



28 Years in Support of  
Small-scale Fishworkers

# Yemaya

ICSF'S NEWSLETTER ON GENDER AND FISHERIES

## From the Editor

The current year marked an important milestone for women in fisheries through the adoption of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Small-scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication—the SSF Guidelines. These provide an important opportunity for women to be able to come together, fight for their human rights and strengthen their access to decent livelihood and equal benefits in the sector. However, the formation and strengthening of effective organisations of women is critical for this process.

This issue of Yemaya brings out the complexities of the economic and social environment in which women continue to struggle in the fishing sector. We see from the examples of Kerala and Gujarat in India, and of Portugal, how globalisation and the economic crisis, as well as governmental interventions in the name of modernisation, are all impacting fishing in local areas. Women are left grappling with the ill-effects of these changes as their customary rights to fresh fish sources and to a safe and secure market place for their activities are increasingly eroded. Women in the sector are also faced with new internal challenges, whether in terms of being forced to leave traditional livelihoods in search of waged work, or of increasing numbers joining fish trade for lack of other livelihood opportunities. This forms the context in which women in the small-scale fisheries have to take up the struggle for both maintaining their existing rights, and for gaining new rights in the fresh occupations they seek.

A recurring theme in this issue is the absence of women from the process of negotiating the changes that affect their lives. The criticality of organising autonomously is stressed, while also highlighting difficulties in building effective organisations. However, the process of organising helps in both empowering women, and benefitting them in the long run in negotiating positive changes. A glimpse into a single woman's life, as we see from the interview of a leader of a women's cooperative in the Ivory Coast, powerfully illustrates how the process of collective action can lead to enormous gains; in her case, in terms of being able to negotiate patriarchy in the family and changing the outdated processing practices that had cost her mother her eyesight. The example from Portugal shows how a slow and inclusive process helps build a strong and participative network of women's collectives. In the case of Gujarat in India, the process of organising helped women question traditional, male dominated caste organisations within fishing communities, and to envisage collective action *vis-à-vis* local administration. In Kerala, India, membership of the SEWA union gave women the forum to question changes in trading practices that adversely affect their own livelihoods.

This brings us back to the criticality of regulation for safeguarding women's livelihood in the fisheries and promoting their human rights. While the SSF Guidelines are an important step in this direction, they alone cannot guarantee positive change. Without effective implementation, the Guidelines would remain an empty promise. And for effective implementation, a pre-requisite is no doubt the strong autonomous organization of women. ❏



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# Fighting for space

**Efforts to form a union of women in small-scale fish vending in Gujarat, India, promise to go a long way in addressing the problems of lack of space and facilities that these women face**

By **Shuddhawati S Peke** (shuddhawati@gmail.com), Programme Associate, ICSF

When you first met Hansaben and Shailesh, the two young and cheerful community organisers from the coastal town of Veraval in Gujarat, India, appear to be simple and shy. They have been part of an organization called Jan Jagruti Manch (People's Awareness Forum) since they were adolescents, and have witnessed their families fight against powerful influential leaders of the *Kharava caste panchayat* (fishing communities' traditional institution). In continuing this struggle against existing traditional systems, they are trying to organize small-scale fishers. Hansaben is at the forefront in organizing women vendors and women fish processors employed in fish processing plants at Veraval. The National Fishworkers Forum (NFF), and Program for Social Action (PSA) have all supported these efforts, with inputs from International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF).

Our meeting with the women of Jan Jagruti Manch started at nine in the night. Many of them had returned from fish processing work, had their bath and finished their house work before rushing to the meeting. In earlier meetings, Hansaben had tried to teach the women how to sign their names. But the women had become suspicious of this activity, and

some women had stopped attending meetings. Even so, 60 women gathered for this meeting and shared their experiences. They were all resident of Beria in Veraval, from the traditional *Kharava* community. Almost half the women gathered worked in fish processing plants. They explained that although they did not face the same problems that migrant fish workers face, they were concerned about low wages, job insecurity, the absence of social security measures like provident fund and health insurance, and about workplace safety and working conditions, including lack of protective gear like gloves and gumboots. Some expressed fears over forming a union, as employers were bound to retaliate against such efforts. An NFF representative at the meeting shared experiences of organizing trade unions for women in the south Indian state of Kerala, and talked about the benefits of such efforts. The women appeared to appreciate the importance of unions and expressed a desire to form a trade union of their own.

Over the days that followed, Hansaben accompanied me on visits to fish markets in Veraval and Porbandar. There are two main fish markets in Veraval. Fisher's Colony Market is the oldest. A new fish market at Bheria is getting built at the original market site, so currently vendors sit in a nearby area. They have been waiting for the past two years for the new market to be constructed, sitting out in the sun, and watching both their fish stock and their health deteriorate. The market is for both wholesale and retail fish trade. Women generally get fish from wholesalers in the market in the morning, and sell their stock through the day. Many women could be seen standing with small buckets of fish for sale. Hansaben said that the local Corporation (local body) had not consulted the nearly 300 vendors while planning for a new market. As the women were not organized, they were not able to follow up with the Corporation's plans or time frame to finish construction of the market.

