



29 Years in Support of  
Small-scale Fishworkers

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# Yemaya

ICSF'S NEWSLETTER ON GENDER AND FISHERIES

## From the Editor

We are happy to present to you the 50<sup>th</sup> issue of *Yemaya*. The occasion is unfortunately, however, more sombre than it is celebratory, in a world beset by war and disaster.

Since its launch in April 1999, *Yemaya* has regularly covered gender issues in the fisheries. It has systematically documented the various forms of gender based inequality and discrimination that prevail in the sector. It has also documented the steady erosion of the livelihood base of artisanal fishers as threats to small-scale fisheries (SSF) continue to grow.

On this occasion, it would be fitting to recall the Shared Gender Agenda that ICSF had released in 2010, with wide endorsement from representatives of fishing communities and fish worker organizations from across the world. Some of the points from the Shared Gender Agenda are worth noting in today's context.

First, it is women's labour, unpaid or poorly paid, which sustains the existing model of development. Their invisible labour subsidizes capitalist exploitation.

Second, specific forms of discrimination cut across all aspects of women's lives—labour, sexuality and fertility—undermining their dignity, sense of self-worth and self-confidence. As a result, women have very little bargaining power to push for better wages and terms of engagement with capital.

Third, the existing model of development is based on the unsustainable extraction of natural resources. This leads to environmental degradation and erodes the very basis of life and livelihood in fishing communities. Similar experiences are encountered when coastal lands are acquired for state-led developments at the expense of people's access. As the resource base is compromised, women's access to productive assets is further reduced and their burden of unpaid labour increased.

The Shared Gender Agenda declared, "If the logic of such market based development is not questioned and indiscriminate capital investment is not regulated, fishing communities and small-scale and artisanal fisheries will cease to exist." In the current issue of *Yemaya*, Meryl Williams predicts that "if left only to the market, the current trends and their gendered impacts will intensify".

Many of the articles in this issue of *Yemaya* focus on women's work in fisheries. We note from one of the articles from South Africa that even as women in fishing communities are increasingly moving out of traditional, community based occupations to seeking employment in the labour market, the feminization of labour at the bottom of the supply chain, and the informal nature of the work allows employers to flout all responsibility. Another article explains that at the intersection of gender, fisheries and economics are systemic anomalies that mask the cost of fish production by underestimating women's labour.

This issue of *Yemaya* calls for suitable actions, starting with the effective implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines). It calls for regulations to "establish fair labour codes for paid employment, affirmative action for women's rights of access to fish, and long overdue attention by fisheries economists to gender". It also calls for the extensive adoption, promotion and implementation of the principles of the Shared Gender Agenda in order to ensure women's rights in the fisheries.

As we go to press, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) concludes in Paris against the backdrop of increasing vulnerabilities facing the SSF—vulnerabilities that are greatly exacerbated by the growing threat of climate change, with glaciers melting and coral reefs being bleached at unprecedentedly fast rates by ever warmer oceans.

The clock is ticking ever faster for marginalized fishing communities. The time to oppose the present unsustainable development model is now! **M**



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# Women in today's fisheries economy

**At both the micro- and macro-economic level, the impact of the fisheries economy is deeply gendered—a problem that must be addressed through explicit, affirmative action**

By **Meryl Williams**  
(MerylJWilliams@gmail.com), Asian Fisheries Society, Honorary Life Member

**T**he economy is the most significant factor in how the fish sector operates. When considering how economic events affect fisheries, gender impacts are rarely examined, even though many impacts are gender sensitive. Our current state of knowledge merely hints at the gendered impacts of the economy. This has to change; economic arguments must be added to the social agenda for gender equality in fisheries.

Fisheries enterprises extend from micro-livelihood enterprises to large multi-national corporations. Those who work in fisheries businesses, directly and indirectly, may be labourers through to top level executives and owners. In aggregate, according to the 2012 World Bank 'Hidden Harvests' study, nearly half of the workers are women, concentrated in but not limited to the processing sector and marketing jobs. Although the statistics are not available, studies on small scale fisheries would indicate that the large corporations, though important, are not the major

employers; instead, the World Bank found that the majority of people (women and men) are engaged in small-scale fisheries.

Fisheries enterprises, small and large, are driven by demands for, in priority order: profitability, environmental sustainability, and social responsibility. All these demands have economic facets. At all scales, businesses strive to produce products in an efficient and lucrative manner, and to find suitable markets. Governments are expected to create and maintain the regulatory and political environment by, for instance, preventing illegal activities, creating incentives for local jobs while keeping the prices of fish low for consumers, and supporting markets. Business and regulatory settings, however, are now operating amid a global economic slowdown, facing risks of erratic changes, for example, in energy prices, the shifting world economic order and political conditions affecting markets, such as trade preferences and sanctions.

In today's economy, what are the implications for people, especially for women? My reflections on this question come under two main themes: impacts viewed at a macro, if not fully macro-economic, level, and those at the household scale. As fisheries economics pays scant attention to gender, our understanding of social impacts is often weak, and hence my reflections may be considered tentative.

Three key issues with important economic dimensions are the economic imperatives of business competition, globalization, and access to resources.

From catching to selling, fish supply chains are competitive. Competition comes from such conditions as the increasing buying power of large supermarket chains that shave their suppliers' margins in order to lower prices and win market share, and competition with other animal proteins in the food basket. Supply chain costs, especially labour costs, are under constant pressure. To keep labour costs down, local labour will be sourced at low rates, or processing located in areas where low cost labour is available, or product shipped to places where labour is cheaper, or processes automated. These labour cost factors apply to self-employed people in the sector through the returns on their own labour.

MERYL WILLIAMS



Women mincing fish at the Hann Fish Market in Dakar, Senegal. The large majority of women in the fish sector are poor, wage labourers, and/or engaged in small scale operations

National governments often aim for increased women's participation in paid employment as a means to improving the economy. As fish exports from developing countries have burgeoned, along with exports from other sectors, so too have jobs in these areas for women and men. In fish processing, women provide much of the labour in the production lines, often with unequal pay for the same work as men—for example, the women in salmon processing plants in Chile, as discussed by Eduardo Ramirez Vera (See *Yemaya* 48). In some cases, the lower rates paid to women may mean they are given jobs in preference to men, but this aspect needs assessment.

A recent World Bank study in the Solomon Islands found that women's wage rates were not sufficient to cover their needs. Sometimes, the lowest paid women took time off to do higher paying outside work, so they could meet acute financial needs, such as school or medical costs.

At sea, those vessels that fish at the margins of profitability, and even legality, source their male, often migrant, crew at the lowest cost and employ them under frugal, sometimes exploitative conditions. This too is an economic and gender issue, but it is primarily framed as an issue of basic human rights. Again, cost cutting is at the base of these labour practices.

As in any sector, the balances between enterprise profit, workers' pay rates and work conditions, and consumer prices can create a fine line between low paid jobs or no jobs, if factories relocate or close down when they determine that local costs are uncompetitive. Similarly, self-employed workers may not survive in fish work if they cannot pay their own labour and other costs.

To survive within-industry competition, enterprises can pursue economies of scale through mergers and acquisitions. In the fish sector, economic power is getting concentrated in fewer, larger companies. Already, Swedish researchers have reported in PLoS One that 13 large corporations control more than 10 per cent of the marine catch. In Norway, a paper presented at the 4<sup>th</sup> Global Symposium on Gender in Aquaculture and Fisheries (GAF4—see [Genderaquafish.org](http://Genderaquafish.org)) reported that as salmon aquaculture became concentrated in the hands of fewer, larger companies, women's participation dropped from 20 per cent in 1990 to 9 per cent in 2010, largely due to the absorption of small and medium family farms into the large companies.

The second macro-economic factor is globalization, long a feature of this major trading sector. In specific locations, globalization has brought many opportunities and challenges by creating and taking away jobs for women and men. In a gendered sense, the balance of work gains and losses is not known but artisanal scale work for women has often been lost as fish is increasingly landed in ports, rather than on the beach, and enters more distant, higher value markets. Jobs can be exploitative if the new work is not carried out in fair and safe conditions. In some countries, such as Bangladesh, some action has been taken to ensure secure workplaces that adhere to International Labour Organization and domestic laws. Attention from the international media, non-governmental organisations and importing countries holds the promise that work in most export supply chains will be just. However, under globalization, the location of many supply chain activities is transferable and so, long term local employment is not guaranteed.

The third macroeconomic issue is the gendered access to natural resources, for example, fisheries stocks and aquaculture sites, which are the basis of economic value. According to Angela Lentisco and Robert Lee in a recent Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) circular, a small and growing body of studies show that women's primary access to fish resources is typically informal, undervalued and fragile. Where fisheries for the same resources serve different markets—for example, local and export markets for invertebrates such as octopus and sea cucumbers—women tend to serve the lower value part of what economists would call a “two sector system”.

In aquaculture, the types, scales and capital intensity of enterprises often are segregated by gender and/or scale, as described in a number of Kerala case studies by Ramachandran C Nair's at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Global Symposium on Gender in Aquaculture and Fisheries (GAF3—see [Genderaquafish.org](http://Genderaquafish.org)). Commercial mussel growing in Kerala was originally started through women's self-help groups for poverty alleviation. Once profitable, farming became attractive to the more cashed-up men's enterprises. In law, the women's legal rights to sites and space were not secured. From the outset, by contrast, the rights for finfish cage culture were protected. These enterprises, that are more capital intensive than those for mussel farming, are run by men.

**Short of stopping capitalism, which is the driving force behind the economic trends, better economic and social outcomes for women and men need explicit action.**

The gendered outcomes of macroeconomic settings are observed in household economics and intra-household effects. Households that depend to any extent on the fish sector experience the same economic conditions of non-fishery households and, in addition, several sector-specific impacts.

