandoned. What remained were degraded swamps, polluted by chemicals and supporting no life. Most severely affected were the fishers as fish stocks went down and other aquatic species disappeared.

“Not all of us are fishers. But, fishing families were badly affected. Fishers could find enough fish for just the family, not for sale, and we knew that it was caused by the loss of the mangrove forests in our homeland,” says Sunant, adding, “So, that's when we started.”

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, a conservation group in Baan Tung Prai consisting of local men and women initiated mangrove restoration activities. After the condition of

mangroves improved, local groups began giving serious thought to Nypa palm restoration.

In the year 2005, Sunant Jewton, aware of the looming threats and eager for a solution that would benefit the entire community, began working closely with other locals to develop a sustainable conservation, utilization, and management programme for the Nypa palm.

The Nypa palm is a local plant which yields many products, such as sugar, vinegar, food wrapper and roofing material. But before the local women's group came into being, no one had ever thought that the palm could be used to make handicrafts.

“The art of handicraft-making has always been there in our community, but we never used Nypa palm as a raw material, even though it grows naturally in our area. It all began with a discussion within our group when some members were complaining about waste from Nypa palm, left over from other traditional usages, which became hard-to-get-rid-of junk. As the group was brainstorming, it came out with this most creative solution!” says Sunant.

With initial funds and training for capacity-building from Yadfon Association, the Baan Tung Prai women's group, with Sunant as the group leader, began experimenting with various types of Nypa palm handicraft. Some authorities stepped in to help the group with marketing channels. As a result, today, just four years later, Nypa palm handicraft is regarded as one of the most prized souvenirs in Trang province.

“Now, we have many types of Nypa palm handicraft—fruit trays, baskets and lamps. We don't mark up the price too high, but we do make enough profits to go round,” says Sunant. “Ten per cent of total income is put into the group fund and used for group activities. We also teach the art of handicraft-making to kids in the local schools.”

This resourceful women's group is engaged in sustainable conservation, income generation as well as the handing down of local wisdom to the next generation, ensuring the viability of the community in the long run.

“Today, community members have an alternative job. When a storm comes, no one can go fishing. So, women from fishing families, as well as the kids, can help generate income to keep the family together, without having to leave home to find jobs in factories,” says Sunant with a smile. ❏

# Women – Fishing and Struggling

**As women fishworkers in Ceará come together for the first time, they highlight the need to forge a political identity and strengthen their collective organization**

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From 26 to 29 November 2008, in Caucaia, a beach suburb in northeastern Brazil, fisherwomen from the State of Ceará took the lead in organizing their first meeting near the capital city of Fortaleza. The meeting, titled “Women: Fishing and Struggling”, brought together about 50 women from coastal villages and small cities, including two women from an indigenous community.

The meeting was organized by Instituto Terramar. Terramar is a non-profit organization that works for the social and environmental sustainability of the coastal zone through the empowerment of coastal communities. In the past years, Terramar has been seriously

speakers were fisherwomen and community activists.

The various sessions focused on women’s multiple responsibilities in the household and community. Women work both in fishery-related activities and in areas like handicraft, small commerce and services. Their economic pluralism often depends on networks of mutual aid. The discussions showed how this mix of tasks often hinders the recognition of women as workers and underlined how women’s everyday jobs are both time-consuming and not easily identified as ‘work’.

The women recounted the range of activities they carry out. Some activities, like salting fish and making gear, have declined while new activities have emerged. A fisherwoman, Luzanete, explained: “Earlier many women would weave nets. But today, with machine-made nets available, you will hardly find a woman weaving nets. My husband and I used to even pay women to help us with weaving because it’s a hard job. But now the nets come readymade and we just buy them. Women have lost this source of income. With tourism coming in, the women got into that sector, to work for the tourists.”

Marizelha Lopes (Nega) from Bahia State, a member of the co-ordination of National Fishermen’s Movement (MONAPE) and also a leader of the National Fisherwomen’s Organization (ANP), spoke of health issues of fisherwomen. Nega posed some basic questions: “How can we enjoy good health when there is no basic sanitation, hospitals, energy or education? If we are to be recognized as traditional communities, we need this recognition as a whole. If the State doesn’t recognize our communities, how can occupational conditions like injuries, vision problems due to the sun, skin cancer, back ailments, fungi infections due to humidity and so on, be prevented?”

Nega then talked about an initiative that some communities, in collaboration with a state university and government agencies, implemented in 2007. A medical researcher was invited to study the health conditions of shellfish collectors. Once the results of the study were available, a meeting, inviting selected state officers and collectors, was organized.