A visit to another market in Bheria revealed the same situation for women vendors. Here the women did not even have a demarcated market space to call their own. They were vending in the streets for the last 15 years. There were presently 200 vendors, and for a few hours in the evening, the whole street was flooded with vendors and customers. Older vendors had, over the years, made temporary structures with fish baskets,

SHUDDHAWATI PEKE



Hansaben with women fishworkers attending meeting at Veraval, Gujarat, India. Meeting with the women of Jan Jagruti Manch started at nine in the night

thermocool boxes and wooden planks to display their fish, while new vendors stood around the plastic baskets in which their fish was kept. A senior vendor we talked with raised concerns over the recent growth in the number of vendors, due to which older vendors were losing both customers and work. She also feared that the Corporation planned to shift vendors to another area altogether. Most of the women were young, and there were even some children among them, trying to sell a few crabs.

The next day Hansaben and I went to Porbander, another coastal town in Gujarat and the birthplace of Mahatma Gandhi. We visited the wholesale fish market in the morning and the retail market in the afternoon. Earlier this was a single market where wholesale and retail fish trade carried on side by side. After the Porbander Corporation built a new fish market at a distance from the original market site, wholesalers chose to auction their stock on the busy streets that were easier to access. As is the case of small-scale fish vending across Gujarat, fish was stocked on the sides of the streets, without ice and under the scorching sun. The crowd of vendors and customers in the narrow streets made it difficult for

people to walk. Accidents were common in this market. The market was said to be controlled by a woman with the reputation of being a 'gunda' (antisocial element) who exercised every possible means to maintain her control. The women here would not even to dare to speak of organizing.

The retail fish market was a well-built structure with separate *galas* (sections) for each vendor. The vendors however chose to sit on the ground in the open areas under the scorching sun, atop their usual thermocool boxes and wooden planks. They said that the space they had been given was too small to accommodate their wares. They were also angry that the Municipal Corporation had shifted them from their original space to this new fish market. There were far fewer customers coming to this market. In protest, they have been refusing to pay taxes to the Municipal Corporation. Life is hard for these women whether in fish processing industries or in fish markets. People like Hansaben and Shailesh are trying to organise them into a trade union. A collective union forum will no doubt help them in being able to negotiate with the local Municipal Corporations and Fisheries Departments to gain more control over their livelihood. ❏

Life is hard for these women whether in fish processing industries or in fish markets.



## Milestones

By **Ramya Rajagopalan**  
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### Rome Declaration on Nutrition

The Second International Conference on Nutrition, jointly organized by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the World Health Organization (WHO) to address the problem of malnutrition in all its forms and to identify opportunities for tackling them in the next decades, was held in Rome from 19 to 21 November 2014.

The Conference Outcome Document recognizes both that malnutrition poses multiple challenges to inclusive and sustainable development and to health, and that the causes of malnutrition are complex and multidimensional, including inter alia, poverty; lack of access to sufficient and adequate food; poor sanitation and hygiene; and lack of access to education, quality health systems and safe drinking water. It recognizes also the need to address the impacts of climate change and other environmental factors on food security and nutrition, and acknowledges that since trade is a key element in achieving food security and nutrition, trade policies must be conducive to fostering food security and nutrition for all.

The Conference Outcome Document calls for a common vision for global action to end all

forms of malnutrition, with particular attention to the special needs of children, women, the elderly, persons with disabilities, other vulnerable groups. It urges that nutrition and other related policies pay special attention to women and empower women and girls, thereby contributing to women's full and equal access to social protection and resources. Further the Conference calls for coordinated public policies to cover food and agriculture systems, including crops, livestock, forestry, and fisheries and aquaculture. It acknowledges that family farmers and small holders, notably women farmers, play an important role in reducing malnutrition and should be supported by integrated and multisectoral public policies, as appropriate, that raise their productive capacity and incomes and strengthen their resilience.

Finally, the Conference Outcome Document recommends to the United Nations General Assembly to endorse the Rome Declaration on Nutrition, as well as the Framework for Action which provides a set of voluntary policy options and strategies for use by governments, and to consider declaring a Decade of Action on Nutrition from 2016 to 2025. ❏



# Gaining ground

## The Fourth Meeting of the National Fisherwomen's Articulation strongly defends Brazil's fisheries and the rights of the country's fisherwomen

By **Náina Pierri** (pierrinai@gmail.com), Professor at UFPR and Member, ICSF and **Natália Tavares de Azevedo** (nataliatavares@ufpr.br), Researcher at Federal University of Paraná-UFPR

Around 80 fisherwomen from 14 out of the 26 States in Brazil met in Pontal de Paraná, a beach town on the Paraná coast in the South Region of the country, from 25 to 29 August for the Fourth Meeting of the National Fisherwomen's Articulation (ANP; please note that all acronyms in this article are based on Portuguese names). This meeting, held once every two years, aimed to take stock of the ground covered since the ANP was set up in 2006, and to define priorities and strategies for the next phase.

