



**28** Years in Support of  
Small-scale Fishworkers

# Yemaya

ICSF'S NEWSLETTER ON GENDER AND FISHERIES

## From the Editor

March 8, or International Women's Day, is an occasion for women across the world to gather in solidarity to mark women's ongoing struggles for equality, freedom, dignity and a violence-free life. For more than a hundred years, ever since the historic protests of New York's garment workers forced the commemoration of this important day, March 8 has also been an occasion for women on their long road to freedom to take collective stock of gains made and setbacks suffered, and to plan ahead. As examples from across the world in this issue of Yemaya illustrate, so it is in the case of women in fishing and coastal communities, whose lives are a daily testament to the spirit of struggle and resilience underlying International Women's Day.

On the occasion of March 8, it is fitting to honour women activists like Tahira Shah and Chandrika Sharma whose lives were spent ceaselessly championing the rights of small-scale fishworkers, particularly women, across the world. The life of Tahira Shah, the militant leader of the Pakistan Fisher Forum, who passed away recently, was a testament to struggle—struggle that began with fighting the shackles of conservatism within her natal family, and continued throughout a life dedicated to improving the lives of Pakistan's small-scale fishers.

March 8 this year also marks a year since the disappearance of the flight MH370 with ICSF's Executive Secretary Chandrika Sharma on board. Ever committed to the principles of gender justice, Chandrika believed that "if our aim is to valorize the artisanal fisheries sector, by the same logic we will have to work to valorize the role of women in the sector and the vital contribution of nature and its services to the life and livelihood of fishing communities." Commemorating her invaluable contributions to the drafting of the Voluntary Guidelines on Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries (SSF Guidelines), a recent workshop in Chennai on the SSF Guidelines urged that these be implemented with the same principles of "commitment, correctness, and consciousness of the great cycle of life" that Chandrika espoused.

Activists like Tahira and Chandrika were deeply conscious that the full consequences of the chronic official neglect of the small-scale fisheries are borne primarily by women. Women in the sector lead uncertain lives without secure livelihoods. They face regular harassment from the State, as the case of the fisherwomen of Kultali in the Sunderbans in India shows. Their livelihood sources are polluted and degraded by commercial interests, while the government turns a blind eye to the rule of law, as evident from the examples from Pakistan. In Chile, as in most countries, women in the fisheries, for the same jobs, earn less than men, while the official non-recognition of certain types of female labour disbars benefit claims. March 8 is an occasion for us to renew our pledge to end such realities and forge new paths of autonomy and hope.

The struggles for livelihood freedom tell only a part of the story. A vital struggle for women is for parity within their organizations, and also within their own homes, as articulated by the women leaders of CONAPACH in Chile. The struggles of women within homes, organizations, and with the outside world, all help weave a net of feminist consciousness that supports women and enables them to build powerful and effective organizations at every level to fight for their rights. ■



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# Long Live Women's Day

**On International Women's Day on March 8, 2015, women from fishing communities from different parts of the world strengthened their central role in the livelihood struggles of their communities**

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For women across the world, March 8 symbolizes the International Women's Day—a day that marks the struggles of women for gaining equality and freedom, for ending gender-based discrimination and violence in all aspects of life, and for a more just and equitable world order. This year, women from fishing communities from different parts of the world marked the day in their own different ways. The following examples, from fishing communities in three continents, Pakistan and Sri Lanka in Asia, Chile from the Americas, and Guinea-Bissau and Uganda in Africa, bring out the different immediate priorities facing fishing women, while stressing the underlying common threads of their struggles.

A large number of fisherwomen and peasant women, wearing traditional dresses and carrying rose petals, thronged lakes and river streams in different parts of Pakistan, and paid tribute to the water bodies on the International Women's Day. The events were part of a 14-day programme of activities, designed by Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum (PFF) to celebrate the International Day of Action for Rivers. The women showered rose petals and poured water from jars into streams, while praying for the rehabilitation of their rivers from degradation and pollution.

The main event was held on the banks of Narreri Lake. This event brought government officials and community people together to celebrate the International Women's Day under the theme "Women and Water". In the area they gathered, Narreri Lake no longer receives fresh water, and the fisher families inhabiting the area face acute fresh water shortage.

Related events in other areas in the region drew public attention to other pressing issues: the destruction of the Indus Delta, ocean grabbing, water shortage, mass migration of communities from their ancestral abodes to places of safety. The events tried to showcase how people dependent on marine and inland waters today face a livelihood crisis, and how their future generations would face the same, if not worse, if the state continued to neglect their rights.

There are lakes in the area, which once had abundant freshwater, and were able to afford the native communities a decent living. These communities are being forced to migrate for better living and survival of their future generations. They believe that indigenous prosperity and the future of their way of life is related to the restoration of natural water bodies through the free flow of the rivers that constitute the Indus, which is unable to end its flow with natural discharge into the sea. Makal Shah of the PFF said it is not only fishers who face this plight, but also livestock holders and farmers, and maintained that without fresh water to feed the deltas and lakes, ecology itself is in peril. "Habitats of wildlife species have been threatened due to degradation of fresh water lakes and the deltaic region" he said.