IANA SOARES



Fisherwomen from different localities present results from group work about the reality of the fishing communities

concerned about the spread of large shrimp farms and has also helped put in place participatory committees for managing the fisheries and the littoral areas.

As a researcher, I was invited to make a presentation on the topic “Women in fishing: Experiences from different places” as part of a round table titled “Fishing and women days”. The topics of the other two round tables were: “Fisherwomen: Challenges for building political participation” and “Organization and political participation of women in Brazil.” Most of the

**“We fisherwomen know a lot, but if we don’t exchange this information and don’t come together, we’ll go nowhere.”**

Later that year, a seminar was held that led to an agreement with a city hospital for health checkups for shellfish collectors. “They originally agreed to see four women every week. But our strategy was to press for more consultations. Then, we began taking 10 or 12 women per week. We are now discussing how to increase this support,” said Nega.

Apart from highlighting problems, the meeting also provided space for women to articulate their identity as fishworkers. One woman said: “During the high tide, I look for shellfish in the mangrove with my husband. I have the courage because I have three little children. If one day I separate from my husband, I can still earn a living from the mangrove. That’s all we have—the mangrove.”

An indigenous woman, Navegante, from Tremembé saw fishing as an addiction, a mix of suffering and joy. “I fish in the river, the sea and the lake”, she said. “I use hook and line. No nets. I fish ‘siri’ and ‘maria farinha’ (crustaceans). We take a can to trap these. Then we prepare *farofa* (a manioc flour preparation) and we eat very well. When we go fishing, I prefer to take our food from nature. I feel like a warrior, like an Indian. Today we have been invited here because we have knowledge. And I tell you, fishing is addictive! Like cigarettes! Even if the lake is bad for health, at six in the morning I enter the cold water, up to the waist...When my sister calls me to go fishing, I can hardly sleep during the night thinking of the fishing. And today I am 60. I have eleven children. I am still addicted to fishing but not the way I used to be!”

In most of the northeastern states, shellfish are important resources and traditionally it is the women who gather them. The women are called *marisqueiras*, from the word *marisco* (shellfish), a term that conveys their separate status within the sector. Although it is not common for women to enroll in fishermen’s *colônias*, when they do so, they enroll as *marisqueiras*, not as fisherwomen. This traditional division still influences the representation of women’s roles in the fisheries and often hinders identification—even self-identification—as fisherwomen. As Graça, from Morro Branco, pointed out: “Some women have their professional card as *marisqueiras*, whereas those who fish aren’t even aware that there is that kind of card. Communication is lacking. Often women aren’t aware that they are fisherwomen and that they earn a living from fishing.”

It is worth noting that even in regions where shellfish is frequently found, for example, in the Amazonian region, the term *marisqueiras* is often used by *colônia* directors to refer to fisherwomen. As long as this perception continues to conceal commonality with men fishworkers, hampering collective organization, this should be a matter of concern for the national organization of women.

The identity question came up again in the final session. This session was facilitated by Sílvia Camurça, from the Brazilian feminist movement, SOS Corpo (Body), who drew attention to two interesting proposals that had come from the participants: first, that the names of the fishermen *colônias* should be changed to reflect both fisherwomen and fishermen, and



## Milestones

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### Brazil’s New Fisheries and Aquaculture Law

Brazil’s new Fisheries and Aquaculture Law passed in June 2009 has important implications for women. A key aspect of the new law is that it broadens the definition of the term ‘fishworker’ by including those who perform critical ancillary activities that, till now, had no legal recognition. With this broadening of the definition of ‘fishworker’, Brazil has taken yet another important step forward. Women working in fishing activities, as harvesters, had already achieved formal recognition with the approval of the Brazilian Federal Constitution in 1988, and the institution of the Social Welfare Law in 1991, that provided rural workers the same kind of social protection accorded to urban workers. Of particular interest to rural women was the recognition of their status as workers regardless of marital status.

The new law adopts a more comprehensive view of fisheries and of the relevant social actors in this field. It ensures recognition of those engaged in fisheries-related activities such as in manufacturing or repairing

nets and gear, and the processing of artisanal fish products.