The meeting's agenda combined a range of activities and issues. There were thematic panels, in which invitees from government bodies, researchers and support organizations participated. The issues addressed were: health of fisherwomen; access to social security; closed season for species harvested by fisherwomen; and formal recognition of the work of women in fisheries by their inclusion in the General Register of Fisheries Activity (RGP). The

Voluntary Guidelines recently approved in the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) for Securing Small-scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication—the SSF Guidelines—and their approach to gender were presented.

Narratives presented in working groups and plenary discussions enabled participants to recall their struggle, the historic moment of the creation of the Articulation, and the successes achieved since 2006, while discussing outstanding demands. Based on this, and keeping the current political context in mind, they defined priorities for their mobilizations in the coming period as well as the measures required to broaden and strengthen the movement. The meeting ended with a statement that synthesized these key points.

The issue of fisherwomen's health has been the centrepiece of the ANP's struggle in recent years. Putting pressure on the Health Ministry (MS) enabled certain joint actions to be undertaken that led to advances in the recognition of occupational illnesses of fisherwomen, and their access to the public health system. The progress made in the prevention and treatment of specific ailments, along with the recognition of these ailments by the social security system is helping to facilitate women's access to a range of benefits.

NAÍNA PIERRI



Martilene Rodrigues and others at Pontal de Paraná meeting of ANP. Narratives presented in working groups and plenary discussions enabled participants to recall their struggle, the historic moment of the creation of the Articulation

The fisherwomen, along with members of the MS present, discussed key developments in the session titled “Participation in and control of the Public Health System (SUS): Progress and Challenges towards Guaranteeing the Health of Fisherwomen”. The SUS is the public health system through which everyone in Brazil has the right (in theory) to free medical attention including consultation, examinations, hospitalization and medication.

The fisherwomen began by underlining the importance of a training course dealing with the occupational ailments of women, in which 45 women from 11 states took part. This training course was to be replicated in other parts of the country with MS support. Fisherwomen and MS representatives also shared the participation of the ANP in the Grupo Terra or Earth Group. This group brings together members of the MS, social movements and research bodies. Its mandate includes the formulation of the National Policy for Comprehensive Health Care for Farming, Forest and Fishing Communities, that intends to improve the health of these communities through effective access to the SUS, and the reduction of work related risks. The engagement of fisherwomen in the Grupo Terra has been fundamental for the inclusion of the specific needs of fishing communities in this policy.

The creation of ten new Health Referral Centres for Rural Workers was highlighted. The new centres will directly target farmers, fishers and the forest population to prevent illness and accidents at work, and train and sensitize health workers on how to treat and correctly report cases.

The participation of fisherwomen in the Municipal Health Councils was also discussed. These councils are collegiate bodies constituted by representatives of organized society (50 percent), health workers (25 percent) and government representatives and service providers (25 percent). The Councils help formulate strategies, and apply social controls to the implementation of health policy. Because fisherwomen had participated in these spaces, their work, health problems and relations with the environment were now better understood, forcing the health units to produce documentation that made their situation more visible.

Finally, the importance of recognizing fishing territories and the lives and work of fishing communities as a basic precondition for comprehensive health was highlighted. Comprehensive health, it was noted, needed to be understood as physical, mental and

social wellbeing, and not merely the absence of disease.

The various panels discussed the difficulties fisherwomen had in trying to access social security. The fisherwomen had formally requested the Social Security Ministry (MPS) and the Fisheries and Aquaculture Ministry (MPA) to participate in the panel discussions. Rather than sending federal agents, these Ministries sent local and state level agents who were neither informed nor able to reply to questions posed by the fisherwomen. Even worse, the MPA representative brought bibles and kitchen aprons as presents, implying that cooking and prayer were more appropriate for women than discussing policy. The fisherwomen’s reaction was emphatic; the principle of secularism (a principle of the Brazil Constitution) had been violated, and the government had thus clearly demonstrated their lack of recognition and respect for this national social movement.

The Social Security Institute (INSS), responsible for paying pensions, death, sickness, accident and other benefits, took part in the panel titled “Social Security: Recognition, secure rights, and elimination of discrimination”. Fisherwomen highlighted a series of complaints. These included excessive requirements for proof of their activities; lack of recognition for specific work-related ailments; corrupt practices; lack of preparation on the part of the agents attending to the fisherwomen; and discrimination and institutional racism practiced by specialist doctors certifying cases worthy of social benefits and other actors.