In yet another part of South Asia, in Negombo, Sri Lanka, women fishers belonging to the Sri Vimukthi Fisher Women Organization held a public function to observe International Women's Day to which they invited government representatives and members of a local political party. Sri Vimukthi was established in 2000 by a small group of about 15 women whose husbands had been arrested by the Indian coast guard. Since then it has gone on to play a major role in defending rights of fishers in Sri Lanka.

Meanwhile, across the oceans, in Chile, to mark the International Women's Day, the six women-board members of the National Confederation of Chilean Artisanal Fishers (CONAPACH) issued a joint message to highlight the important contribution made by women workers in the artisanal fishery sector.

BEMBA CAMARA / REJOPRAO



On March 8, 2015, women in artisanal fisheries from Guinea-Bissau, along with their sisters from Benin, Cape Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Mauritania, Senegal and Togo took the fishermen's house in Bissau fishing port, Guinea - Bissau by storm

The statement highlighted that although fishing is generally perceived as a man's world, this is changing, thanks to the advances made by women in recent years. Whilst men may make up most of the workforce in seagoing fishery activities, women dominate in shore-based activities. However the overall contribution made by women is difficult to evaluate because official fishery statistics generally don't include women working in the upstream and downstream segments of the fishery chain. For example, women who work as *encarnadoras*, rigging nets, baiting hooks and preparing the gear for fishing, and who process fish, do not appear in any official statistics. Yet without their work, many artisanal fishery operations would not be possible. The Chilean Artisanal Fishery Register records that around 23 percent of the extractive workforce in the fisheries sector are women.

The message further noted that women leaders in CONAPACH comprise just below three percent of the total board members of CONAPACH, reflecting a large gap to be filled if they are to be representative of the number of women in the sector (23 percent), and a much larger gap, if parity with men is the target.

On 8 March 2015, women in artisanal fisheries from Guinea-Bissau, along with their sisters from Benin, Cape Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Mauritania, Senegal and Togo took the Fishermen's House in Bissau fishing port, Guinea-Bissau by storm. This country was selected by the African Confederation of Professional Artisanal Fisheries Organizations (CAOPA) to celebrate the feisty women in the sector.

The Fishermen's House, a hall some 50 m long and 30 m wide, is usually occupied by fishermen just returned from the sea, used for repairing their nets, recounting their tales and mishaps, and resting before returning to sea. However, on the Sunday of March 8, there was no place for any men in the Fisherman's House. More than a thousand women took over the place to celebrate International Women's Day, in the presence of Guinea-Bissau's Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, and Cape Verde Minister in charge of the maritime economy.

The Prime Minister, referring to societal inequality in the past, stressed "We need consensus to promote investment, to build infrastructure to achieve economic independence, to improve the lives of women, youth and our population in general." He added that "Women are the major emergent force in the world. In Guinea-Bissau, thanks to their decisive contribution, their force is

increasing and becoming ever more prevalent. Today, we need the strength of women more than ever, because we need a change of attitude to trace a new future for our youth, honouring our past and those women, who in the 1960s, fought alongside men for our independence."

Thousands of miles from Guinea-Bissau, in East Africa, during the celebrations to mark International Women's Day on March 8, 2015 at Kigezi in Uganda, the President of the country, H. E Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, awarded a medal of honour to Margaret Nakato of the Katosi Women Development Trust (KWDT), an organization whose work Yemaya has consistently covered in its pages. On this occasion, a KWDT statement, said: "The significant efforts that Margaret has invested for the last 19 years, in organizing women to be in charge of their development and that of their communities is evidently yielding abundant results as reflected in the lives of rural women in Mukono."

It is important to note that the various commemorations of the International Women's Day this year highlighted the importance of recognising the source of livelihood for coastal communities, while stressing on the important role played by women in the livelihood struggles of coastal people. We may recall here that the origins of the International Women's Day were in the struggles of women workers for regulation of conditions of work. Even today, the struggles of women of fishing communities continue to be for regulation of their working conditions and environment—whether we consider the demand of the women from Pakistan for restoring their rivers and lakes; or of Chile for official recognition of the work done by women; or the fisherwomen of Guinea-Bissau, Benin, Cape Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Mauritania, Senegal and Togo for societal equality and economic independence of women. We should also pay heed to the demand, most clearly articulated in the joint statement of the six women leaders of CONAPACH that parity for women has to be achieved even within their organizations, and also within their own homes.