General economic issues that are also expressed in fishing communities include the complexities of unitary versus multiple household accounts. The assumption of unitary household accounts has been the basis for most developmental assistance to the fish sector: assistance agencies have assumed unitary household accounts and delivered aid to men's activities, expecting financial improvements to flow directly to all household members. From the early work of Rosemary Firth in coastal Malaysia to more recent work by Marilyn Porter and colleagues in Tanzania, fishery households have often been found to run multiple household accounts. In a household, whether women earn or control the money earned or not can have a major impact on gender equality.

Another generic micro-economic feature that also holds in the fish sector is the greater burden of reproductive, care and unpaid work done by women. This has been revealed in numerous studies on the gendered division of labour in fisheries households. Women often perform unpaid fish sector work and bear the load of (also unpaid) reproductive and care work.

Features that are more specific to household economies in fisheries are the intra-household stresses and changing gender roles now being seen in localities where fish stocks have declined. Nelson Turgo, and Alice Ferrer and her colleagues have reported on changes in Philippine fishing households. As survival strategies, women and men have broadened their respective household roles to overlap in unpaid chores and income generation. Although barely whispered in the fish sector, violence against women is also a feature emerging as a result of households under economic stress from reduced male income and less masculine roles.

Migrant labour at sea has received media attention but not for its impact on the households left behind. Recent studies are starting to reveal the intricacies of migrant labour in fish farming, for example, on Burmese workers in shrimp farms in Thailand

by Arlene Nietes Satapornvanit and on Mexicans in catfish farms in the Mississippi in the USA by Kirsten Dellinger. In such cases, couples are often hired, creating a 'two for the price of one' setup and less security for women in the contract labour partnership. Also, little attention is given to the family left behind, such as children and their grandparents.

Much has been written in the last decade of the sex-for-fish trade, in Africa and parts of Asia and the Pacific. Beyond the initial reactions, research has revealed more nuanced stories in which the economic power of the women can have a major impact on the agency of women in such trade relationships. Regardless, such trade should be seen as a part of the fish economy, driven not only by personal circumstances but by the scarcity of fish and its value.

Apart from the small number of women who may be owners of major capital or related to large fisheries capitalists or in executive positions in fisheries corporations, the large majority of women in the fish sector are poor, wage labourers, and/or engaged in small scale operations. If they are entrepreneurs, they face the double discrimination of being women and small scale. A few assistance programmes are now starting to discover the opportunity of raising the business skills of these women as a possible pathway out of poverty.

Short of stopping capitalism, which is the driving force behind the economic trends, better economic and social outcomes for women and men need explicit action. If left only to the market, the current trends and their gendered impacts will intensify. Depending on the impact and its context, suitable actions would have to start with effective implementation of the gender and related elements of the Voluntary Guidelines for Small Scale Fisheries so as to cover the largest number of affected people, regulations to establish fair labour codes for paid employment, affirmative action for women's rights of access to fish, and long overdue attention by fisheries economists to gender. On this last point, fisheries economists could do well to learn from the field of feminist economics. A key journal in this field, *Feminist Economics*, gives its goal as to "not just develop more illuminating theories, but to improve the conditions of living for all children, women and men". ■



# Widows' struggles in post-war Sri Lanka

**This report documents the post-war struggle of women, mainly widows, from the fishing communities of Mannar, Sri Lanka, attempting to reconstruct their lives**

By **Cornelie Quist**  
(cornelie.quist@gmail.com), Member, ICSF, with support from Anusan Mary Priyantha, NAFSO-Mannar

In 2012, Yemaya had carried a report based on my meetings with women of fishing communities of Batticaloa, a district on the east coast of Sri Lanka which had been badly affected by both the ethnic based civil war in Sri Lanka and the Indian Ocean tsunami of December 2004 (see *Yemaya* Issue 41). This year, at the end of August, I had the opportunity to return to Sri Lanka where I met widows who are organizing themselves in groups to survive and meaningfully reconstruct their lives.

There are an estimated 89,000 such war widows in Sri Lanka. Since 2009, the guns have fallen silent after 26 years of ethnic based civil war, but the widows are still struggling to feed themselves and their children. Many war widows belong to fishing communities in the north and east of Sri Lanka. Their plight has recently been captured in an Al Jazeera documentary as well (see <http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/101east/2015/04/sri-lanka-widows-war-150421161203533.html>).

I was able to talk to some of these widows during my meeting with women's groups at Mannar Island, a fisheries dependent area in north Sri Lanka. The meetings were arranged by the National Fisheries Solidarity Movement (NAFSO), an NGO that works with fishing communities all over Sri Lanka.

CORNELIE QUIST



Women helping in cleaning nets, Mannar Island, Sri Lanka.  
The livelihood of the widows and deserted women is very fragile

Mannar Island is located in the Mannar district of the Northern Province of Sri Lanka, and is connected to the mainland by a causeway. It is situated in the Gulf of Mannar, a large shallow bay forming part of the Laccadive Sea in the Indian Ocean. The bay lies between the southeastern tip of India and the west coast of Sri Lanka. From Thalaimannar at the western tip of Mannar Island, a chain of reefs, sandbanks and islets nearly connects Sri Lanka to India at Rameswaram).

The Gulf of Mannar is an ecosystem with high biodiversity. It is rich in fishery resources, and fishing is a major contributor to the economy of Mannar Island. Approximately half of the island's population (99,051 in 2012) is involved in fisheries. The large majority of fishers practise small-scale fisheries using fibre reinforced plastic boats with outboard engines, motorized traditional boats (*vallam*), non-motorized traditional boats (*theppam*) and non-motorized beach seine boats, and a large variety of nets. Although much of the catch is from the sea, lagoon fishery is also practised. Mannar Island is famous for its dry fish production.

Mannar Island was hit hard by the war because of its location. It was a major exit and entry point from and to India, and became a key host to Tamil refugees from all over Sri Lanka. The island's large Muslim population was driven out by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in 1990. After the war, the composition of Mannar's population changed. It now has around 80 per cent Tamils, the majority of whom are Christian, and 16 per cent Muslim—a demographic change responsible for growing tension between the two ethnic groups.

The war had a major impact on the fishing communities of Mannar. Many fisher families were displaced. The situation was compounded by restrictions on fishing hours and fishing grounds. Since the end of the war in 2009, the fisheries have revived, but fishing communities still face major difficulties in their life and livelihood.

The fishing village of Santhipuram has 450 families of which 75 are headed by women—60 widows and 15 deserted women. Fishery is the main livelihood source. The men go out to sea, fishing, and the women do various types of related work. To provide food

and income to their households, the widows go to the beach at four in the morning to help in removing fish from nets, and cleaning and repairing nets. In return, they are given some small fish. The men sell the big and valuable ones to middlemen. The women keep some of their earned fish for food and process the larger part into dry fish. In the absence of adequate facilities, the dry fish processing is carried out under unhygienic conditions.

The livelihood of the widows and deserted women is very fragile. Selling dry fish at the local market is their mainstay. They earn around SLR 500 (USD 3.5) per day when there is fish, and SLR 100 (USD 0.70) when there is none. The fishing season is only six months long, and for the rest of the year, they live off their savings, and from selling dry fish and some homemade food in other villages. They take micro-credit loans from NGOs for poultry or goat keeping, but these do not provide a real alternative livelihood. There is no programme to help these women to improve their dry fish processing and marketing. The women feel they are drowning in debt, but still take more loans to educate their children, in the hope that they will bring a better future.

In all the fishing villages, there were similar stories. Women related that the major problems of fishing families after the war are access to land and sea. Many had lost their homes and land when they fled during the war, leaving behind all their documents, including land titles. When they returned, they found their houses destroyed, belongings looted, and all their livelihood equipment had gone missing. Their lands are now occupied by other people or confiscated by the Sri Lankan security forces, who even today keep the former war zone areas under tight control.

In the lagoon fishing village of Pallimunai, the land and houses of 22 families are still occupied by the Navy. Of these families, 12 are headed by widows. These families have been displaced by war since 1990. One woman said: "For so many years we have lived nomadic lives, shifting between camps for displaced persons and the homes of relatives. Now it is our biggest dream to have our family land and houses back, and our livelihood and community life restored." It was only in 2013 that the affected families of Pallimunai were able to go to court to get their land and houses returned; but their cases are still to be settled and they feel very frustrated. The navy had offered the families alternative lands, but these were far away from the coast and therefore not suitable. Fishing is their traditional livelihood and they need to live close to the coast. The widows said that they wanted to stay in their traditional communities, where they felt safe and looked after. With their traditional lands occupied by the navy, the women also lost their spaces for drying fish.

During the war, restricted access to their lands and fish resources was a major livelihood constraint for Mannar's fishing communities. After the war, fishing restrictions were lifted, but the process was extremely slow. Furthermore, another threat arose from large fleets of Indian trawlers invading the Palk Bay and Gulf of Mannar, attracted by its rich fish resources. The Indian trawlers fish very intensively near the shore and leave little fish for the local fishing communities who primarily use small traditional boats and gear. Further, these trawlers also destroy the nets of the locals. Women of Pallimunai, as also of Santhipuram, Jim Brown Nagar and other villages, related that their fishermen could hardly make a living now from fishing: "Our resources and livelihood are being ruined and we are without any compensation. The Indian trawlers must be stopped from

## What's New, Webby?




By **Ramya Rajagopalan**  
(ramya.rajagopalan@gmail.com), Programme Associate, ICSF

## Gendered Seas

As part of the European project Oceans Past Platform, a new working group on gender and fisheries history named Gendered Seas has been established. The Oceans Past Platform was set up to measure and understand the significance and value to European societies of living marine resource extraction and production to help shape the future of coasts and oceans.