As the representative of the MPA had already left, only fisherwomen participated in the panel titled “RGP: Recognition and secure access for women”. The panel drew attention to the failure to regulate the Article in the recently-introduced Fisheries Law of 2009 that broadened the concept of fisheries to include pre- and post-harvest activities. While the legislation allowed women to be recognized as professional fisherwomen, its implementation was inadequate. Another problem highlighted was the MPA’s requirement for annual renewal of the General Register of Fisheries Activity (RGP) as the Ministry was not adequately structured to process the paperwork every year, and fishers were hard-pressed to travel from their places of work to the Ministry offices.

The panel titled “Species caught by fisherwomen: research, and fixing the closed season” had a presentation from a participant from the MPA and one from a woman researcher who presented the case of Para State. The fisherwomen proposed that the

**Their demands included the protection of traditional fishing territories; putting labour rights and social protection into practice; recognizing occupational ailments; and establishing a closed season for fishery species targeted by women with a guaranteed compensation.**

government should establish a closed season for the species they target to ensure sustainability. Currently, the closed season is restricted to only the species of greatest commercial importance and caught by men. In addition, they said that the closed season does not serve its purpose as the period of closure is inadequate because it does not heed fishers' knowledge.

There was a session titled "SSF Guidelines and Gender Issues". The process leading up to the adoption of the SSF Guidelines and the role played by civil society organizations was explained, highlighting, in particular, the participation of fishermen and fisherwomen from Brazil. The role and rights of women as addressed in the SSF Guidelines was also explained. Discussions underlined the need to press the government to implement the SSF Guidelines at the national level. This would not be easy, given that the current government promotes aquaculture and industrial fishing at the expense of artisanal fisheries.

The session ended with an emotional tribute to Chandrika Sharma. Her dedication to defending artisanal fisheries and the rights of women fishworkers was highlighted. An image was displayed with the text "Chandrika lives and will live on in the struggles of artisanal fisherwomen and fishermen!"

At the end of the meeting, there were retrospective discussions on the road taken by the ANP which identified successes at different levels. The professional recognition of fisherwomen by the new fisheries law was highlighted together with the progress made towards recognizing occupational

health problems and also fisherwomen's participation in the social control of the public health system. Fisherwomen talked about the freedom they had gained from getting out of their houses to participate in the movement. They gained access to information and political training which enabled them to effectively participate in the collective struggle.

The fisherwomen set out their main demands for the next period. These included the protection of traditional fishing territories; putting labour rights and social protection into practice; recognizing occupational ailments; and establishing a closed season for fishery species targeted by women with a guaranteed compensation.

To take these demands forward women emphasized the need to strengthen the organization at the level of States, generate and train more leaders; and improve internal and external communication of the ANP, in order to improve interactions between fisherwomen and give them greater visibility in the society. They also decided to hold the next national meeting, scheduled for 2016, in the State of Maranhão.

The final statement ended with a dedication that expressed the strength and warrior spirit of Brazilian fisherwomen's social movement: "In memory of Chandrika Sharma, strong defender of artisanal fisheries and the rights of women, and in memory of our ancestors, we will forge ahead, until all artisanal fisherwomen have secure rights that are put into practice and until artisanal fishing is free from the impositions of the agro-business and hydro-business." ❏

## What's New, Webby?



By **Ramya Rajagopalan**  
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## The 2015 Beijing +20 Review Process

The fifty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) will take place at the United Nations Headquarters in New York from 9 to 20 March 2015.

The main focus of the session will be on the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, including the current challenges that affect its implementation and the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women. The Commission will undertake a review of progress made in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, 20 years after its adoption at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995. The review (Beijing +20) will also include the outcomes of the 23rd special session of the General Assembly, the first five-year assessment conducted after

the adoption of the Platform for Action, which highlighted further actions and initiatives. The regional commissions of the United Nations will undertake regional reviews. Both the national and regional review processes will feed into the global review.

The critical areas of concern include women and the environment; women in power and decision-making; the girl child; women and the economy; women and poverty; violence against women; the human rights of women; education and training of women; institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women; women and health; women and the media and women and armed conflict.

[www.unwomen.org/en/csw/csw59-2015](http://www.unwomen.org/en/csw/csw59-2015). ❏



# Coastal and fisherwomen in action!

**In Portugal, the Estrela do Mar network turns into a formal association following a two-day training workshop**

By **Katia Frangoudes** (Katia.Frangoudes@neuf.fr), facilitator of the AKTEA network, Member, ICSF  
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For more than ten years, Portuguese fisherwomen had been members of Estrela do Mar (Sea Star), an informal network under the umbrella of Mútua dos Pescadores, a specialized insurance company, registered as a co-operative, for fisheries and maritime activities. The fisherwomen decided to work together as part of an informal network to get to know each other before establishing a formal association. In this period, Estrela do Mar was able to successfully promote fisherwomen rights within the fisheries sector. Their presence was acknowledged in all projects promoted by Mútua dos Pescadores as helping to build a strong *esprit de corps* within the informal structure.