(With inputs from Brian O'Riordan, and from the following websites:

<http://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2015/03/10/city/karachi/fisherwomen-celebrate-world-womens-day/>;

<http://rejoprao.info/2015/03/11/la-guinee-bissau-fiere-de-ses-femmes/#more-218>;

and <http://www.nafso-online.org/2015/03/world-womens-day-commemorated-at-negombo.html>)

**The International Women's Day highlighted the importance of recognising the source of livelihood for coastal communities while stressing on the important role played by women in the livelihood struggles of coastal people.**



# Equal Work, Unequal Pay

A research study reveals that increasing numbers of women are joining Chile's lucrative salmon industry, doing the same jobs as men but for less pay

By **Eduardo Ramírez Vera** (eramirez@rimisp.org), Centro Latinoamericano para el Desarrollo Rural (Latin American Centre for Rural Development), RIMISP

Developing countries like Chile generally have lower labour participation rates for women as compared to developed economies. Women's restricted participation in the labour market is a major reason for low household incomes. Furthermore, when women do secure employment, their incomes are in general lower than for men. This is true also for men and women working in the Chilean export manufacturing sector.

Labour economists have used different factors to explain the decisions of women to participate in the labour force. These include education and experience, the opportunity cost of not taking up employment, income of other salaried workers in the household, the existence of taxes and subsidies, the presence of children in the household, and the family. In addition, factors affecting access to labour markets—for example, the existence of

networking opportunities, and cultural factors such as *machismo*—have also been considered in recent studies.

Can there be territorially-specific factors that influence labour market access? If so, would they have implications for determining territorially-specific and gendered effects of national employment policies? These issues are discussed here in the context of labour participation of women in the salmon industry in Chiloé, Chile.

Between 1990 and 2008, national salmon production increased from 29,000 to 600,000 tons per annum, and Chile became the second largest salmon producer of the world, with exports reaching USD 2.5 billion in 2008. The successful development of the salmon industry was driven by a unique combination of hydro-biological conditions, counter-cyclical production methods, and low costs of production and transportation. Some commentators have also emphasized the comparative advantages of Chile's rather lenient environmental and labour regulations and liberal marine resource allocation regulations. The transformation of the salmon industry in Chiloé led to a rapid increase in women's employment.

PATRICIO MELILLANCA



Former salmon workers from various companies in Puerto Montt, gateway to Chiloé. Many have now left the sector to seek better pay and conditions elsewhere. The increasing rate of women's participation in the labour market in Chiloé could be the result of these changes

Chiloé Island, with an area of 8,394 square kilometers, is the second largest island in Chile, after the Isla Grande de Tierra del Fuego, and the fifth largest in South America. In recent times, increasing numbers of women in Chiloé have been joining the labour force. The increasing rate of women's participation in the labour market in Chiloé could be the result of changes in cultural patterns, temporary migration of men, and the development of agriculture in the absence of male labour. These are not factors taken into account in most studies on women's participation in employment in the region, which have tended to focus only on changes in demand generated by the aquaculture industry.

Our data is obtained from a household survey that was designed and carried out in May and June 2009. The survey covered 856 households in both rural and urban areas. Households were selected using information and maps obtained from the 1992 population census. The survey collected past and current social, economic, and workforce information, as well as opinions of respondents on various topics related to the economic and social dynamics of Chiloé.

The research analysis is based on the assumption that women workers in the salmon industry are familiar with agriculture, fishing, the collection of seafood products and handicrafts. It indicates that factors such as age, number of years of schooling, the presence of children in the household and marital status are all important determinants for women taking up employment in the salmon industry. The analysis also shows the existence of gender-based salary bias within the salmon industry, with average salaries for men of USD 560 per month while female salaries are around USD 360 per month. This difference persists when we control the data by heterogeneity of labour, that is, the wage difference is not dependent on type of labour or different productivity levels between men and women.

The results suggest that in Chiloé, economic growth has not led to a decrease in wage gaps, even in the presence of economic, social, and cultural conditions that facilitate a higher level of participation by women in the salaried labour market. This finding supports the argument for specific, territorially-sensitive policies as being necessary for removing gender-based salary discrimination. ❏

**Economic growth has not led to a decrease in wage gaps, even in the presence of economic, social, and cultural conditions that facilitate a higher level of participation by women in the salaried labour market.**



## Milestones

By **Ramya Rajagopalan**  
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### Women 2000

The fifty-ninth session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women was held in New York from March 9-20, 2015. At this session, and in the context of the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995, a review and appraisal of the implementation of the outcomes of the Conference and of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly was undertaken, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century". The Political Declaration of the session, while welcoming the progress made towards achieving gender equality, however expressed concern that progress had been slow and uneven and that major gaps and obstacles remained in the implementation of the twelve critical areas of concern of the Platform for Action. It committed to achieve measurable results by 2020 and to fully realize gender equality, the empowerment of women and the human rights of women and girls by 2030.