Gendered Seas aims to explore the different roles and responsibilities

of women and men in the exploitation and management of living marine resources over time. Claiming that most research in fisheries history has "turned a blind eye on women", the working group has set itself the task of filling a major gap in the understanding of fisheries systems and their development.

An introductory video on Gendered Seas may be viewed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ajlWZPkcX58> 

fishing in our waters.” The women spoke strongly, and some also blamed the occupation of their land by the navy on the intrusion of the Indian trawlers: “Because of the Indian trawlers, the navy camp is here”.

After the war, the Sri Lankan government started reconstruction of the war affected areas, with a focus on building and infrastructure. On Mannar Island, a highway and the causeway to the main land were reconstructed, and since April 2015 the railway has also been restored. Mannar is now connected again to the mainland and to Colombo, the country’s capital. But the government paid practically no attention to rebuilding local village infrastructure and rehabilitating displaced and traumatized people, including, and in particular, the war widows.

The women of Mannar’s fishing villages indicated that they felt forgotten by the government. The lack of assistance from the government and limited assistance by United Nations bodies and NGOs compelled people to fend for themselves. In the fishing village of Jim Brown Nagar, a woman leader had this to say: “We lost everything in the war. In the IDP (Internally Displaced Persons) camps, we were only given dry rations and not allowed to go out to undertake livelihood activities. And now, six years after the war is over, we still live in misery. With no access and equipment to engage in our traditional fisheries activities, it is hard to survive. There are no other livelihood options for us. Our housing conditions are also poor. Women feel unsafe when going to the jungle for toilet needs or to collect firewood. In the rainy season, the temporary houses we live in are often flooded and many families have to seek shelter in the church. Of course it is good that there is no more killing and raiding, but our housing and livelihood problems are not being solved. And we still live in fear because of the presence of the security forces.”

The women’s (widows’) groups in Mannar Island have been in existence for only a couple of years. Earlier, there had been many restrictions imposed by the security forces for people to organize. NGOs were only allowed to support government programmes. Community assistance was primarily organized by the church or mosque and these institutions played a binding role for the people, although unfortunately the relations between Christian Tamils and Muslims are still tense.

The Negombo-based NAFSO came to Mannar in 2004. The NGO supports Tamil women’s (widows’) groups and citizen groups in fishing communities, generally in collaboration with the Catholic Church. They started with providing livelihood loans to families headed by women, but later also took up land rights

issues and the issue of intrusion by Indian trawlers. Presently, there are 13 village level women’s groups supported by NAFSO, which are federated at the district level under the name Valarpirai (‘ascending moon’) Women’s District Committee. The village level meetings mostly deal with the immediate needs of widows and deserted women, such as children’s issues and livelihood problems. Community services, including helping the sick, are also rendered. At the district level, common problems such as land and other rights issues are discussed. The women are encouraged to write petitions to the authorities, for which they get assistance from NAFSO. The women’s organization of Mannar also became a member of the national Women’s Federation, organized by NAFSO.

When asked what has changed for them since they began to participate in the Valarpirai women’s organization, the women’s groups in Mannar Island responded enthusiastically: “We feel more self-confident now to fight for our dignity and rights. Earlier we felt so isolated and alone. Now we meet other women’s groups from fishing communities, also from other parts of the country, and get solidarity.” The women are aware of the need to speak out and actively approach the authorities with their problems. But, as they emphasized, “without solidarity and support from outside this is really difficult”. The NGO had encouraged the women to vote in the recent General Elections. For many women this was the first time they cast their vote. Disappointingly, the Mannar district had no women candidates, but the women said they hoped that this would change in the future.

The new government in Sri Lanka promises to focus more on reconciliation, restoration of human rights and rehabilitation of livelihood. The women said that a survey has now been conducted of displaced people in their area. These developments have generated fresh hope.

On 7 September 2015, war widows and human rights activists handed over a fact finding report on war-displaced people to the government in Colombo (see <http://wodep.blogspot.nl/2015/09/round-table-discussion-on-ensure-land.html>). At this event, Nimalka Fernando, a women’s rights activist and president of the International Movement against All Forms of Discrimination and Racism, spoke in solidarity with the war widows and called on the newly elected President and Parliament to accept the responsibility to return land to Sri Lanka’s war widows and allow them to rebuild their lives: “It is not enough for the government to run vocational training for internally displaced persons. Give them back their sea, lands and jungle; let them restart their livelihoods. It is their fundamental right.”

**The underestimation of women’s labour in fisheries can lead us to understate the costs of fishing, while overstating and oversimplifying their economic benefits.**



# The long road to freedom

**The end of apartheid has signalled a new beginning for women in South Africa's fisheries but real equality is still a far-off dream**

By **Sharon Groenmeyer**  
(sgroenmeyer@uj.ac.za), Senior Research Associate, Centre for the Study of Democracy, University of Johannesburg, South Africa

Women in fishing communities are increasingly moving from traditional, community based occupations to seeking employment in the labour market. While this is an opportunity for women, their employment is also largely in the male dominated fishing industry, where job segregation into 'less skilled and low paid' jobs for women define employment opportunities. However, engagement as members in local non-government networks help women to challenge these stereotypes. In South Africa, for instance, the recent legislation promoting opportunity for women in male dominated sectors of employment is an opportunity for women to earn wages equal to those of men.

The following is an example from fishing villages located in Saldanha Bay, 140 km outside Cape Town. It shows how life for women has changed since the time of apartheid, with formal independence slowly opening up opportunities to challenge oppression of patriarchy, race and class.

A fish processing factory was established in Saldanha Bay in 1964. Even today, the factory is the hub of economic activity in the region. Many women in the region find employment in the factory and, in addition, assist their men in pre- and post-harvest activities linked to the employment contracts of the men. A recent study in the region indicated that more than half the families earned

75 per cent of their income from fishing and related activities.

The situation was very different at the time of the establishment of the factory during apartheid years. African women could not enter urban areas without a residential permit, and were thus confined to the Bantustans where they cared for children and their aged relatives. Women with the requisite work permits were employed as housemaids, housekeepers or nannies in the homes of urban and rural white families. The migrant labour system, in addition to restricting job opportunities for women, reinforced patriarchal traditional practices by extending the authority of the traditional chiefs and their control over women living in the Bantustans. The multiple burdens of gender, race and class discrimination consigned black women to the lowest rungs of the socio-economic ladder.

The personal experience of living under apartheid is described by Nololo, a mother of four children and a women entrepreneur today in Saldanha Bay. Nololo's father was born in Lesotho, and walked to the gold mines in Johannesburg, where he stayed on, got a work permit, and managed to send money home. As a migrant, he was confined to living in a hostel in the goldmines as a single person for 11 months of the year. He was finally able to get a job on a trawler owned by a white fisherman in Saldanha Bay. After three years of separation, Nololo's mother decided to also move to Saldanha Bay to be near him. However, not having a residential permit, Nololo's mother could be arrested and jailed by the police if found living with her husband. Her life therefore revolved around avoiding arrest and

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View of fish processing factory at Saldanha Bay, South Africa. Many women in the region find employment in the factory and, in addition, assist their men in pre- and post-harvest activities linked to the employment contracts of the men



imprisonment. She was only home over weekends because that was the only time she could avoid the police searches for illegal residents. Thus Nololo, as an African child living in a coloured residential area, had little economic or social stability. "The instability of my family life forced me to go to high school in Cape Town and stay with a coloured family," she says. She completed her schooling at the age of 16. There were no other job opportunities but to work in the fish production factory because the only resource was the sea.

Today, Nololo is a small entrepreneur in Saldanha Bay. As she says, "I took advantage of affirmative action policies (in post-apartheid South Africa) by starting my own business at home. My son who was still a university student at the time assisted me to start my own business. I bought myself a caravan and changed it to a mobile from which to sell food. I sell seafood over weekends to the community." While Nololo's eldest daughter became a teenage mother, her other children took advantage of government policies of free education to break out of the cycle of impoverishment and social disadvantage. Her eldest son went to university to complete a law degree. One daughter has a Bachelor's degree in tourism and hospitality, and is seeking employment. Freedom of movement and affirmative action by the government provide a setting where women can aspire for good education and jobs.

However, for many women, available jobs are at the lower end of global supply chains. Even when they are able to obtain training and skills, they are denied employment in what are considered 'male' jobs.

Elsie lives in White City, a coloured township in Saldanha Bay. She had been trained to fish from a boat. However, Elsie has not worked as a fisher but takes on day jobs as a domestic worker in local white suburban homes. This income feeds her family and children. She is unable to find employment as a fisher because of the constraints on fishing quotas.

Lulu, who works on a sewing project, is a trained fisher who cannot find employment in Saldanha Bay. She trained as a line fisher and believed that the local fish processing factory would employ her after she had completed her training. However, she was denied employment on the grounds that she had no experience of the sector, yet men could get employment even without work experience.

The feminization of labour at the bottom of the supply chain, and the forced informality of work allows employers to flout all responsibility. Employers renege on

responsibility for meeting workers' needs of healthcare, pensions, maternity, leave time, compensation for on-the-job accidents, and workforce training. The removal of limits on working hours has particularly burdened women, since they continue to bear most of the responsibility to raise children and care for the sick and elderly, though they have entered the workforce in large numbers.

Many women, despite having employment, are unable to shift the power relations within the home because they are not economically independent. The temporary nature of their work prevents them from influencing decisions on behalf of their family. Josie described how her work kept her away from home for long hours during the day. However her husband, who was at home after the fishing quota was reached, refused to help with housework or child care. Instead he spent the time as a volunteer at a local NGO.