The first steps toward building the network were taken in 2002 by Cristina Moço, Director of Department of Social Action and Training at Mútua dos Pescadores, within the framework of a European project for the establishment of fisherwomen organisations in Europe. The project helped Portuguese fisherwomen learn from the experiences of other fisherwomen in Europe and establish their own informal network, later named Estrela do Mar. In 2006, Estrela do Mar joined AKTEA—the network of fisherwomen's organisations in the European Union. Estrela do Mar was one of the first groups to integrate with the Regional Advisory Council (RAC) of South Atlantic and to participate in the decision making process of fisheries management in the region. More

recently, efforts were undertaken at regional levels, facilitated by Maria Baptista and Marta Pita under the banner of Mútua dos Pescadores, to help transform the network into an association. This effort through meetings and discussions of the fisherwomen was possible with official co-financing from European funds through their PROMAR (Fisheries Operational Programme 2007 to 2013) programme.

On 19 September 2014, 35 fisherwomen representatives from five Portuguese regions met at IPMA (the Portuguese Institute of the Sea and Atmosphere) in Algés near Lisbon, to adopt the by-laws of the network, soon to become a formal association. The meeting presented the charter the challenges ahead to various representatives of unions and of political parties, to the Adviser of the President of the Republic, and to representatives of the Commission for Equality in Labour and Employment, who had all been invited to the event.

Estrela do Mar is active in bringing together women working as fishers, spouses of fishers playing an active role in the family business, net menders, shellfish gatherers on foot and boat, small-scale fish vendors, managers in the sector, factory workers, and workers at fishers associations. The association also has members from local coastal associations for culture and development. It sees its primary role during the present economic crisis as being able to maintain fisheries activity at the community level, while simultaneously bringing in a gender perspective. These issues were discussed and highlighted at the meeting in September.

BRUNO COSTA



Participants at the national level meeting of Estrela do Mar (Sea Star). Estrela do Mar were able to successfully promote fisherwomen rights within the fisheries sector and their presence was acknowledged in all projects promoted by Mútua dos Pescadores


AKTEA network also participated in this meeting and explained the role it plays for the promotion of the gender dimension in the fisheries at the European level.

On the following day, women participants met in smaller groups as well as in the plenary to prepare the Plan of Activities to be taken up by the Board of the Association. The discussions helped participants articulate their own needs, listen to their regional needs of their neighbours, and finally, to find a national resonance of a common shared agenda.

There is the need to improve women's knowledge and skills. During the present

economic crisis, women are looking to find new jobs, and also improve their qualifications to sustain their livelihoods. Women are even prepared to train to become crew aboard fishing vessels. The availability of women as potential crew members can present a solution for artisanal boats (small-scale fishers) facing difficulties to recruit crew.

Caring and raising children is mainly women's work and their ability to work on fishing boats would depend on the family's capacity to take care of the children when they are away. Nurseries within the communities need to respond to women's changing needs,



All their lives, Mwanahawa (41) and Kulthum (22) have lived in Bagamoyo in the north eastern part of Tanzania, an area known to be rich in a variety of marine species owing to the varied ecosystems to be found there—sandy and muddy tidal flats, mangroves, coral reefs, rocky intertidal platforms, sea grass and algal beds, lagoons and estuaries.

Mwanahawa and Kulthum make their living from *kutanda ushimba* or collecting small shrimp. Such shrimp (*Acetes* sp.) are to

The dwindling numbers are because the work is hard and the income from it simply not enough. normal daily catch size today is about four containers weighing about ten kg each. Selling at TShs 10,000 per container, (US\$ 5.71) the women can get TShs 40,000 (US\$ 22.87) a day, which is divided amongst the three group members. Dried *ushimba* sold inland fetches more income but is in demand only during the dry season when fresh *ushimba* is scarce. Just five years ago, a group of women could easily hope to harvest up to ten containers a day. What explains this decline in catch?

*Ushimba*, according to Mwanahanwa and Kulthum, is collected during the monthly *bamvua* or spring tide. They say that the catch has been falling because of the recent entry of male collectors leading to greater competition. Also, some of the newer entrants use sophisticated fishing gear capable of greater extraction. Indeed, the numbers of fishers and boats officially recorded in the region, has more than doubled in the last 25 years. Says Kulthum, "During spring tide, many fishers converge in these waters using *ngalawa* (small vessels), and cast seine nets to which nets with small mesh size are illegally attached. So they end up catching even the small shrimp that used to come up to the near shore waters where we women traditionally have fished". Mwanahawa adds that in earlier days, the men of the community would leave near shore spaces for women; however today, the entry of outsiders has upset this traditional understanding.