While the Political Declaration was a milestone for the UN Commission on the Status of Women, it attracted strong criticism from civil society organizations (CSOs), who issued

a joint statement in this context. Signed by nearly 1000 CSOs, the statement asserted that "At a time when urgent action is needed to fully realize gender equality, the human rights and empowerment of women and girls, we need renewed commitment, a heightened level of ambition, real resources, and accountability. This Political Declaration, instead, represents a bland reaffirmation of existing commitments that fails to match the level of ambition in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and in fact threatens a major step backward."

The statement proceeded to outline CSO expectations of an effective Political Declaration, necessary to achieve the full realization of the human rights of women and girls.

The Declaration is available at: [www.unwomen.org/en/csw/csw59-2015/session-outcomes](http://www.unwomen.org/en/csw/csw59-2015/session-outcomes)

The CSO critique is available at: [www.awid.org/eng/News-Analysis/59th-Session-of-the-Commission-on-the-Status-of-Women/CSW59-Declarations-and-Statements2/Statement-on-the-Political-Declaration-on-the-occasion-of-the-20th-anniversary-of-the-Fourth-World-Conference-on-Women](http://www.awid.org/eng/News-Analysis/59th-Session-of-the-Commission-on-the-Status-of-Women/CSW59-Declarations-and-Statements2/Statement-on-the-Political-Declaration-on-the-occasion-of-the-20th-anniversary-of-the-Fourth-World-Conference-on-Women) ❏

# A Right to Fish, a Fight to Live

**In the Sundarbans forest in the east coast of India, women canoe fishers organize themselves to secure their constitutionally-protected right to survival and livelihood**

By **Urvashi Sarkar** (urvashisarkar@gmail.com), journalist, and researcher with South Solidarity Initiative

A tall and lean fisherwoman with a strong face stares at the evening sun fading into the still waters running through Kultali, an island in the Sunderbans forest; Anima Mandal is angry. She hasn't eaten since morning.

She was there for a meeting that the Kultali Forest Range beat officer had fixed for 2 pm on February 14, 2015 at the forest range compound in a corner of Kultali, across a river. Nearly 50 women, and a few men, had turned up for this crucial meeting to make two pressing demands—the return of their confiscated fishing canoes (*dongas*) and for the women to be recognized as traditional small-scale fishworkers, with a right to fish for their livelihood.

The women, organized under the Kultali Mahila Donga Matsyajibi Samity [Kultali Women Canoe Fishers' Association], had travelled a long way from Madhya Gurguria village—on foot, on cycles fitted with wooden planks and by boat—to make it to their appointment.

It is already past 5 pm. A number of women begin tracing their steps back towards a dinghy headed homeward: some hurry back to feed and care for the children they've left at home and others return home for fear of husbands who could turn violent. Anima and a few others choose to stay

back at Kultali and represent the group, determined to get a response from the Forest Department. They walk around the compound, to the edge of a murky green pond, where their confiscated canoes of palm trunk lie stacked. The women are appalled; debris and wood bits from the canoes have started to peel off and mingle with the water. "Our canoes have been broken into pieces and thrown into the water. There must be lakhs of rupees (floating) in this river," says Geeta Sahu, a fisherwoman speaking softly. Her indignation, however, is unmistakable, shared by the workers standing beside her, still waiting.

The conversation among the waiting crowd turns to input costs: the cost of palm trunks from which the canoes are dug out, the labour cost for chiselling, and the cost for coal-tar coating maintenance, all amounting to about Rs 5,000 (USD 80). Almost every confiscation necessitates this extra expenditure on their part, to build a canoe from scratch. "It can take at least two or three months to gather such a sum. Wooden boats, permitted by the Forest Department, are too expensive to afford," explains Beena Bag, one of the fisherwomen. They walk down some distance and spot a couple of confiscated *dinghies*, still sturdy, poking out through a mass of trees. The canoes and *dinghies* are the fishworkers' only means to catch crab and fish, their sole means to earn a living. By now Anima is fuming: "Why confiscate the canoes and hurt us in the stomach? We don't earn salaries, you know. This is not Calcutta city, where each month people earn something to be deposited in the bank. Nobody is going to hand me a bag of vegetables to cook. Life is different here."

Indeed, life is starkly different in the Sunderbans. For Anima, and other fisherwomen like her, the day begins at 3 am. After housework, they take their canoes into the rivers. To make a catch, they wade into cold, chest-level water. Once they have caught the fish, they return home to cook and feed their children. Crab and fish depots are the next stop. The women come here to sell their catch with hope and no guarantees to make a little money. On days there are earnings, they are funneled into immediate household expenses, fishing input costs (if any), and

PRADIP CHATTERJEE



Women of the Mahila Donga Samity and members of the Dakshinbanga Matsyajibi Forum in front of Kultali Forest Range beat office, West Bengal, India



savings for the less fortunate days in the week. Many of the communities here are landless second or third generation fishworkers, entirely dependent on fishing for their survival. And so, what they earn will determine what they buy at the market.