Women in the village spoke of high levels of delinquency amongst children because they were left to fend for themselves while their mothers worked long hours. There were high levels of alcohol and drug abuse, with the concomitant levels of gender based violence.

However, new legislations like the one promoting women in male dominated employment in South Africa are an opportunity for women to break the traditional barriers to entry into so-called male employment, and earn wages equal to those of their male counterparts.

Bonnie is employed as a cadet engineer on a fishing trawler. "I like adventure and being in a male workplace. At school I chose subjects like mathematics, physics and motor mechanic service because I thought I was going to work shifts with sailing guards. I chose the subjects because I enjoy fixing mechanical things. I am eligible for an engineering career because I have a school leaving certificate with a university entrance and can train to be a chief engineer on the trawler."

Bonnie's work entails going to sea for long periods. She does shift work, including going on trips for up to 47 days with men on the trawlers. On her last trip, she was one of two women with four men. Her tasks include mainly maintenance work, drilling holes, working with the grinder and fixing, packing and loosening the pumps. She is one of five girls in her family, and her father encourages her even though it is tough being a woman employed in a male world. As a young engineering cadet, Bonnie is aware of male jealousy and the capacity of verbal abuse to break her self-confidence. She is also more self-assured of her workplace rights than her parents because she is the first generation

**Formal equality has still not resulted in substantive equality for the large majority of women**

of youth to benefit from government affirmative action policies.

Not all young women share this perspective on gender equality. According to Nololo, only a minority of young women are training as engineers today because young women tend to undermine themselves. They lack the confidence of learning the skills required for what is considered men's work.

In contemporary post-apartheid South Africa, women now have formal equality and are protected by progressive workplace legislation. However, the intersection of race, class and gender as categories of identity appear more evident today than ever before. Twenty-one years of formal democracy have not enhanced the substantive rights of the majority of black South African women. This becomes evident when the stories of opportunities for older women intersect with those of the younger women.

The right to equality, as stipulated in the South African Constitution, offers the possibility of alternative versions of gender roles and expectations. The new opportunities allow children to have better educational, and consequently, better career opportunities than were available during the apartheid era. Women's participation in the economy increases women's economic contribution via both paid and unpaid labour, which makes them more visible. Therefore, formal equality does provide a measure of emancipation.

Furthermore, government legislation, which promotes preferential treatment for women in the workplace, benefits both black and white women with education. However, this formal equality has still not resulted in substantive equality for the large majority of women. This is the challenge facing women's organisations in the country. ■

## REGIONAL

## AFRICA

# Women in fisheries in Africa

**The diverse and productive fisheries in Africa's coastal countries depend greatly on the contributions of women, who are today increasingly asserting their right to livelihood and support**

By **Serge Raemaekers** (serge.raemaekers@gmail.com) Member, ICSF, and **Jackie Sunde** (jsunde@telkomsa.net), Member, ICSF

The 30,490 km of coastline around the African continent is home to many small-scale traditional fishing communities who depend on these shores for their livelihoods. In addition, the continent hosts vast lakes which provide critical sources of food and livelihoods for many inland communities. It is estimated that there are

approximately ten million people in Africa reliant on small-scale fisheries as their primary livelihood, and a further 90 million depend on fishing as part of a diversified livelihood strategy. As few countries disaggregate their statistics along gender lines, it is not known how many of these fishers are women; however, it is generally acknowledged that women play a very significant role in fisheries on the continent, depending on them for food and for their livelihoods.

The coastal regions around the continent include very diverse marine and aquatic ecosystems, resulting in considerable differences between small-scale fishing communities in different parts of the continent. The particular species caught and landed in different areas, shapes the type of fisheries that has developed in that region and this in turn has contributed towards shaping women's involvement in the fishery. In some parts of West Africa the fisheries are dominated by small pelagic catches such as sardines and herrings, and it is mostly men who go to sea whilst women are active in pre- and post-harvest activities. In parts of the Eastern Indian Ocean, large pelagic species like tuna are caught. In some regions, crustaceans such as crabs, lobsters, shrimps and prawn are an important component of the catch, and women participate actively in the fishing of these species as well as in pre- and post-harvest activities. In many

BEATRICE GOREZ / CFFA



Women fishsmokers in Guinea Konakry. There is a need to support women in these countries and in enabling them to link up with women fishworkers in other countries

countries, women play an important role in the harvesting of inter-tidal resources such as mussels, oysters, conches, octopus and seaweed.

The fisheries of West Africa in countries such as Senegal, Cote'Ivoire, Benin, Sierre Leone, Guinea Conakry, Ghana and Mauritania have received considerable focus in the past two decades with non-governmental organizations as well as donor interest focused on this region. This is due to the important role it has played in inter-regional trade and in trade with the European Union. Several specific regional workshops have highlighted the conditions that women face in small-scale fisheries and their need for access to credit, infrastructure and better work conditions, particularly for those who are involved in pre- and post-harvest activities, including the processing of fish and inter-regional trade. In addition, workshops in countries surrounding Lake Victoria such as Uganda, Zambia and Tanzania have focused attention on inland fisheries, and the impact of the development of trade in this region and its associated ecological, social and economic impacts, including those on women in fishing communities. In this region, the issue of 'sex for fish' has caught the attention of policy makers and researchers who have highlighted the negative consequences of the fish trade on power relations at the local level. Kenya and Tanzanian fisheries have also had a lot of focus from conservation organizations resulting in considerable literature on these fisheries. In more recent years, small-scale fishers in South Africa have garnered attention through their advocacy activities and demanded that a human rights based approach to fisheries must include a focus on their rights as women. Despite the relatively good coverage of women's activities in African fisheries in Yemaya over the years, the roles of women in several countries remain largely invisible, and women in these countries remain largely outside of the nascent networks of small-scale fisheries activists. The challenge of language across Africa makes this difficult. Two countries in Southern Africa where women in fisheries seldom receive attention are Namibia and Angola along the southwestern shores of the continent.

Fishing and related activities are a key livelihood strategy for Angolan coastal communities. Both men and women own boats and employ crew to catch fish. Women are mostly involved in post-harvest activities, including buying fish from the boats when they come into shore, cleaning and processing fish, as well as the sale of fresh, salted and cooked fish. Often wives have preferential

access to their husband's catch. They sell it to local or regional traders in what appears to be an intricate network of local benefit-sharing arrangements. Dried fish sells for similar prices as fresh fish, even though the process of salting and drying takes up to eight days and is considered labour intensive. Some women cooperatives have access to dedicated centres for salting and drying, but most often fish processing and marketing takes place along the main roads. Some women have also diversified into making yoghurt, ice cream, popcorn and cakes to sell at the fish market. However, they often argue that this is difficult to sell when the fishers themselves make little money from catches. In more remote coastal villages, women who buy directly from the artisanal fishers have to travel to larger cities to sell their catch, making them particularly vulnerable. In order to reduce risks of abuse or robbery, they travel in small groups of women traders.

Along the Namibian coastline women collect shells for making jewellery called 'onyoka'. Onyoka, a traditional necklace made from mussel shells, is common jewellery among the Oshiwambo speaking people. The use of seashells to make this jewellery has created a means to generate income for a number of women, who have moved to the coastal towns wholly to do this business. Most women operate individually, but on several occasions, when they are going far from their homes, they also operate in groups. Their operations involve collecting shells from the shoreline, processing these at their homes, and travelling to the northern regions of Namibia where the product is mainly sold. Women shell collectors often argue that they are keeping alive the culture and tradition of the Oshiwambo speaking groups. Although they have a dependence on harvesting marine resources along the Namibian coastline, they are not recognized by law, and hence operate informally. Their strong social, cultural, historical and traditional links to the sea, coupled with their limited capital make them a particularly vulnerable group. This group's vulnerability is exacerbated by dynamics and trends within their immediate environment—such as ocean acidification, increased sea tides and waves, competition with other jewellery makers, limited processing equipment and gear, and lack of access to educational and transport infrastructure—as well as an inability to belong to any formal institution.

There is a need to support women in these countries in making their fisheries visible and in enabling them to link up with women fishworkers and activists in other countries. ❧



# Through the years w

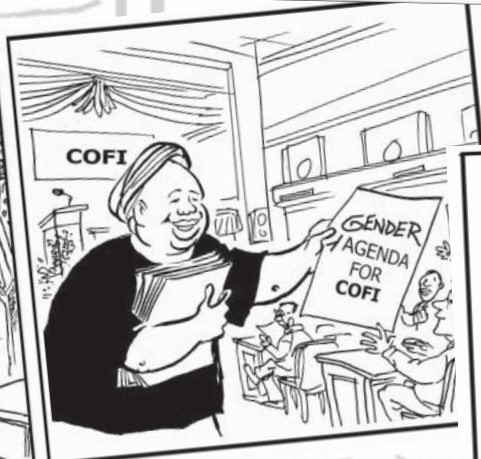
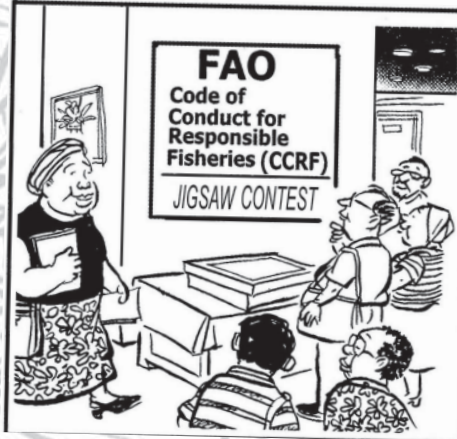
HI! I'm the newest member  
of the Yemaya family!  
Look out for me  
'cos I will be back!