Changing land use patterns means that agriculture as an alternate livelihood option is also outside the reach of Mwanahanwa, Kulthum and the other *ushimba* collectors of Bagamoyo. Their only hope today is to secure petty loans from village community banks to establish small businesses of their own. These however are still in the making. ❏

## PROFILE

# Casting the net for less in the Bagamoyo fisheries —Mwanahawa and Kulthum

**Ushimba (small-shrimp) collectors from Bagamoyo, Tanzania**

This profile is by  
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be found along the inner shores of the Indian Ocean. This activity however is traditionally not regarded as *uvuvi* or fishing by the coastal communities, for whom fishing means only the capture fisheries, a domain of men. Yet, collecting *ushimba* has been an age-long endeavor, one that for long has provided an accessible livelihood option for coastal women. Unlike fishing, it does not require a license for entry; all the gear required is a net, or even just a piece of cloth, called *khanga*, to serve as a net; but what it does is demand physical endurance for the periods of time spent in the waters. The women go out in groups of three, usually comprising close family members. The trade is passed down the generations, usually from mother to daughter, grand-daughter or daughter-in-law.

Kulthum entered the trade when she was 12 and Mwanahawa at 20. Only fifteen known *ushimba* collectors remain today in Bagamoyo from a previously recorded number of 20.



for example, to factor into the daily routine the impact of tides, craft might have to leave shore and return to shore on high tide. Separate toilets and showers for women are important when working on larger fishing craft out at sea for long periods. Many women drew attention to the lack of these facilities not only on craft but even in harbours.

Specific attention has to be paid to needs of old women, widows and elderly people facing difficulties because of low social security coverage and small pension entitlements. Houses for elderly people could be established within fisheries communities.

There is need to strongly defend the fisheries activity. The consumption of wild fish instead of fish grown through aquaculture should be promoted; otherwise it will be more and more difficult for fishers to earn their livelihood. Portugal's consumers are currently able to access fish produced through aquaculture as well as imported fish. This has to be regulated if the fisheries are to survive.

Women net menders from the town of Peniche asked for better working conditions, in clean surroundings—safe from rain, wind and hard sun. They stressed the need to open this activity to women coming in from other harbours; some of the net menders volunteered to train newcomers.

Traditional lace making, which produces *renda de bilros* or bobbin lace, common in Peniche and also in Vila do Conde, is an example of alternative source of income. After the meeting, women lace-makers showed their

products. A first prototype of their logo—a fish star—was shown. It was discussed that this could be used as a gift or a form of raising money for the association. Preserving cultural and other values of fisheries communities and transmitting these to the next generation is seen as a common duty. Preserving stories, songs, plays, and dialects as a form of maintaining and continuing social identity and coherence is considered a necessity by the women.

As a network they expressed willingness to contribute to the maintenance of this common heritage. The promotion of the fisheries heritage at a community level also means the preservation of the local art of wooden boat building, which is often beach-specific and adapted to the specificity of the coastal waters or natural harbours. The women not only used these boats to fish or collect shells, but also decorated them on the days of their patron saints—the Senhora das Dores (Lady of Pain), the Senhora da Agonia (Lady of Agony), and so on.

Portuguese law demands that a national association like Estrela do Mar should have at least 1000 members before its opinions are formally taken into account. This is a high target and requires a lot of work at the regional level. For this reason it is important that the Board and the members are supported to meet regularly through well-designed workshops. The association expressed the hope that it would continue to receive support in this endeavour from the Commission for Equality in Labour and Employment. ❏

Specific attention has to be paid to needs of old women, widows and elderly people facing difficulties because of low social security coverage and small pension entitlements.

ASIA

INDIA

## Empty boats, loaded trucks

**Rapid changes in fish marketing in a small village in Kerala, India, highlight complex market dynamics and throw up difficult questions**

By **Nalini Nayak**  
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A few days ago I visited the fishing village of Pallam in the southern coast of Trivandrum, India. This is a densely populated fishing area. Women fish vendors in the SEWA (Self Employed Women's Association) Union had told me that they were facing harassment from the fish agents and were being badly abused. They also said that in some areas, these agents had been

banned because they bring in bad fish. Initially I was confused because I did not understand why agents in Pallam were bringing in fish. On enquiring, they told me, 'Oh, you have not come to the shore for long and that is why you do not see the hundreds of trucks that come in every morning with fish from all over the country.' I had seen a couple of trucks on some occasions when I passed the coast, but I had not seen any substantial number. So I decided to go one early morning and it was indeed a surprise. It was a day when there was a hurricane on the east coast and so the trucks from that area had not come in, but yet there



Insulated vans bringing iced and frozen fish to the sea shore in Pallam, Kerala, India

were quite a number and the shore was as busy as ever. Hundreds of women fish vendors buying fish, sorting it, repacking it and taking off in auto-rickshaws (three-wheeled vehicles) to the market.