Anima was 10 or 12 when she got married. She recently lost her husband to a stroke. "There is no decent hospital here. Even pregnant women need to travel for two hours to Joynagar, where there are hospitals," she exclaims, frustrated. The number of men in the Sunderbans has declined over time, mainly due to migration for better livelihoods; most move to cities as construction workers or get involved in tiger killings for the profit.

The women are also bitter about having no stake in the proposed tourism projects in the Sunderbans. "Why won't they involve us in the tourism projects? It will give us better jobs and a better quality of life. Nobody seems to want to engage with us. For instance, the big boats catch fish and crab just like we do, but it is us that the Forest Department goes after."

If life is not hard enough, the Forest Department's confiscation of their canoes has ensured that it becomes even harder. The reason cited is that since the canoes do not have a boat license certificate (BLC), granted by the Forest Department, they are therefore not authorised to ply in the Sunderbans; Kultali is part of Sunderbans reserve forest area, preventing the fishworkers from catching crab on their own land, unless they have a BLC.

The BLC regime has several problems including a non-transferable nature, the

possession of BLCs by those who are no longer fishworkers, a thriving black market, and the non-issuance of fresh licenses. ICSF study, *Report: Fishing Community Issues in the Sunderbans' Tiger Reserve* outlines these problems in detail ([http://mpa.icsf.net/images/stories/mpa/report\\_2march\\_kg.pdf](http://mpa.icsf.net/images/stories/mpa/report_2march_kg.pdf)). To deter fishworkers, the Forest Department uses methods such as seizing fishing nets; the women complained of receiving threats that glass bits would be mixed into with the riverbank sand, to prevent them from going (as they walk barefoot) to fish.

"The denial of the community rights of the forest dependent fisherwomen to fish in the forest waters is a violation of the FRA," says Pradip Chatterjee, President of the *Dakshinbanga Matsyajibi Forum*. The Forest Rights Act (FRA) is meant to secure the access rights of forest-dwelling people, including sustainable use and conservation of the biodiversity of their home grounds.

He notes that despite repeated calls, the West Bengal government is yet to notify the FRA in the North and South 24 Parganas Districts: "The failure to notify the Act has resulted in the denial of livelihood rights to forest-dependent people including fishers, wild honey collectors, drywood collectors, and shell collectors (among others), leading to consequent conflicts with the Forest Department." Implementing the FRA would allow fishworkers to catch crab without BLCs.

The beat officer enters the scene a little past 6 pm. He speaks with the women of the *Mahila Donga Samity* and members of the *Dakshinbanga Matsyajibi Forum* in front of

## What's New, Webby?



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## The Role of Women in Fisheries

The website of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) carries a recent interview with Susana V. Siar, Fishery Industry Officer at the FAO, in which she describes the significant role women play in the fisheries sector and what FAO is doing to increase their visibility and contribution to the sector globally.

Susana V. Siar explains that fishers, like farmers, are not just men but that, in fact, millions of women around the world work in paid or unpaid jobs throughout the fish supply chain. Although women are mainly involved in the tasks that come before and after the fish are hauled out of the water, at least 15 percent of

women in the sector are also involved in the act of fishing itself.

At the artisanal level, their preparatory work includes making and mending nets, baskets and pots, baiting hooks and providing services to the fishing boats. They practice their own fishing both for commercial and subsistence purposes, often from canoes and in areas close to their community.

To see the whole interview, please visit: [www.fao.org/gender/gender-home/gender-resources/gender-videos/gender-videosdet/en/c/278439/?utm\\_content=bufferc16c1&utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_source=linkedin.com&utm\\_campaign=buffer](http://www.fao.org/gender/gender-home/gender-resources/gender-videos/gender-videosdet/en/c/278439/?utm_content=bufferc16c1&utm_medium=social&utm_source=linkedin.com&utm_campaign=buffer)

Kultali forest range beat office. The officer states that the canoes have been confiscated because of their alleged use for poaching. Episodes of poaching involving canoes have been sporadic, the women argue, the entire fishing community should not be penalised.

They promise to act as informers for the Forest Department during instances of poaching, but insist on their right to continue using canoes for fishing. The beat officer agrees not to seize canoes for the next three months, during which time the movements of the canoes will be supervised. He also agrees to take up the issue of the rights of forest-dependent fisher communities with higher authorities.

When he voices a grouse about the government having to pay compensation when there are deaths caused by fishworkers venturing into tiger territory, he is reminded that fishworkers do not voluntarily venture into tiger territory, but because it is a question of their livelihood.

By the time discussions conclude, night has already set in. The women are happy to have this victory, even if temporary. They pile into a dinghy that takes them into the dark waters of the Sunderbans. Anima gazes at the still waters and towards home.