It is expected that this will provide workers performing fisheries-related activities, most of whom are women, access to welfare rights, notably retirement, accident and sickness cover, and maternity indemnities. Moreover, wherever annual fishing bans are established, they will benefit from the related insurance—normally a four-month allowance involving the payment of the minimum wage for each month of the ban, approximately US\$218 per month. With this entitlement, they will receive recognition as full economic agents, who suffer, just as male fishworkers do, from income shortage during the fishing ban period. Given the major presence of women in pre- and post-harvesting activities, their official inclusion within the sector is expected to greatly increase the enrolment of women in artisanal fishworker’s organizations. ■



second, that identities based on local occupations like *marisqueiras* and *alqueiras* (algae collectors) should be abandoned in favor of the more general political identity 'fisherwoman'.

Sílvia Camurça, while acknowledging the relevance of the second proposal in securing professional rights, pointed to the dangers of losing sight of the diverse activities women assume in the fisheries. She agreed with the suggestion that the movement should consider both identities: one that affirms diverse local experiences as well as the other that affirms political selfhood. As Nega put it: "I consider myself a fisherwoman, but I don't intend to stop being a *marisqueira*."

The necessity to examine membership statutes came up for discussion. An approved guideline for the fisherwomen's organization, for example, is "to study shellfish breeding cycles". This, it was felt, is indeed necessary to protect natural resources in the current context of shrimp-farm expansion near mangroves, mounting fishing pressure, and tourism and population growth in the coastal zones. Sound ecological data too is necessary to negotiate allowances for fishers during the closed fishing season. Clearly, what is required is powerful organization in order to influence agents, researchers, unions and decision makers. In the words of Liduína, from Icapuí: "We fisherwomen know a lot, but if we don't exchange this information and don't come together, we'll get nowhere."

This meeting might have been the first of its kind in Ceará State but its origins date back to another meeting held four years ago. In 2004, soon after the new government had instituted the National Fisheries Office, a National Meeting of Women Fishworkers was held in Brasília, the national capital. Several delegates from coastal communities, including those from Ceará, were present. The following year, two regional meetings were organized in the east and west coast respectively. A team of women from the meeting in Brasília co-ordinated these efforts. Six capacity-building workshops were held in 2006, supported by a grant from the Carlos Chagas Foundation, a Brazilian funding organization.

An outcome of the Brasília meeting was the founding of the National Fisherwomen's Organization in 2006. Around the same time, the Coastal Zone Project brought together various social movements working at the state level, which gave rise to the Forum of Fishermen and Fisherwoman from Ceará Littoral (FPPLC),



Bina, an algae collector and Lourdinha, a fish seller, from Batoque (east littoral) during the net weaving workshop

a unique phenomenon in the Brazilian context. Protest marches against predatory fishing and aquaculture were organized, and conferences, well-attended by women, were held on environmental issues. On International Women's Day, 8 March 2007, a preliminary co-ordination committee was established in Ceará with the purpose of organizing the State Fisherwomen's Organization, a branch of the National Organization. With a grant from the Ecumenical Service Co-ordination (CESE), a series of local workshops were held, leading finally to the present meeting: the first meeting of fisherwomen from Ceará.

Looking back, one of the co-ordinators, Mentinha, recalled: "In these four years, we learned a lot. We discussed fishing, health, inequalities, racism, environmental management... everything! We discussed many topics that other movements never discuss."

Despite an acknowledgement of overall achievement, there was concern about the obstacles on the way. The identity issue was a dominant concern: Who is a fisherwoman? Can women who perform other parallel or temporary activities outside the fisheries, be called fisherwomen? What about those who perform pre- and post-harvest tasks? It was also pointed out that the meeting had managed to mobilize the *marisqueiras* but not the *alqueiras* or the octopus collectors, who were fewer in number. It was the same case with the fisherwomen from coastal *quilombolas* communities, legally recognized as descendants of ancient slaves. Such groups were yet to be organized.

In every session women talked about the tensions they experienced within the family and even within professional organizations whenever they began to take up active roles. Women also complained about the problems they face in accessing entitlements, such as retirement benefits, maternity leave and adequate health assistance.

A major difficulty is that the organization of women still lacks legitimacy within the fishermen's organizations. It was noted that many *colônias* did not accept women at all or accepted them only to 'increase the number of voters', not because they were committed towards women's interests. However, it was felt that the National Fishermen's Movement (MONAPE), which had women in several leading positions, had promoted the fisherwomen's cause much more than the traditional state federations had.

Nevertheless, there was consensus that gender relations in the fisheries were far from balanced, and that conventional attitudes remained. The relationship of fisherwomen's organizations with other social movements or NGOs was reported to be often far smoother than with fishermen's organizations. A woman leader of a fishermen's organization describes the problem vividly: "When we came into the fishermen's organization, we thought our companions would surely have a better understanding. Not true. They assigned women to secretary roles, to serve coffee. So, we started to complain about that. We discussed methodologies, priorities for speeches and the division of tasks. It's not easy at all because when we want to discuss women's health issues, they start scratching themselves; they leave the room; they go out for a smoke. Even the assistants have trouble dealing with the presence of women."