The women told me that this had been going on for the last four or five years and the number of trucks coming in had gradually increased in numbers. There were women from all the neighbouring villages who had come to buy fish

there. This was not an unusually bad time for fishing—the end of the monsoon, but yet, the fishing boats that were coming in did not have much of a catch and hence, did not have much to sell. Moreover, what they did bring home—good fresh mackerel—the women did not want to buy. The auctions were commencing at rates they did not think would be profitable to buy at. I saw an auctioneer try six times to restart the auction, always bringing down the price, and still there were no takers. I do not know what price he finally sold his fish at because women were just turning away and the auctioneer knew that the fisher would be at a huge loss if he sold any lower.

We had seen a similar situation in the wholesale market, when fish caught by the larger trawlers and other crafts was brought in from the big landing centres, and the women vendors purchased for retail sales. But a wholesale market of this kind right there in the fishing village was a more recent phenomenon, and very disturbing for the following reasons.

The fish brought in plastic crates looked extremely old. It was packed with ice which, according to some merchants, had been treated with ammonia, so the fish was semi-frozen. The women examined the fish in the crates and then bid for a crate at a time. Then they settled down with their crates, repacked the fish in their containers, again adding ice and salt. In a small container they also carried some sea sand, to sprinkle on

the fish before selling to give the impression of fresh fish from the shore.

Along with the crates, there were also cartons of frozen fish. The label on the carton said reef cod but bore no date or country name. The fish inside was like stone and the women who bought it told me they would take it to their village and salt and dry it. When I spoke to the truck driver, I was told that this fish was brought from the cold storage of the Cochin harbor. This brought back memories of women at the Accra harbor in Ghana buying fish in cartons from the cold storages, where the European fishing fleet had sold the fish that they had fished off the west African coast back to the African women. These women too had no more fish on their shores, and took the frozen fish to their villages to smoke and preserve. I did not think I would see this in our fishing village, at least in my lifetime. But things have changed rapidly.

There were a couple of other striking features on the shore. I was surprised to see the number of younger women with books and pens, writing down the accounts of the auction. These literate local women were a new layer of people involved in the marketing chain. Earlier the auctioning agents themselves kept these accounts and claimed the money from the women buyers. Now it was the younger women who heckled the women buyers to return their dues. These women were paid a daily wage which was quite substantial. But the man who actually auctioned the fish seemed the villain in the chain. In addition to a percentage of the sales price, he also kept a portion of fish after the auction was settled. This was a loss to the woman who actually bought the fish, and she had no way of controlling this.

The other new phenomenon was the number of women who worked as head loaders. Women now found employment to unload fish from the boats, and also from the trucks. This was well paid wage work, payment being both on a piece-rate and on a daily-wage basis. The stronger women who did not want to leave the village to sell fish took to this work. Wage work in the community was now an established phenomenon for women in fishing, and all this work continued to be unrecognized and unrewarded.

The women vendors who are members of the SEWA union were ambiguous about what they thought of this phenomenon. On the one hand, they felt this was a reality that they could not wish away. There was not enough

fish being caught on their shores, and therefore the incoming trucks helped them access fish from other shores. They could thus continue to eke a livelihood through fish trade. On the other hand, this brought down the value of the catches of their own fishermen who landed fish on their shores. The fresh fish had to compete with fish from trucks. Moreover, there was no control over the quality of the fish the trucks brought in.

The women were angry with the men agents who spoke to them roughly, often using vulgar language. They resented the practice of the auctioneer taking away a part of the fish as his share. They would rather pay a fixed percentage of the total auction value, but not this unregulated payment in kind.

According to the merchant who had started this market, “This is all about markets—fish has to move from the shore to the consumer. In this process hundreds of people can make a living. So isn’t this a good system? When I see that very little fish is being landed in Pallam, I call my agents and tell them to divert the trucks with fish this side, and they come. Or when there is too much fish landing here, I ask the agents to come and buy from here for other markets. The price is determined by the availability and the demand in the market and the fisherman is the winner in the long run”. This merchant said that when he started this market in Pallam eight years ago, there were only twelve boats catching fish in this village.

Now there were over a hundred. Similarly, there used to be just a few women from the village purchasing the fish, but now there were hundreds. There were 17 teams of merchants—each with its own labour chain. There were also teams of ice suppliers with their own chain of labourers. As he explained, “Look at the employment we have generated, and we are all local people. We contribute to the local economy, and to the Church whom we pay two percent of the income. So the Church has managed to also build a community hall and other services for the community. We have a Merchants’ Association and we control the quality of fish that comes into the village and we are sure it is not bad fish.” However, he was unaware of where the frozen reef cod in cartons came from.

