



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

# Yemaya

ICSF'S NEWSLETTER ON GENDER AND FISHERIES

## From the Editor

**M**ore than three years since the endorsement of the SSF Guidelines in June 2014, it is important to recall that these Guidelines, the first internationally recognised instrument for the small-scale fisheries sector, expressly call upon all stakeholders to adopt strategies to promote gender mainstreaming in the fisheries. It is important to ask, how are women in fishing communities articulating their demands in the context of the SSF Guidelines?

Women in fish processing and trade in many parts of the world are increasingly getting organised and networked to build capacity and entrepreneurial capabilities. The current issue brings together many such examples: from the Caribbean, of women fishers' organisations working towards networking, representation and capacity building; from Africa, of women across several fishing nations networking to build capacity, adopt best practices and increase their incomes, while also advocating for more gender responsive fisheries policy; from Europe, of the women's network AKTEA campaigning for equal rights for women in fisheries as well as for sustainable fishing practices.

However, we see that even today, in many parts of the developed world, especially in fish harvesting, the contribution of women tends to get ignored, and they do not share equal rights with men. In Norway, the number of women registered as full-time fishers was the highest in 1990, and has consistently declined since then. Low female workforce participation means low participation in fisher associations, leading to gender blind fishing policies. We read in this issue that it was only after they were recognised as professional fishers that women shellfish harvesters in Galicia were spurred to organise. At first organising independently but with affiliation to the fishermen's organisations, in time, these women were even able to gain leadership positions in the predominantly male cofradias. Formal recognition of women's work is thus often necessary to mobilise and build organisation, and allow women's leadership to emerge.

While formal recognition of women's work is of critical importance, without family and domestic support, women would find it difficult, if not impossible, to stand up to community taboos and policy indifference. In this context, the story of K.C. Rekha, who, with her husband's support, became India's first deep sea fisher, is particularly heartening.

Another important enabling condition for women is access to simple technology and local data, particularly in today's context of environmental degradation, climate change and increasing encroachment of the seas by other stakeholders. The article on beach profiling in Tamil Nadu, India, highlights the importance of fishing communities taking control of such access. It brings out how women of the community can work with the men to master simple techniques towards building local data to support their own struggles for coastal rights.

All the articles in this issue thus represent examples of gender mainstreaming in different contexts, whether by external inputs of capacity building or by women's self-organisation or through access to simple technologies, with family support being crucially important. For the local implementation of the SSF Guidelines to be truly gender sensitive, lessons learnt from such diverse global contexts are of great significance. ❏



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# Celebrating Women in Caribbean Fisheries

**The Caribbean Network of Fisherfolk Organisations works on the implementation of the SSF Guidelines with a special focus on gender**

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The Caribbean Network of Fisherfolk Organisations (CNFO) is a regional network of national and local level fisherfolk organisations and individual fisherfolk leaders. It operates throughout the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) comprising mainly the English-speaking countries and territories. In 2006, the CNFO was informally established through fisherfolk capacity building and strategic planning, assisted by regional inter-governmental (Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism Secretariat), non-governmental (Caribbean Natural Resources Institute) and academic (University of the West Indies Centre for Resource Management and Environmental Studies) collaborating partners. In 2016, CNFO was legally established as a not-for-profit company.

The mission of the CNFO is to “improve the quality of life for fisherfolk and develop a sustainable and profitable industry in the Caribbean region through networking, representation and capacity building”. Without using the terms gender equity and gender equality, the CNFO has always sought to be gender aware in its three areas of

strategic focus—capacity building, policy advocacy and policy engagement. Currently at the helm of this network that recognises the importance of gender in fisheries is its female chair, Vernel Nicholls. Her seven-member executive, 17-member board of directors and general membership strive towards mainstreaming gender in fisheries.

According to Nicholls, “The CNFO considers gender, and in particular, the diverse roles of women in the fishing industry, to be integral to the continued development and sustainability of Caribbean fisheries. It seeks to promote the inclusion of gender equity (and equality) in discussions and policy through member participation (collective or individual) in activities, projects and forums at the national and regional levels, ensuring that women’s issues are addressed”. She further adds that, “in working towards achieving gender equality among its members, the CNFO has consistently tried to ensure that its members are treated fairly and receive justice according to their needs”.