Regarding the structure of the Fisherwomen's Organization, the members of the co-ordination team in Ceará stated that although they had seats in different councils, they had not been very effective in influencing the agenda. Manuela was candid about the limitations: "Me and my companions were not successful in including our issues in the agenda list. For example, in the FPPLC, we debated closed seasons for fishing and boat licensing but not lake fishing and shellfish collection."

Communication gaps were a critical problem; gaps in information and input between the state, the regional and the local levels. It was not only about distances or the shortage of transport and funds. The key issue was how to organize effectively and in greater numbers.

Similar concerns were reported at the national level. According to the representative of the National Fisherwomen's Organization, distances between states weakened national-level organization. To proactively address this concern it was decided that for the next national meeting, scheduled to take place in June 2009 in Bahia State, groups of two members from the co-ordination team will visit as many states as possible from the North to the South to mobilize groups and partners.

Not just problems, there were positive stories as well—the case of Fortim *colônia*, for example, that had implemented different fees for women and men affiliates, proportional to their earnings from fishing.

Numerous proposals emerged from the three days of discussion, touching upon a broad range of issues: basic services, energy and water management as well as problems of violence. There were specific proposals aimed at strengthening the fisherwomen's movement through documentation of the history of the movement; studies on shellfish breeding cycles; initiatives to control tourism expansion in the coastal zone; and efforts to include the term 'fisherwomen' in *colônia* names.

The co-ordination team was expanded from four to six women and a schedule drawn up for visits to coastal communities. To strengthen this initiative, Terramar agreed to prepare two documents with support from ICSF: a brief booklet on the history of organizing fisherwomen in Ceará with an account of the present meeting, as well as a handbook on women's labour and welfare rights in the fisheries. The working group includes members from Terramar and Conselho Pastoral dos Pescadores (CPP) as well as two representatives of the State Fisherwomen's Organization.

To conclude, Ceará's fisherwomen, who have always engaged in promoting the wellbeing of their community, today know that in order to gain social and occupational status, they need to organize collectively. They realize that this involves self-organization rather than joining existing fishermen's *colônias* and associations. They are also aware of the obstacles they face: conventional prejudices, institutional barriers or even complexities inherent in the process of self-organization—forging a political identity, for example, that does not obscure real social differences. These hurdles are not, however, a dampener. An indomitable spirit prevailed during the three days of the meeting as fisherwomen shared their skills and traditional

“...there was consensus that gender relations in the fisheries were far from balanced, and that conventional attitudes remained.”

knowledge through narratives, writings, poetry, photographs, dancing and chanting. It was remarkable to witness the beginnings of a movement that will eventually no doubt transform fisherwomen into political actors,

recognized and respected for who they are and what they do.

Note: This article is based on a report by Cristiane Faustino, Co-ordinator of Planning and Evaluation, Instituto Terramar, Brazil. ❏

## Q&A

### Interview with Mamayawa Sandouno, President of the NGO ADEPEG-CPA, Guinea Conakry, and member of ICSF

By **Brian O’Riordan**  
(briano@scarlet.be), Secretary,  
ICSF Belgium Office

#### Can you tell us a bit about how women fish processors in Guinea have organized?

The historic struggle of women fish smokers in Guinea has been to organize locally and to be recognized nationally.

Starting in 1985, with support and advice from the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the Government of Guinea initiated a pilot project to establish several Economic Groups of women fish-smokers.

Subsequently, with support from an NGO, ADEPEG-CPA, and through education programmes, awareness-raising campaigns and lobbying activities, several local-level associations and co-operatives of women fish smokers were established.

In February 2008, a major milestone was reached with the establishment of the National Union of Women Fish Smokers, under the Interior Ministry. Some 30 associations and co-operatives are formally associated to this new National Union, grouping together around 1,000 women fish smokers. The challenge now is to establish further local associations and co-operatives, and to associate these with the National Union.

#### What are the major challenges for women fish processors where you work?

Securing sufficient quantities of good quality fish at the right price to smoke is a major challenge. Another challenge is adding value to processed fish, including aspects such as packaging and presentation of the product, degree of

smoking, and storage. We need to find ways to access and expand trade in national and regional markets, in the EU and USA. We also need to promote learning through the exchange of experiences with counterparts in other countries, on a South-South basis.