*Mama gets real!*



*...tries to crack the Code*



ITQs  
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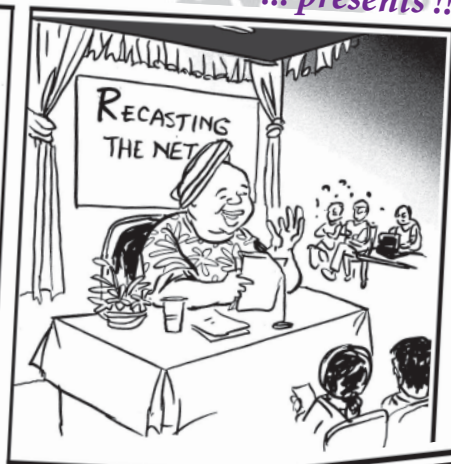


# th Yemaya Mama

...in a questioning mood !



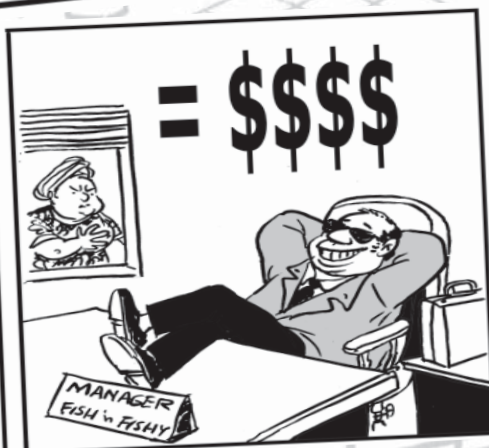
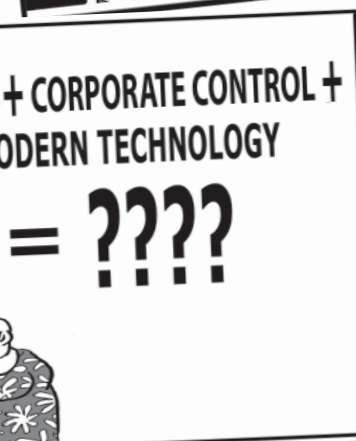
... presents !!



...looks for Sustainable Development!



... sums it up !!





# Hard days and nights

**Hardships at work, a lack of support at home, and little or no social security combine to create a bleak future for women fishsellers in Mangalore, India**

By **Ellen Thorell**  
(ellen.sigrid.thorell@gmail.com), Graduate Student in Human Ecology

Mangalore is a port city situated in the west coast state of Karnataka in India. The city hosts both large-scale and small-scale fisheries along its coastline. Traditionally, fishermen catch the product and sell it at a daily auction in the harbour to women vendors, who thereafter transport the goods to the market for commercial sale. The trade starts early in the morning, when the fishermen return to the harbour from their nightly fishing. The women fish vendors therefore also start their day in the early morning and work through the day till their stocks are sold or the sun goes down. One woman described her working day: "I have to sit around a lot, and that makes my body ache. It's also very hot in the sun and my eyes hurt. I have to take medicines for pain, and am often too unwell to work and am forced to stay at home for days in a row."

The marketplace is very hot, humid and unhygienic, with mosquitoes everywhere. The women have to sit in uncomfortable positions all day, which is bad for their health. They also need to work long hours to make the work profitable. All the women said that they would generally be at work as long as the sun was up. They claimed that if the lights

at the market had been functioning they would have worked even longer hours. They work through the year. One woman said that she sold fish on all except six days in a year. Older women vendors find it difficult to sustain a reasonable income from the profession.

On an average, a fish vendor makes around Rs 100 (USD 1.50) a day. There could be days when the market is slow, and she ends up with no profit or even a loss for the day. This economic model has forced women into taking loans daily. Most fish vendors do not have any savings, and many have substantial debts. Given their financial status the vendors cannot access banks, and are forced to borrow money from private lenders, very often at usurious rates of interest.

The women have to pay a fee of Rs 10 (USD 0.15) per day to the city corporation for their vendor space in the market. This works out to around a tenth of their daily income. For this payment, the vendors do not get any service from the corporation, beyond the use of the market space. The corporation does not feel obliged to arrange for waste removal, lighting, etc. Discontent with the way in which the marketplace is organized and the total lack of any facilities has provoked the vendors in the past to organize strikes and protests. However, these protest actions have not got them any real attention from the corporation, whose office bearers add that such protests are not their concern but rather an issue for the police.

The women get their livelihood from local fish stocks but have no control over how fish reserves are exploited. They therefore also face future declines in the amount of fish available for daily sales.

After an entire day, from dawn to dusk, spent in procuring fish and selling it at the marketplace, the women return home to all the tasks of housework. The domestic sphere is their sole responsibility, and they get no support from husbands. This daily grind of sweaty work in extremely poor working conditions, followed by the total lack of support from husbands towards sustaining the family, leaves the women with very little energy to even think of changing their lives or destiny. It robs them of energy to stick up for their rights and protest against the daily oppression. Society also reinforces this view of them being relatively powerless. According

ELLEN THORELL




Auction at Bund fish market, India. The women fish vendors start their day in the early morning and work through the day till their stocks are sold



to a former union activist, women are neither viewed by society, nor even by themselves, as able to shape their own destinies. The social structures determined by poverty, gender and class that surround them, form their identities and deny them the spirit to try and change their circumstances.

What, then, are the possibilities for effecting improvement and benefiting fish vendors? First, communication between the women and different local institutions must be improved. The women should be empowered to have greater influence in the decisions regarding the market structure, as this deeply affects their dignity and democratic rights. The corporation must also be prevailed upon to visit the market and gain more local knowledge. Today, they only

get the information once a year, through a third party, and this is not sufficient. The local community must also provide better legislation concerning the exploitation of the resource to avoid over-fishing. On a socio-economic level, in order to increase the vendor's level of agency, it would be beneficial to provide better security such as sickness benefits. Thereby, women might not need to take daily loans and end up trapped in debt. The union's solution is focused on providing more favourable loans. While beneficial in the current circumstances, this might not help in the long run. Finally, opportunities for education for young women in the fisheries sector will give them the opportunity to switch to other sectors if the fish sector breaks down. ■



A fisherwoman from Cabuya in Costa Rica, Sara García, is the first to admit that fishing is hard work. But she says: "I like the work. I like working with fish. I know how to prepare and sell it, and other women admire what I do."

Sara García's family, traditionally a small-scale fishing family, migrated to Costa Rica from their home country, Nicaragua, when she was little. She and her siblings spent their early years in Guanacaste in northern Costa Rica, but the family moved to Cabuya in search of work when Sara was about 15. The constant search for work meant that

knack for empathy and solving problems, being in fishing for Sara also means lending a sympathetic ear to her comrades. "I help the fishers when they are upset and they listen to me. I can really support the fishers' organization because they listen to me. I am like a balance for them. More women need to get involved," she adds.

Sara's family is closely knit; her brother, also a fisherman, and her sisters, married to fishermen, live close by and are always there for each other.

The year 2015 has been a special one for Sara. She was able to make a trip to Honduras—her first trip out of her hometown. Another feather in her cap has been completing two courses with the National Women's Institution (INAMU).

Today Sara is both pleased with and astonished at herself: "I took a trip out of the country. I developed myself as a woman. And to think that earlier I could hardly say my name out loud!"

Known for her simplicity and straightforwardness, Sara enjoys the respect and trust of her community. Truly an inspiring person, she has many plans for the future. Recently, Sara invested in a shrimp packaging machine and did a trial sales run of *mariscadas* (assorted seafood) and shrimp packages at the local market, which went off very well. Boosted by this success, Sara says with all the simplicity and determination that are the hallmark of her personality, "My goal is to have my own business and I know that I will be successful very soon!" ■

## PROFILE

### Defending a way of life—Sara García Fisherwoman from Costa Rica

By Jesslyn Solano  
(jsolano@coopesolidar.org). Member,  
CoopeSoliDar RL,  
Costa Rica

Sara did not have formal schooling but that was hardly a handicap since Cabuya readily offered work to those who needed it. Not just work, but as it turned out, romance too!

"I met Olivier, my husband, also a fisher, in the first ten days of coming to Cabuya. He was 18 then. We married a year later and I had my first son when I was 17 years old," Sara reminisces.

Today, a mother of three sons, who have all turned to fishing to support themselves, Sara cleans, prepares and sells the daily catch but, just as readily, she goes to the sea to fish whenever the need arises. "I pull the nets and it is a very nice experience," she says.

Fishing has meant everything to Sara and her family. Rather than just a source of livelihood, it is a way of life. Blessed with a

# Women in Central America's fisheries

**Women in Central America are a vital part of the fisheries supply chain but official data fails to reflect their labour**

By **Vivienne Solis Rivera**  
([vsolis@coopsolidar.org](mailto:vsolis@coopsolidar.org)), Member, ICSF

In their 1988 book, *Women and Environment in the Third World*, Irene Dankelman and Joan Davidson mention three issues that reflect the relationship between women and the small-scale fisheries (SSF) in Central America: first, how difficult it is to talk about women and SSF without ignoring the vast economic, cultural and social differences that exist among women even within a particular country and region; two, the tremendous work burden these diverse groups of women shoulder; and three, the fact that rural women have been the invisible workforce, the unacknowledged backbone of the family economy in Central America's small-scale fisheries.

As in other parts of the world, in Central America too, women are involved in the diversification of production in the fisheries sector. This has important implications for food security and food sovereignty, and the management of coastal and marine resources. Small-scale fishing is a source of food for their families, and supplements their earnings from other activities such as farming and tourism. Fish is caught, processed, consumed and sold by women along the isthmus in diverse ways.