(This article was first published on The People's Archive of Rural India, www.ruralindiaonline.org on March 12, 2015) ❏

## PROFILE

# Farmers without borders

**Annie Castaldo—Shellfish farmer at the Laguna of Thau, France**

This profile is by **Katia Frangouides** (Katia.Frangouides@neuf.fr), facilitator of the AKTEA network, and Member, ICSF

**A**nnie Castaldo is a shellfish farmer working in the Laguna of Thau in the Mediterranean part of France. The farm was established by her father and grandfather, both fishers, who were given a concession by the fisheries authorities in the early 1950s. At 24, when it was time for her to officially succeed her father, Annie, having worked on the farm during every vacation through her growing years, knew pretty much all there was to know about oyster farming.

The Thau Laguna however is not the easiest of water bodies for shellfish farming. It is large—7000 m wide with an average depth of 5 meters. One fifth of its area is farmed for shellfish by about 400 shellfish enterprises. The presence of a large number of villages around the lagoon impacts its fragile ecosystem, and during certain years, oyster mortality rates are high.

Not many women in France head their own shellfish farms. This is the domain of men; moreover, until less than 20 years ago, under French law, concessions were reserved for men who had served the navy, and later, for those who had a diploma and a boating license. Legal reforms at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century opened up the possibility of shellfish farming for Annie, the sole child in her family, who strongly wished to continue the family tradition.

In 2003, Annie was elected to the board of the Regional Committee of Shellfish farmers of the French Mediterranean, a largely male organization that she had joined to gain help with product promotion. The experience was disastrous. Says Annie, “At first, the men didn’t let us speak, and later, they didn’t listen.”

Luckily Annie found support coming her way. She came across an organization, CIVAM that provided skill development training to shellfish farmers to help them teach tourists and other visitors about shellfish culture, types of shellfish, and the importance of preserving the lagoon’s ecosystem.

This work soon became Annie’s vocation. Along with some other women, she set up a women’s group dedicated to this work, which ran successfully for several years doing varied activities such as creating brand value for Thau Laguna oysters and joining Italy’s slow food movement.

After the group became less active, Annie, along with some other women, became involved in awareness-raising around the “Collaborative Spouse Status” provision that French law granted to fisher wives in 1998 in recognition of their equal partnership in the family fishery. And more recently, Annie has also been active in AKTEA, the European network of women’s organizations in fisheries and aquaculture, through which she was able to meet and share experiences with women working in shellfish farming from different countries.

Annie deeply values the friends she has made through AKTEA and her other women’s groups. Without their wonderful solidarity, she may not have been able to continue her work as a shellfish farmer, she says. ❏



# A Life of Truth and Struggle

**A respectful tribute paid in homage to Tahira Shah, the great leader of the Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum, who recently passed away**

By **Mustafa Gurgaze** (gurgaiz@gmail.com), Programme Manager Livelihoods, at the Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum (PFF)

I can never forget the first official meeting I attended soon after joining Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum (PFF) in January 2010. This was held at the PFF Secretariat premises in Ibrahim Hydri, which houses the largest fishing community village in Pakistan. I noticed a simple but gorgeous lady in her mid-forties taking down notes of the discussion, who humbly raised her hand whenever she wanted to be clear on some points. She seemed seriously concerned about the issues of fisherwomen, their role at the unit- (village), district- and central governing-body level of PFF, and of course, about the education and health of fisherwomen. One of the senior colleagues at PFF told me that she was the elected Senior Vice Chairperson of PFF. That was the first time I met Tahira Shah, and observed in her the qualities of a great leader.

Being born in a middle class Syed family, it was hard for Tahira to get an education.

While still in her teens, she decided to get married, against the rules of the society and the wishes of her family, to Muhammad Ali Shah who belonged to an economically lower class in society. Ultimately, Tahira took the bold and rebellious step of getting married in court, outside the traditional rituals.

The couple started working for the fishing community at a local level, under the platform of their first organization 'Anjum-e SamajiBehbood'. Tahira however felt that the issues of women were not being addressed properly, and there was no effective role of women in the decision making structure of the organization. She then founded an organization only for women, named 'SaheriyenSath' (group of womenfolk). She campaigned door to door, organized women, mobilized them and made them understand the roots of their problems and the way to get them resolved. She spoke up against all forms of discrimination, based on gender, caste and religion and made other women also speak up against these. On one occasion, among hundreds of participants, there were a few

MUSTAFA GURGAZE



Tahira Shah leads a cultural rally in Hyderabad, Pakistan to celebrate World Fisheries Day on 21 November 2013. She spoke up against all forms of discrimination, based on gender, caste and religion and made other women also speak up against these

**She rightly earned the title of 'The Martyr of the Indus', given to her by civil society.**

women who belonged to a Hindu scheduled (socially lower) caste group. Tahira felt that some of the women participants were being disrespectful in their behavior towards the women of the scheduled caste. She at once mingled with the Hindu women as if they were old and close friends, shared meals with them, and did everything to remove their feeling of discrimination. Such was our leader.