So while the merchant was right in saying that the fish market looked alive and a large number of people had gained employment, the gains from the process were certainly not equitable. Just observing the various players, and their housing and other facilities, the class differentiation among them was clearly visible. The major gains went to the large merchants, and the Church had also substantially grown in size and stature. The others were merely surviving. ❏

**Interview with Micheline Dion Somplehi (39), fish seller/processor at Abidjan, leader of the cooperative AVEPFFA (Association of Women Fresh and Smoked Fish Traders) and Coordinator of Women’s Programme of CAOPA (African Confederation of Small Scale Fisheries Professional Organizations)**

By **Katia Frangoudes** (Katia.Frangoudes@univ-brest.fr), Member, ICSF

**Where are you from and when did you start working as a fish processor?**

I am from a fishing family in Abidjan. I took to fish processing because my family couldn’t afford to pay for my further studies. In 2002, I stopped studies and joined my mother as a fish processor. Later on, I set up a small fish business.

**Why did you start fighting for the rights of fish processors?**

Until 2002, women fish processors in Abidjan were working as individuals. Most were migrants. Many had lost husbands to war and had to work to support their families. Working conditions were very bad. I decided to help organize these women. In 2010, we established an association of women fish sellers and processors, and I became the chairperson.

**What difficulties did you face as an activist?**

Initially, my husband couldn’t understand my activism. Neighbours asked why he allowed me to spend time working as an organiser. I had to convince him that my work benefitted not only others but also myself as a fish processor. My mother lost her eyesight because she used a bad oven to dry fish, and had to stop working. Now my husband is more supportive.

**Please describe your main struggles.**

We first fought for better working conditions and tried to facilitate the integration of migrant women locally. But as an association we could not undertake commercial activities. Therefore, in 2012, we joined AVEPFFA and created a Women’s Section there. I am the Chair of the Women’s Section and also AVEPFFA’s Administrative Council. Our participation in the International Day of Artisanal Fishers in 2012, organized by CAOPA in Abidjan, gave us visibility at the national level. This helped us get finances for an FAO oven, which meant better, smoke-free working conditions, and greater processed fish production.

**What are your current priorities?**

We need finances for more ovens to manage increased processing during peak season, to be able to sell fish during the low season. We need to do more about improving working conditions. We also need more fish supplies during low season and improved fish packaging for better prices. We would like to register our cooperative society. ❏

**YEMAYA MAMA**

*It pays to organize !*





DOCUMENT

## Informal fish retailing in rural Egypt

Kantor, P., Kruijssen, F. (2014). *Opportunities to enhance income and work conditions for women and men. WorldFish, Penang, Malaysia. Project Report: 2014-51*

By Nilanjana Biswas  
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Researcher

Aquaculture has seen a steady growth in Egypt in the last two decades, and today provides 65 percent of the fish eaten by Egyptians. The aquaculture value chain employs around 100,000 workers, half of whom are youths. Fish from aquaculture is by far the cheapest source of animal protein in the country, and therefore has particular importance to the country's 21 million poor people.

Informal fish vending, particularly in rural Egypt, is the one activity in the fish aquaculture value chain that provides employment to women. However, Egyptian women face several constraints, including norms around domestic work leaving little time to engage in income generation; lack of access to working capital; and cultural norms against women's visibility in public spaces.

Improving Employment and Incomes through the Development of Egypt's Aquaculture Sector (IEIDEAS) is a project funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, and implemented in five governorates in the country. It seeks to improve the income and working conditions of women fish vendors. The present study on informal fish retailing in rural Egypt sought to conduct a gender analysis of fish vending in the aquaculture value chain, to identify how gender impacted characteristics of employment in the sector. It located its research in the areas of work of the IEIDEAS project. The study used a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, and interviewed a sample of 507 women and 241 men.

One significant finding of the study was that women fish retailers came from numerically larger families, and with greater number of children under the age of 15. This seemed to indicate that it was economic pressure that drove women to seek employment in this sector.

The study revealed certain widely-held gender stereotypes: married women should not have control over their own savings; men could not take care of children as well as women could; and that it was not acceptable for a married woman to work outside the home if her husband earned enough for the family.

The strongest endorsement was for the proposition that a woman cannot leave the home without permission of her husband. In the context, clearly, women would find it difficult to come out voluntarily and freely to take up any form of economic activity, which ties with the finding that the women took to employment because of economic pressure.

The study found that 15 percent of the women respondents were able to save some of their income while nearly 80 percent spent some on personal consumption. This finding does hold out the hope that with improved conditions in the sector, women might seek employment as a way to enriching their lives.

The most significant constraint reported by both women and men in the trade was the lack of a secure selling site. In contrast, lack of credit was not identified as a significant constraint by most respondents. This is not surprising given the small size of operation of the rural fish vendors. The situation could change if external development aid allowed women and men to access more capital and assets and move to more profitable avenues of fish trade. ❏



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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.