Through its regional partners and international assistance (such as through the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the FAO), the CNFO and its member organisations have benefited from engaging in projects aimed at institutional strengthening, capacity building, improving governance, fisherfolk leadership, climate change adaptation, disaster risk management and, more recently, gender in fisheries. Recent activities illustrate how the CNFO is bringing women, gender equity and gender equality to the forefront in the implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (the SSF Guidelines).

The CNFO has been very supportive of global level and Caribbean engagement with the SSF Guidelines, having recognised the inadequacy of information for addressing gender in fisheries. Since March 2017, the CNFO has collaborated with its regional partners to incorporate the SSF Guidelines into the Caribbean Community Common Fisheries Policy. The partnership recognised the need for countries and fishing industries

MARIA PENA



Women processing white sea urchin roe for sale. The annual fishing season, locally known as sea eggs, is important socio-economically to hundreds of Barbadians

to focus more explicitly on gender equality and equity in Caribbean fisheries policies and management. The SSF Guidelines, having a human rights-based approach, strengthens this focus by making direct linkages to gender equality and equity. The CNFO and its partners led a regional participatory process with fisherfolk and fisheries officers to develop a protocol for incorporating the Guidelines into regional policy. The resulting draft protocol is in the final stages of review prior to submission for endorsement by the Caribbean Fisheries Forum, and Ministerial Council of the Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism. It has received support from senior fisheries officers, representatives of inter-governmental organisations and civil society organisations from across the insular Caribbean. A gender mainstreaming protocol to the fisheries policy can help to achieve gender equality and equity, by strengthening the roles of women in leadership. The SSF Guidelines also invoke international human rights standards and can be linked to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular SDG 5: achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

In 2016, one of CNFO's long-standing partners, the Centre for Resource Management and Environmental Studies, formed the Gender in Fisheries Team (GIFT at [www.cavehill.uwi.edu/cermes/projects/gift/](http://www.cavehill.uwi.edu/cermes/projects/gift/)) to better understand and assist with policy and practice concerning gender in Caribbean small-scale fisheries. Within the SSF Guidelines, the focus of GIFT is on the section 'Responsible fisheries and sustainable development', sub-section 8 on 'Gender equality'. The scope of GIFT is limited to SSF fisheries value chains and governance arrangements at sub-regional, national and local levels, working primarily with members of the CNFO. The CNFO, currently represented by its Administrative Officer and Chair, is one of a dozen members that comprises the GIFT and actively contributes to its activities. Given the potential of fisherfolk organisations and cooperatives to represent the fishing industry, it is encouraging to have the CNFO and its supporting partner organisations playing active roles in the GIFT and exercising leadership in introducing gender mainstreaming in fishing. We are witnessing the creation of a community of practice.

Through its membership in the GIFT, the CNFO has participated in international

and regional conferences such as the Global Symposium on Gender in Aquaculture and Fisheries, and the Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute, among others, to share Caribbean perspectives on gender in fisheries with wider audiences. The CNFO assisted in collecting data on fisherfolk perspectives on the SSF Guidelines and gender in fisheries, the results of which fed into GIFT's preliminary 'Gender Scoping Study' supported by FAO. The summary findings from the study established a partial baseline from which to measure progress on the SSF Guidelines as well as incentivise more intensive and active engagements to ensure that efforts to achieve SDG 5 (Gender) and SDG 14 (Life Beneath Water) are at once complementary and mutually enabling.

In July 2017, CNFO was involved in the programme 'Small-scale Women in Fishery Learning Exchange', facilitated by CoopeSoliDar R.L., Costa Rica. The purpose of the learning exchange was to strengthen the capacities of women in fisheries from several Caribbean countries including their Costa Rican hosts and counterparts. The CNFO selected women from the fishery sectors in Barbados, St Kitts and Nevis, Grenada and Belize to participate in the exchange. The women learned and shared experiences from their fishing communities and from personal, economic and political/organisational empowerment perspectives. This exchange helped with strengthening bridges among islands of the Caribbean and Costa Rica, while contributing their knowledge on Caribbean artisanal fishery value chains.

A 2017 wall calendar titled 'Leading Ladies in Fisheries' was produced and distributed throughout the region by GIFT to raise public awareness of the importance of women in fisheries and their contribution to development. The CNFO played a pivotal part in the development of the calendar by recommending leading ladies to be featured. CNFO's Administrative Officer was one of those four special 'Leading Ladies' featured. CNFO will collaborate again this year with the GIFT to develop a 2019 Gender in Fisheries calendar.