Tahira's real fight started when Pakistan Rangers—the paramilitary force—occupied the lakes in the coastal areas of Badin district. She threw away her *burqa* (veil) and came out openly to struggle. She mobilized fisherwomen to come out on the streets, organized demonstrations, observed hunger strikes, organized sit-ins in front of the press club and what not. She bravely led the struggle against the illegal occupation of the lakes by the Rangers. When her husband Muhammad Ali Shah was put in jail, she carried on unflinchingly to strengthen the peaceful struggle. Finally, Tahira and the coastal communities succeeded and the powerful Rangers were forced to end their occupation of the lakes, despite Pakistan being under martial law.

I have heard many friends say that it was Tahira who gave voice to the Press Club of Sanghar district, where the nibs of journalists' pens had rusted due to the extreme feudal influence of the ruling classes. The PFF launched a campaign against the illegal occupation by the feudal lords of the Chotiyarion Reservoir, and Tahira with her magical ways of mobilizing womenfolk, brought them out in thousands on to the streets of Sanghar city. She boldly challenged the force of feudal lords in fiery speeches before the Press Club. The journalists were compelled to cover her speeches and news of the struggle.

Tahira had a multi-dimensional personality. She conducted meetings with women in different villages of the fishing community, mobilized and organized them, encouraged them to become the strong member of the PFF and raise their voices for their rights. At the same time, like other professionals, she took notes of the discussions and prepared reports of the community meetings. She was an enthusiastic member in community theatres, formed to promote understanding of the illiterate fisherwomen on the issues they encountered in their daily lives. She sang cultural songs and also danced in the events of the fisherfolk. She was at the same time a

good listener and always welcomed differences of opinion. She was a bold, brave and upright leader who never left her companions alone and acted like a rock in every situation, even where it was extremely dangerous for women.

Tahira and Muhammad Ali Shah were equal comrades in their political struggle. They walked together in step, in their personal life, as well as in the struggle for the socio-economic, political and cultural empowerment of the fishing community. Tahira was also a good home maker and mother, brought up the children well, and gave Muhammad Ali Shah the space to effectively lead the organization. She was generous in her support to a number of poor families. No needy person returned empty handed from her house. Everybody in the fishing community across Pakistan called her Jeeji (mother). They all had their stories of the love and affection they received from Tahira. She once told me "You are Mustafa and my son is also Mustafa, so you are like my son".

Tahira never wore jewellery and make up. She always remained a picture of simplicity and grace.

During the struggle for the protection of mangroves, when two of her comrades were martyred by the notorious land grabbers, Tahira did not hesitate to openly name the murderers in her speeches at every forum. Everybody knew how risky it could be to even talk about those who were involved. I said to her: "Jeeji, please avoid taking so many risks, it can be dangerous in the current situation". She replied, "I never want to die by inches. I shall be proud to sacrifice my life for truth and in struggle for my community". I recall a number of occasions when she was asked to take some rest, or to see her doctor, her reply would be "I want to die in the fight for the rights of my community, not ill in bed". Even a day before her demise, our senior colleague Dr. Ely Ercelan noticed her blood pressure was high and suggested she avoid continuous travels, but she responded as always, "I shall go in a flash, not by inches". And so she did, the very next day. She was going with her husband to Badin to lead the rally organized to mark the International Rivers Day. They had a deadly accident when their car plunged in deep stagnant waters. She had sacrificed her life in the struggle for the restoration of the Indus. She rightly earned the title of 'The Martyr of the Indus', given to

her by civil society. No doubt she lived as she wanted, and she died as she had wished. Live long Jeeji Tahira, Live long PFF. ❏

## Family Fish Farming

**A recent study found that family fish farming improves quality of life in the Bolivian Amazon**

A recent study titled “Family fish farming improves quality of life in the Bolivian Amazon” by Tiffanie Rainville and colleagues evaluated the changes brought into the lives of around 4000 families of the Yapacani municipality of Bolivia, living in extreme poverty. This study was part of the ‘Stories of Change’ series that shared emerging outcomes from research conducted in Latin America and the Caribbean. These families from Yapacani had been dependent on single crop rice farming. This type of farming was however highly vulnerable to vagaries of weather and market conditions. The families were able to improve their conditions through diversifying into family-based fish farming. They incorporated technological innovations in water management and polyculture which increased their income by five times.

An important aspect of this activity was that women led the fish farming activity. They were in the process empowered within their homes and community. The fish cultivation also gave women access to an affordable source of high quality protein for their family consumption.

To quote Victoria Zelaya, a local fish farmer, “Raising small fish is like a bank. Whenever I need to, I sell my fish and it gives me a little money, both for food for my fish as well as food for us. With the sale of my fish, I was also able to make another fish pond and buy more fish fry to continue producing more fish.”

Family fish farming has begun to be replicated in other regions throughout Bolivia. As the model centres on family based productive business units, it has also been able to bring together families and communities into an inclusive model of economic progress.