However, given that there are very few sex-disaggregated statistics available about the number of women involved in fisheries related work, and given also the fact that it has been difficult to introduce the concept of gender to any relevant decision making platform, especially in the fishing sector, the importance of women's labour is seldom acknowledged in technical or political discussions on fishing policies and strategies. Furthermore, the data that is available fails to capture the multidimensional nature of the work done by women in the fisheries.

In Central America, as in other parts of the world, women occupy multiple roles in SSF. As ICSF's website puts it, they may be workers (paid and unpaid) within the fisheries, in pre- and post-harvest activities, including seafood processing plants; the main fishers in inland fishing and aquaculture in many countries around the world; caregivers in fishing families and communities, maintaining social networks and cultural identity; workers in non-fisheries sectors supplementing the household income from fishing, which is often erratic, or members of fish workers' movements and fishers' organizations.

However, these important roles are often overlooked when it comes to resource rights and decision making, and women's roles in small-scale fisheries continue to be hidden. In many national laws, for example, women are not considered artisanal fishers, because the definition of this activity usually excludes the pre- and post-capture activities in which women are actively involved. In most cases, the role of women in small-scale fishing communities in Central America is seen as limited to the domestic arena, and their work is hardly recognized as productive.

The following two examples of women's work in the fisheries illustrate their vital but under-recognized contribution to the economy of the sector. The first is the example of women line organizers (*lujadoras*) in Tárcoles, Costa Rica.

The organization and baiting of the fishing lines in preparation for fishing is a slow and hard job. In the *lujadoras* community, Tárcoles, located in Costa Rica's Pacific coast, this pre-capture job is the work of women

COOPESOLIDAR R.L.



A mollusc collector in Costa Rica. In most cases, the role of women in small-scale fishing communities in Central America is hardly recognized as productive

and young girls. It is a low paid job and the women rarely have social security backup. Remuneration is only on the basis of fishing trips undertaken and dependent upon the catch. Because of these uncertainties, the job is not highly valued. Nevertheless, a large number of the *lujadoras* are also heads of households. In addition to the low pay, the women have no legal or social support, and most of them are not part of any union or cooperative that could help to protect their interests and facilitate their access to various support systems.

The second example is the impact of the closure of shrimp trawling on women. A study done by CoopeSoliDar R.L and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) on decent work and fisheries in Costa Rica interviewed women who used to work in two shrimp peeling enterprises in the province of Puntarenas. The women were between 40 and 60 years of age, and their work involved the peeling and packaging of shrimp. They were heads of their families. Recently, the closure of the companies and moving of the shrimp fleets to the neighbouring Nicaragua left the women unemployed. They had been engaged in the work since they were young girls, some as young mothers needing the work to maintain their families. In some cases of women with children, the approval of child welfare authorities had been necessary in order for the women to enter this work. The sudden closure of the companies stripped from families their main wage earners.

These two examples underscore the importance of women's productive work in the fisheries sector. However, this is all but ignored in the official statistics. In 2011, the structural census, OSPESCA, mentioned that "the purpose of studying the family context is to know how many people depend economically from fishing according to the size of homes, the generational exchange that has been happening in fisheries and the economic wellbeing reached by the families according to their access to education, work and house".

Thus, the 'family context' is where most statistics on women in fisheries are included. The importance of considering women's participation in fishing is not recognized in the census exercise. The potential for women to contribute through their work to new ideas and efforts on issues of development, conservation, sustainable fishing,

and adaptation to new threats such as climate change is totally ignored.

The census mentions that small-scale fishing is done primarily by men in Central America (92.5 per cent of regional activity) and limits the contribution of women to just 7.5 per cent. Women are usually involved in the processing and commercialization, and during the last years have started taking positions in the organization and leadership of cooperatives and other forms of association both of only male fishers and mixed fishing groups. Also, some are becoming intermediaries in fish selling; some own boats, administer restaurants, and in some countries, go out to fish with their husbands and sons. However, when it comes to the census, the role of women in fishing is seen as a very small part of the effort.

The rhetoric of most cooperation agencies and governments emphasizes the importance of gender mainstreaming as being fundamental to empowering women, and recognizing their true contribution to the economy. This would mean incorporating the needs and perception of both men and women in the development agenda—which is far from being the case in Central America. The absence of a gender perspective in policy documents is especially evident in the small-scale fishing sector, both at the continental and the marine and coastal levels.

As an example of the non-inclusion of a women's agenda, the new Integration Policy for fishing and aquaculture in the Central American isthmus (2015-2025) approved in 2015 by all the ministries in charge in the region, explicitly mentions women in fisheries only once in the following context:

"VI.5.12. In relation to gender, the development of capacities for the commercialization and management of financial assets and credit: training and education, organizational strengthening, and the major involvement of women in the associations related to small-scale fishing and aquaculture."

No agenda for mainstreaming of gender in fisheries is included in the document. There is, however, the hope that the mention of the Voluntary Guidelines, and its integration in this policy, will give a better opportunity to include gender aspects in fisheries in a more integrated and serious way:

"VI.5.6. The Voluntary Guidelines for securing the sustainability of small-scale

**A human rights based approach to fisheries must include a focus on their rights as women.**



fisheries in the context of food security and eradication of poverty approved by FAO, will be taken into account in the planning related to small scale fisheries in the SICA countries, and the participation of the Confederation of Artisanal Fishers of Central America, and other regional groups of civil society related to small-scale fishers.”

The foregoing is illustrative of how, despite the stated goal of gender mainstreaming, women remain invisible for the most part in the fisheries sector. Their absence from all processes of policy and planning results in devaluing their work, excluding their contributions from the enumeration of statistics for the sector, and not including specific recommendations that help in increasing their share within the economy of the fishing sector.

In the context, certain recommendations may be made for inclusion in future policy documents for fisheries in Central America.

The contribution of women in fisheries and within the community must be legally recognized along with the multidimensional nature of their work. This recognition should translate into effective measures such as credit access, funding for women-led projects, as well as advocacy campaigns, among other means.

The exploitation of women in their workplace must be stopped, and social security as well as unemployment and insurance benefits must be extended for women and their families. Domestic and sexual violence must be eliminated. Further, an environment must be created that supports women to register their organizations so that they have the necessary means to access credit and participate in development programmes, and which makes their work visible in the economic and political sphere.

The issue of child labour in Central America’s fisheries hardly receives the attention it deserves. At a minimum, the international conventions for the elimination of child labour in fisheries and aquaculture, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and relevant International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions, including with respect to informal sector household chores, must be implemented. Similarly, legislation governing and regulating child labour through the use of incentives, disincentives and enforcement mechanisms must also be implemented.

Along with social and economic measures, the sustainable use and conservation of fishing resources must be promoted. Towards this end, several steps may be taken. The first would be to promote ecosystem based marine and coastal management, and to recognize and promote sustainable use as a valid strategy for the conservation of natural resources. The role of women in the management of such zones and areas is vital, and so also is their participation in programmes focusing on the conservation and restoration of coastal ecosystems. Therefore, gender specific proposals to permit women and women’s organizations to implement their ideas and actions related to conservation and sustainable fisheries practices are necessary.

Information exchange among women in the fisheries is necessary, together with training programmes for communities, especially gender related training that enable fishing communities to carry out their own surveys and produce their own documents, so that they can engage in responsible management of their resources.

The protocol for identifying areas that meet the criteria for Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Areas (EBSAs) must include traditional knowledge as well as scientific and technical expertise. This should be done with the approval and involvement of the holders of such knowledge (including women). Indigenous peoples and local communities must be involved in the process of describing EBSAs, by inviting them to regional workshops and consultations.

These processes must contemplate social and cultural information relevant to any subsequent step in the process of selecting conservation and management measures. Subsidies for industrial fishing fleets must be eliminated, and community based governance models must be put into place for marine protected areas. The participation of fisherwoman must be promoted in all relevant forums to discuss global and national actions concerning the conservation of marine ecosystems. The FAO International Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries must be widely recognized and put into practice. Clearly, the road ahead for women in the fisheries in Central America is a long one, but the hope lies in the fact that women are getting organized; they are ready to take on this challenge and walk the long road a step and a time! ❖

# Half the fishers in the world

**Tracing the road ahead for women in fisheries in Asia, a continent that produces the most fish and supports the largest number of fishers in the world**

By **Nikita Gopal**  
(nikiajith@gmail.com),  
Principal Scientist,  
ICAR-Central Institute of  
Fisheries Technology,  
Cochin, India

Fishing and the fisheries are a major source of food and livelihood for millions of people in Asia. Many Asian countries like China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Thailand and Vietnam are major fish producers. The fisheries policies in these countries have centred on increasing production over the last two decades. This has resulted in investments in centralized infrastructure development, along with introduction of bigger sized crafts, gears and different fishing systems. In many developing and less developed countries in the region, this has had government funding.

Though there are boundaries defined to differentiate fishing zones for traditional small-scale and larger vessels in the region, policing of the violations is difficult and often inadequate. Conflict situations are also observed between different fishery users in the countries in the region. On the whole, over capacity, increase in population, and decrease in available resources has led to the increased vulnerability of small-scale fishers. Fishing capacity increases have not necessarily reflected in increased per unit catches or better returns to the primary producers. Fisher producers have become fisher labourers working on bigger crafts, or are migrating out of the sector. Fishing trips are becoming longer and less economical. Another key development during the last

two decades has been the influx of electronic communication, and the fisheries sector has witnessed increasing use of Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) for both backward and forward link activities.