#### What initiatives have women taken to deal with these issues?

Women are organizing in various ways. One important initiative has been to open up credit to groups of women smokers, under a scheme of the African Development Bank. Some women have used this to purchase vessels, others to purchase improved fish smoking kilns.

A particular initiative worth highlighting is the Japanese-supported project to construct a new artisanal fish landing quay at Boulbinet. Boulbinet is the most important fish landing centre in the capital city, Conakry, established during the colonial era, and an important fish smoking centre. There are two associations of women fish smokers here that group some 200 women. Alongside the quay two hangers are to be constructed to house “bressage” fish smoking kilns as well as cold storages.

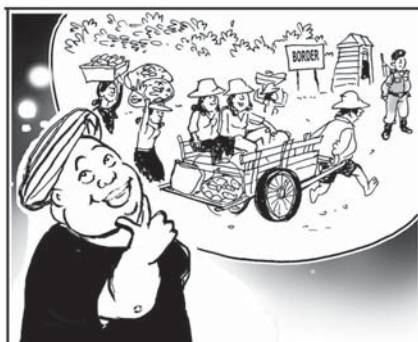
Following an initiative in 2006 to establish a regional network of fishworker organizations and media professionals, radio journalists in Guinea have broadcast several programmes of interviews with women fish smokers. These interviews have enabled women to highlight their problems, concerns and demands at national level.

#### What are the important changes that have taken place in the last two decades with respect to women in fisheries?

Women’s organizations have been established and strengthened. There’s been a capacity-enhancement among women with respect to fish-processing. There are better educational opportunities for women smokers and these women are now sending their children, even their daughters, to school. Finally, international exchanges have taken place, regionally with other West African countries, and internationally. ❏

## YEMAYA MAMA

...at the border



FILM

# Gaëlle's boat

2006. 53 min. Directed by Philippe Lubliner

By **Alain and Danièle le Sann**, associated with Pêche et Développement, France

Philippe Lubliner's 52-minute film "Gaëlle's boat" opens with the story of a fishing couple, Alain and his wife, Gaëlle, in Le Guilvinec, a village in Brittany, France, who are on the verge of retirement. The couple owns a boat—a gillnetter—on which they work along with their two sons. Neither of the sons, though both are keen on fishing and love the sea, want to take over the responsibility of the boat from their parents. The burden of ownership is too much to handle; being crewmembers is easier and more convenient.

Gaëlle's boat is still in a good state, and a young fisherman could very well become its owner but the reality is that the number of boats and fishermen in their port is diminishing everyday—a fact that dismays Alain and Gaëlle. As the story unfolds, it becomes clear that what the couple is up against is really no less than European policy, which is aimed at reducing fishing fleets, even if large

sums of money, much more than the worth of the fishing assets, must be paid to achieve this end.

The story builds up to a finale around the couple's desperate attempts to hand down their boat even if it means losing money on it. Although it offers no easy solutions, the film severely criticizes European fishing policy and its support to the Individual Transferable Quota (ITQ) regime, drawing our attention to its detrimental human impact.

Gaëlle's life is particularly movingly depicted. She wasn't born into a fishing milieu, yet, at the end of the 1980s, in order to help tide over a crisis in their lives in the middle of a bout of particularly cold and stormy weather, she decides to accompany her husband to work aboard his boat. The story is a testimony to Gaëlle's trials; how difficult and exhausting the job is; how it wears her out; how hard it is to raise children under such conditions, but also, how she grows to love the sea.

Gaëlle's presence in the film is overwhelming. She offers a humorous view, sometimes lucid, sometimes melancholic, of the craze her husband and his friends have for the sea. It makes you wonder how they will ever survive without fishing when they retire.

This film was awarded the first prize in the "Fishermen of the World" film festival held for the first time in March 2008, in Lorient, France. It is a must-watch for policy makers because it will give them an idea of the human impact of the policies they make. It is a must-watch also for every environmentalist who claims that there are too many fishermen out there at sea. The question is, of course, are these people listening? ♣



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Writers and potential contributors to YEMAYA, please note that write-ups should be brief, about 500 words. They could deal with issues that are of direct relevance to women and men of fishing communities. They could also focus on recent research or on meetings and workshops that have raised gender issues in fisheries. Also welcome are life stories of women and men of fishing communities working towards a sustainable

fishery or for a recognition of their work within the fishery. Please also include a one-line biographical note on the writer.

Please do send us comments and suggestions to make the newsletter more relevant. We look forward to hearing from you and to receiving regular write-ups for the newsletter.