For more details, visit: <http://www.idrc.ca/en/Documents/Family-fish-farming-improves-quality-of-life-in-the-Bolivian-Amazon.pdf> ❏

**Interview with Bela Behera, fishworker and board member of Samudram, a federation of women’s self-help groups in Odisha, India**

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

**Please tell us about yourself and what you do.**

My name is Bela Behera. I am from Balidia village of Astrang Block in Odisha, India. I am a board member of the Puri district-level federation of Samudram. My husband along with three other villagers owns a fibre fishing boat. I take care of his food and gear for the fishing trip, and I also sell fish, at the landing centre or door to door. Then, I look after the house work, our home kitchen garden and also the milk cows we keep to help support our children’s education.

**Please tell us about Samudram.**

Samudram is a federation of self-help groups of women in five districts of Odisha. It organises skill development programmes in record keeping, and awareness programmes on issues like gender equality, HIV, right to education and right to information. When I joined Samudram in 2008, it was to save money for household expenses. Samudram helped me free myself from the clutches of the local moneylenders. I also became aware of the importance of educating the girls in my family.

**What are the activities of your self-help group?**

Traditionally, ordinary villagers of our village never attended the *gramsabha* (local governing body) meetings, and *gramsabha* decisions were taken without their participation. But recently, thanks to Samudram’s awareness raising programmes, 200 women and six men turned up at the *gramsabha* meeting. We raised our voices in protest against liquor. We said unless liquor sales are banned, we will protest publicly. We demanded reasonable interest rates as well as a road for our village. We also demanded the right to form co-operatives, and to access government schemes for health and education.

**What are your hopes for the future?**

I hope for a better future for my children with good and decent jobs. I hope my village will get good roads, proper sanitation and potable drinking water. I hope that through Samudram, the village and district will be able to set up good marketing facilities for fish. I also hope that Samudram will become a self-reliant organisation, not only in my district but in all the five districts where we work. ❏

## YEMAYA MAMA

March 8 calling...





DOCUMENT

## 42 Portraits of Women Working in the Fisheries and Aquaculture Sectors

Femmes de Mer 42 Portraits. Un Livre De Michèle Villemur

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

This colourful and informative book celebrates the work of women in the fisheries and aquaculture sector in France. It is designed to “let women speak” about their work in fishing, in aquaculture, and other related occupations.

The foreword traces the difficult history for women trying to engage as professionals in the marine domain. A 17<sup>th</sup> century law—the Colbert law—forbade women to go aboard fishing vessels, merchant ships and warships. Despite such laws being lifted, women continue to face barriers of tradition. The 42 portraits demonstrate how the times are changing.

Scarlette le Corre, in 1983, at the age of 28, became the first woman in France to qualify as a seagoing fisher. The mother of three children and daughter of a master fisherman and farmer, she hails from the village of Penmarc'h in Brittany. Along with catching fish which she sells locally, she works as seaweed harvester. She is also a processor of fish, and runs a shop. Additionally, she is the Vice President of the Regional Sea Fisheries Committee, and Grand Master of the Brotherhood of Atlantic Ocean

Cuisine.

Catherine Luccini from Corsica sees it as quite normal that she took up fishing. “In Corsica, women are actively engaged in the fisheries sector”, says this mother of two boys and the President of the Corsican Association of Fisherwomen.

Agnes Marie explains that her father is a mechanic (“and people say

that we have oil in our veins”). She works as engineer aboard the Jérémie-Teddie, a fine 18.5 metre trawler, whose beating heart is a 450 horse power motor. “When I started this work, I was worried what people would say. So I used to hide in the port with my jerry cans, till one day I decided to show people that it was me who serviced the engine aboard the Jérémie-Teddie.” But her work does not stop there: she also deals with the administration; the contracts; the bills—the everyday tasks of the wife of a fisherman. She became the first woman to sit on the board of Copeport (a cooperative specialising in sailors clothing, fishing and sports) in Port-en-Bessin. She sits on a number of fisheries- and port-related committees as well.

Christine Follet is a deepwater oyster farmer. She is a ‘Class 2A welder’, which means she is qualified to undertake underwater jobs down to 60 metres depth. After several years of work, she went on to study to become an aquaculture technician and then qualified as a fishing skipper. “To start with I wanted to cultivate seaweed on my concession, but then I chose to cultivate oysters at 10 metres. This allowed me to live out my passion: living underwater!”

Magali Molla is a seaweed harvester and co-manager of a business. After leaving school she studied aquaculture production techniques. In 1997 she became an aquaculture engineer and took up work in Ireland. Thereafter, she learned how to cultivate large seaweed from Jean-François, a French expatriate whom she married. The couple now manage an aquaculture company. The 42 professional women of the fisheries are tough go-getters, sometimes formidable business women who always keep their cool. Through this book they share their passions, hoping with their stories to strike a chord with young people.

To read the book, visit: <http://www.developpement-durable.gouv.fr/IMG/Femmes%20de%20mer%20web%20VF.pdf>



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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.