A major shift in production has been the emergence of aquaculture as an alternative to capture based fish production. By 2006, most of the production in the sector came from culture. In many countries in the region like Thailand, Vietnam, Bangladesh and India, major fish production comes from aquaculture rather than capture fisheries. Many factors such as unsustainable and over exploitative practices of many capture based fisheries, climate change induced impacts, and development activities along coastal areas have also had an impact on coastal fisheries and aided the growth of aquaculture. Aquaculture is more akin to agriculture and many of the factors of production can be reasonably controlled. Though there are many risks associated especially with regard to disease outbreaks and environmental concerns, this sector is growing and will continue to occupy an important place in future fish production. The past two decades have seen many countries evolving policies to develop aquaculture, with an eye on lucrative export markets. For developing countries in Asia and elsewhere, fish trade is clearly a significant source of foreign exchange. The growth of aquaculture has seen the emergence of a new class of non-fisher entrepreneurs, with coastal farmers shifting from rice cultivation to shrimp farming. This trend was also visible in an earlier era, when the capital intensive mechanization of capture fisheries shifted the ownership of vessels into the hands of non-fishers.

Women have been an integral part of fisheries. All over the world, studies have acknowledged that women form half the workforce in fisheries, especially in Asian countries. With small-scale and often subsistence fisheries and aquaculture dominating, it is imperative for the fishing communities that both men and women engage in the sector, which is a source of food and income for their families. However, the sector has strong gender divisions of labour, hosting much invisible women's work in fisheries and in fisheries production chains, and limiting women's access to the means of

SIBASIS GUHA / CIFT



A woman feeding in aquaculture pond, India. Women contribute in almost all activities right from pond preparation, stocking, feeding, and to harvesting

**Women's work in the fisheries, being subsistence and family oriented, remains invisible.**

production in fisheries and in aquaculture because of cultural taboos and practices.

Women have always been a dominating presence in marketing of fish, mostly in retail trade. They have been traditional processors of fish and also contribute to the growing labour force in the industrial processing sector. Though not so highly noticeable, a small proportion of women have always been involved in fish capture, often using nets and traps in inshore waters and inland water bodies. They have also gleaned for molluscs, crustaceans and fish. Fry collection for aquaculture is carried out by women in India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka in inter-tidal waters. However, closed seasons in various areas due to conservation efforts have made these areas inaccessible and have affected livelihoods. We also have women diving for crustaceans, molluscs, coral and other fishes and seaweeds in Japan, Korea and India. Evidence from certain countries suggests that women are working on commercial fishing vessels but they form a very small minority. Women as harvesters have always engaged in subsistence fishing to make ends meet for their families. Women are rarely encouraged to take up fishing, as fishing has always been thought of as a male preserve. Post-capture activities are a niche area for women, be it sorting the landed catch, or in processing and marketing and processing. In the industrial fisheries too, commercial processing is dominated by women in most Asian countries, including India, Thailand, Bangladesh and Vietnam.

The changes in the fisheries sector have affected women in many ways. The increased mechanization and the centralization of landings to bigger harbours from the beaches have meant loss of employment for the fisherwomen, who once were the custodians of fish after landing. Women took over in the supply chain thereafter, and engaged in the marketing or processing of fish. In India, for instance, fishing operations have shifted from beach landings near fishing villages to more urban based harbours. The landed fish is now auctioned and marketed through institutionalized labour organisations in these harbours. Women find it difficult to penetrate this set up. It has also meant travelling from their fishing villages, disrupting set work regimes and increasing workload. Women have also lost the bargaining power they once enjoyed, when the landings were within their reach. Now they have to depend on the auctioning being carried out in the harbours, and their resources do not permit

them to be active in the process. A change that may be noticed, however, is that many women are becoming auctioneers or agents of auctioneers.

While women continue to be active in fish marketing in most Asian countries, the physical conditions are still very dismal. Upscaling their fish businesses is a problem because of lack of resources, and they continue to be small players in the larger scheme of things. Aquaculture, being similar to agriculture, should have seen more participation of women. However, here too they continue to be near invisible. A recent study by the Network of Aquaculture Centres in Asia-Pacific across Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia and Lao PDR that focused on small-scale aquaculture systems (see the article 'Women in Aquaculture' in this issue, based on this study) found that women were present in all the major nodes of the aquaculture value chains. They contribute in almost all activities right from pond preparation, stocking, feeding, water management and healthcare, to harvesting. Since they are seldom categorized as hired labour and contribute mostly in the form of family labour, the invisibility was high. In industrial processing, the shop floor almost entirely comprises women's labour, involving working long hours and standing in cold conditions that are required for processing. However, in all countries, it has been observed that women are disadvantaged as far as the wages are concerned and invariably earn less than the men engaged in this industry. The working conditions also leave a lot to be desired.

On the whole, women take on a range of work within the fisheries and within fishing communities in Asia. The nature of work varies with the social and cultural distinctiveness of their countries, but the underlying similarity is that it is rarely seen as being 'productive'. Though it is acknowledged that women are the custodians of traditional knowledge about their natural environment and resources, women's work in the fisheries, being subsistence and family oriented, remains invisible.

Largely limited to the post-harvest sector and marketing, women in the fisheries face limitations in their scale of operations as a result of low levels of both investments as well as risk-bearing abilities due to lack of access to resources like institutional credit and technological innovations such as ice boxes and proper storage mechanisms. Though initiatives in micro-credit have helped women from other sectors to begin



micro-enterprises, they have largely been under-utilized and not completely effective in fisheries. Studies in India and Philippines have shown that micro-credit can often be diverted to meet family needs. Women need to find ways to exploit the opportunities to tap micro-credit, and utilize it effectively, as credit from other institutional sources may continue to be difficult to obtain.

Even when women are actively engaged in economic activity, it has been observed that their income is not always under their own control, which poses a big social challenge. Poor physical conditions of work have been highlighted quite often, but continue to get little or no policy level attention or field level intervention. This is the case in both marketing and processing. To equip women to meet the changes taking place with regard to electronic devices and applications, skill development training opportunities must be made available. Technical training in other fisheries related areas such as management of aquaculture farms and other fish related businesses are also required.

A larger, but more important, issue is the disruption or displacement of lives and livelihoods due to anthropogenic or natural factors. Development initiatives, climate

change impacts and natural disasters call for mitigation strategies that must also include capacity building, especially to help women to meet the emotional as well as physical aspects of the losses they incur. In most natural calamities, women are seen to be the more vulnerable.

For women to be able to articulate their concerns and needs, formation of formal organizations is essential. The one network that was established in the late 1990s and still continues to be active is the Mekong River Commission's 'Network on Gender and Fisheries' active in the Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia and Lao PDR. This network aims to improve the visibility of women's contribution in the fisheries sector. It works towards suitable policies and programmes to support their work and it tries to improve women's decision making power in the household and community, and at the government and policy level, highlighting fisherwomen's achievements in the region and initiating programmes for their benefit.

Will mere inclusion in fisheries related activities be able to empower women? This is a question that needs thought. Often it has been observed that attempts at inclusion have meant increased workloads which are



## Milestones

By **Ramya Rajagopalan** (ramya.rajagopalan@gmail.com), Programme Associate, ICSF with inputs from ICSF members, **Jackie Sunde, Cornelia Quist and Katia Frangoudes**

### Significant events in gender and fisheries since the launch of Yemaya in 1999

**2014:** Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Small-scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication—the SSF Guidelines—adopted. These guidelines recognize the importance of adhering to human rights standards and gender equality as fundamental to development and have a special chapter on gender equality

**2013:** European parliament organizes a public hearing on 'Developing the Role of Women in Fisheries and Aquaculture'

**2012:** FAO's Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security recognizes the equal tenure rights and access to land, fisheries and forests of women and girls independent of their civil and marital status

**2011:** The 29th session of the FAO Committee on Fisheries (COFI) approves the development of a new international instrument for small-scale fisheries to complement the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (CCRF)


**2010:** ICSF declares a 'Shared Gender

Agenda' for sustaining life and livelihoods in fishing communities endorsed by participants from 18 countries, including women fishworkers, representatives of fishworker organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), activists and researchers

**2009:** Brazil passes a comprehensive 'Fisheries and Aquaculture' law with important implications for women; the Ecuadorian National Assembly enshrines the right to food as a constitutional right

**2008:** In Chile, woman fishworker Zoila Bustamente elected president of Chilean National Confederation of Artisanal Fishermen (CONAPACH) 2006

**2006:** Formation of AKTEA, the pan-European network of women's organizations in fisheries and aquaculture

**2000:** At the Constituent Assembly of the World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fish Workers (WFF) held in Loctudy, France, women fishworkers from around the world emphasize the need for co-management of fishery resources and a community approach to the fisheries 

not commensurate with returns. Sensitivity to gender issues is still low, not only within households and within the community but also among extension personnel who work with fishers. Development efforts by governments and NGOs are inadequate and existing legislation usually poor. The lack of appropriate and relevant sex-disaggregated databases adds

to policy blindness—a problem which, if addressed, could serve as a basis for effective planning. Programmes need not be considered as ‘women programmes’; the involvement of the community as a whole is required. The participation of women in all areas in the sector, from resource management to policy decisions, must be ensured. **M**

## LATIN AMERICA

## MEXICO

# Empowerment through filleting

**Women’s labour adds value to the fish supply chain in Petatán, Mexico, and brings independence and hope to their lives**

By **Carmen Pedroza-Gutiérrez**  
(pedrozacarmen@yahoo.com), National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM)

Located in the central-western part of the country, Lake Chapala is Mexico’s largest lake, and one of the many fishing villages bordering the lake is Petatán, with a population of only 423 inhabitants. However, what makes Petatán special is that most fish caught in Lake Chapala—tilapia and carp—as well as other water bodies in the region is processed here. There are no official statistics for how much fish is filleted and packed in ice every day, but Petatán houses the second largest fish processing industry in the region. The fish filleted here goes to El Mercado del Mar, the second largest fish market in the country, from where it is distributed to restaurants, smaller markets and other parts of the country.

In Lake Chapala, like in other parts of the world, women dominate many aspects of the fisheries production chain. They participate in

the sale and capture of fish, but their main role is fish processing. In Petatán, all the fishers are male while women are experts in the filleting of fish. Since it is located between the lake and a mountain and has no arable land, Petatán’s economy revolves around the fisheries.

The women of Petatán have entered the labour market for two main reasons: first, the town depends on middlemen who buy fish only if it is already filleted and packed in ice, making women’s processing work an essential part of the value chain; and second, when fish catch volumes are low, the women’s income becomes crucial for household subsistence.

Most women began to learn how to fillet fish at the age of eight or nine years, and it is not rare to see little girls going to fillet after school. The average education level in Petatán is primary school, after which there are no further education avenues. Although for some girls, filleting might be a pastime, the money earned being used to pay for entertainment, including video games, for others, the income goes straight to helping their families survive. The sight of women filleting alone or in groups in their courtyards or in processing plants is a common one.

This activity offers many advantages to women. On a good catch day, working fast, a woman can fillet up to 150 kg of fish over a span of ten to twelve hours. They are paid 3 pesos (USD 0.18) per kg, which adds up to a total of 420 pesos per day (USD 24.7). Most women work from Monday to Saturday. Considering that in Mexico, the minimum wage is 70 pesos per day (USD 4), this is good income in a rural community.

Women are free to arrive at work and leave whenever they want. This is not an issue with the middlemen who pay them to fillet fish on a piece rate. The piece rate nature of work means that women are under pressure to put in long hours to earn good money, making

CARMEN PEDROZA-GUTIÉRREZ



Women filleting in Petatán, Mexico. The sight of women filleting alone or in groups in their courtyards is a common one

it difficult to balance domestic work with income generating activities. In fact, domestic work comes after a filleting journey.

Moreover, this job requires prolonged periods of standing, which causes extreme fatigue and can lead to chronic problems of back, leg and body pain. Women under pressure to produce more may miss meals, and drink less water to avoid having to go to the toilet. They are therefore prone to many forms of ailments. The women do not have any employment benefits. They have no social security protection, and do not receive any support from the government. Middlemen do not provide them even with first-aid-kits. This is due to the fact that this work is mostly done informally, without registration. Women are therefore excluded from fishers' organizations, ignored by creditors and by governmental development programmes.

Despite these disadvantages, women opt for this employment. It contributes to the household income and the money earned is spent on buying necessities for themselves and their children. They feel independent and empowered by being able to earn their own money. One woman said, "Now if our husbands want to leave us, we wouldn't care because we can work and be independent." However, there was a tone of resignation in these answers. The lack of real options was clear when women said that they prefer processing fish than going to work in the fields in neighbouring villages, as one of them said, "Filleting is anyway the only job that we have ever done".

Fish processing has given Petatán an important place in the Lake Chapala fisheries. By being able to add value to the fish, despite the disadvantages and poor labour conditions, women now have an opportunity to earn an income and to become independent and empowered. Little wonder then that the women of Petatán have come to be known as the bravest in the region! 🐟

### Interview of Kholiswa Fosana, a dynamic young woman fisher leader from the village of Hobeni situated in rural Eastern Cape, South Africa

By Jackie Sunde (jsunde@telkomsa.ne), Member, ICSF

#### What is the main focus of your organization?

I am a youth leader in our organization, the Hobeni Fisher's Association. Our organization comprises men and women who have traditionally fished and harvested marine resources along the coast adjacent to our village. During the apartheid regime in South Africa our community was forced to move out of our land and the State established a nature reserve and a marine reserve along the coast. My parents and others were prevented from accessing marine resources. After democracy came to South Africa in 1994, we hoped that we would get our land back and once again be able to harvest resources. However, the State insisted that our land must remain part of the marine protected area (MPA), and we were not permitted to harvest resources. This has really impacted the well being of my community, in particular, the food security and livelihoods of fisher families. Although the State promised that we could use resources from the coastal forest and reserve on a sustainable use basis, co-manage the reserve and benefit from eco-tourism, none of these benefits have materialized.

#### What are your main demands?

Our organization has come together to unite men and women from our area to fight for our human rights. In particular, we have started to advocate for our customary rights to harvest marine resources for our food security and livelihoods. Since the reserve was declared, hundreds of men and women have been arrested, prosecuted and fined or jailed for harvesting marine resources. In 2010, one of the leaders of our organization was arrested together with two others and charged with fishing illegally in the MPA. We stood firm and requested a public interest law firm, Legal Resources Centre, to launch legal action on behalf of our organization and community. We are using the Constitution of South Africa to ask the court to recognize that the Minister of Environmental Affairs acted unconstitutionally when he declared this MPA a complete 'no-take' reserve and that our customary rights to resources have been violated. We are demanding that our customary tenure rights are recognized and that we are able to participate in the management of the area.

#### What are the challenges you face?

Poverty levels are very high in our area. We have no basic services such as electricity and running water in our homes and there is no clinic in our village. There is very high unemployment and this really impacts the youth who have no opportunities and cannot see any future in remaining in the area.

#### What are your future plans?

We want to build the capacity of the members of the organization, particularly the youth, and get political education going so that people are aware of their rights. We are waiting for the outcome of our court case but we are determined to fight for basic services such as a clinic and a community hall. We also want to ensure that we can participate in a range of eco-tourism projects and ensure that the community derives benefits from the presence of the reserve and the MPA. 🐟

## YEMAYA MAMA

...cops out of COP 21!





## BOOK

## Our Mother Ocean: Enclosure, Commons, and the Global Fishermen's Movement

Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Monica Chilese;  
translated by Silvia Federici; Common Notions; NY. 2014

By Nilanjana Biswas  
(nilanjanabiswas@  
yahoo.com),  
Independent  
researcher

**O**ur Mother Ocean, co-authored by renowned feminist political theorist Mariarosa Dalla Costa and sociologist Monica Chilese, is a vigorous critique of where globalization and industrialization in fishing have led global water resources to, and the direct role that humankind has played in this destructive relationship.

Oceans are more than mere masses of water. We depend on them for oxygen, for climate control, and for a significant portion of our food resources. Since ancient times, oceans have also been a means for travel, to discover the world, to 'globalize' humankind. Today, the same oceans are the sites of some of the worst man-made disasters on earth—the BP oil spill off the Gulf of Mexico; the Fukushima nuclear disaster, or the ecological catastrophes caused by the repeated tsunamis threatening large parts of coastal communities.

This book is important in bringing into sharp focus the current war over oceanic resources and the possibility of resistance to the irrational exploitation and depletion of "this great reservoir of nature". Reviewing the more than two decades that have elapsed since the Rio Conference, Dalla Costa describes the various agreements and conventions to safeguard the oceans and preserve the rights of those traditionally dependent on the oceans, and how they all failed to deliver what they promised.

The industrialization of the fishing sector carried on, pushed through, as Dalla Costa finds out, with the help of USD 20 billion annually. These subsidies were primarily devoted to new technology, leading to overfishing and a host of other problems.

Co-author Monica Chilese talks of how excessive fishing has led to the collapse of 40 of the 60 main stocks of fish in North Atlantic. Unregulated forms of fishing like use of explosives had put 85 per cent of the coral barriers at risk in Indonesia. Industrial aquaculture, in the push for greater productivity and profits, used increasing quantities of chemicals and drugs, poisoning consumers and polluting the environment. Dalla Costa

points to Indian women and children working in aquaculture farms—"blue factories"—for eight to ten hours each day, in unhygienic conditions. The authors describe how industrial fishing was fast replacing good jobs in traditional fishing with the alienated, high work intensity techniques of industry.

Globalization is presently spreading the scourge of overfishing across the world. The authors quote the UNEP (United Nations Environment Programme) as saying: "...developing countries with good fishing stock have stipulated fishing agreements with foreign countries... [for the] influx of foreign currency with which to pay off debts and stimulate economic growth. Unless rigorous protection mechanisms are activated this can be a dangerous mistake."

Simultaneously, the authors outline a parallel narrative, centred in the global South that has brought together movements of fisherpeople over the question of food sovereignty, and seeks to make the organic connection between modes of fishing and safeguarding the ecosystem. Dalla Costa, in tracing the movement, dwells extensively on the formation of the National Fishworkers Forum (NFF) in India. She sees the accumulation of autonomous struggles of fisherpeople into national formations leading on to the World Forum of Fish Harvests and Fish Workers in 1997, and the World Forum of Fisher Peoples in 2000. To quote Tom Kocherry, the President of the NFF from 1982 to 1995, "...fishermen in the North and the South, all victims of globalization, are trying a new development paradigm ... where small is acceptable as beautiful and sustainable, and simplicity becomes a way of life, paying due respect to indigenous cultures."

This is an important reader to understand the connections between globalized industrialization and the destruction of our oceans and water resources. The book simultaneously puts out the hope of struggles from below that play David against the might of the industrial Goliath. The India-centric exploration of resistance does not detract from showing the global nature of the resistance. The book, however, while talking of the dehumanizing condition of wage labour in industrial fishing, does not include in its exploration of resistance, either an analysis of the attempts that have been made to organize industrial fishworkers, or the importance of such organization in the fight for regulation of industrial fishing. ■



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the International Collective  
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27 College Road  
Chennai 600 006  
India  
Tel: (91) 44 2827 5303  
Fax: (91) 44 2825 4457  
E-mail: icsf@icsf.net  
Web site: www.icsf.net

EDITED BY  
Nilanjana Biswas

ILLUSTRATIONS BY  
Sandesh  
(sandeshcartoonist@gmail.com)

DESIGNED BY  
P. Sivasakthivel

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.