The first ever Women in Fisheries Forum (WIFF) in Belize, jointly organised by the Belize Marine Conservation and Climate Adaptation Project and the Wildlife Conservation Society, has been a major step towards understanding the role of women in

**The CNFO has always sought to be gender aware in its three areas of strategic focus —capacity building, policy advocacy and policy engagement**

fisheries there. Geared towards promoting gender equality and equity in the allocation of resources, rights, status and responsibilities between women and men, the WIFF attracted female participants representing all aspects of the fisheries value chain—fisheries management, gear/equipment services, harvesting and marketing, and processing and distribution—with the main objective of developing a Gender Action Plan to mainstream gender in the daily activities of government departments, NGOs and projects in Belize. The CNFO assisted with the organisation and facilitation of this very special forum, and helped provide

participants with updated information on gender in the SSF Guidelines.

From the information highlighted here, we hope readers have gained an appreciation of the support the CNFO continues to provide to the implementation of the SSF Guidelines and its commitment to gender mainstreaming in Caribbean fisheries through its membership. As the Chair of the CNFO, Ms. Nicholls notes, “Concepts of gender equity and equality will become more prevalent in our discussions so as to bring more awareness and understanding of their importance to small -scale fisheries.”



**T**aking a road less travelled is not easy. Sometimes the whole of society stands against you. But no such fear deterred Rekha K.C. of Koorkenchery, a village in the Thrissur district of Kerala, India, the first woman in the country to go fishing in the deep waters of the outer sea. Amidst prevailing social stigmas, 45-year-old Rekha has been fishing in these waters with her husband Karthikeyan for ten years.

## PROFILE

### **K.C. Rekha: Seagoing Fisherwoman from Kerala, India Dream Big, the Sea is the Limit**

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“Although the sea is considered mother and goddess, our society forbids a woman from entering the sea,” she says. “I faced strong opposition...they even said it would destroy the sea. There were even times when our nets were damaged,” she adds.

Rekha is no stranger to struggle. Twenty years ago, when she fell in love with Karthikeyan, their families, being from different communities, and certain that the match was doomed to fail, opposed it. “Today, after all these years,” says Rekha, “our work celebrates our togetherness and is a sweet revenge for all those who said our marriage wouldn’t last.” The couple is blessed with four children.

Rekha began her fishing career by helping Karthikeyan land his catch. As her expertise grew, one day Karthikeyan asked her whether

she would join him at sea. Today, she does the netting and catching, thus challenging the linguistic imbalance of the word ‘fisherman’. “At first netting was difficult as it was all about calculating fathoms, but with practice we now net at 10-20 fathoms a day, depending upon the season,” she says. Using only gill nets and hooks, they catch mackerel, sardine, tuna, pomfret, sole and other small fishes. “We may not have been able to save much, given our daily expenses, but there were times we would earn up to Rs 40,000 (USD 625) selling fish,” says Rekha.

Rekha’s day begins at three in the morning. She and her husband go out to sea by four o’clock. Although she can’t swim, it is Rekha’s intense belief in Kadalamma (the goddess of the sea) that enables her to take up the challenge. Lacking any access to navigation technologies, their voyages rely solely upon traditional knowledge.

India’s Central Marine Fisheries Institute recently felicitated Rekha for being the first woman to venture out to the outer seas for fishing.

Necessity may have forced Rekha to take up fishing but today it is her love for the job that keeps her going. “As long as my health allows it and the sea keeps me happy, I will continue my job,” she says bravely. All she needs now is a new boat with a good engine to replace the current one which uses up too much petrol. Unfazed by her financial crises, Rekha continues to dream about the fortunes that Kadalamma has in store for her each day. The dreams that twinkle in her brown eyes are as vast as the sea.

# Networking for Strength

**A newly established network of women fish processors and traders promises to improve the prospects of women in Africa's post-harvest sector**

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The vast fish resources of the African continent offer many benefits. Fishery and aquaculture products supply food, nutrition, income and livelihoods to hundreds of millions of people; they help earn foreign currency and represent conservation and biodiversity values of global significance.

Despite its vast marine, freshwater and aquaculture assets, the African continent continues to be saddled with numerous problems that challenge long term resource and environmental sustainability, and impede the sector's contribution to food security, poverty alleviation and national economic growth.

Recent statistics reveal that women make up more than one-fourth (27 per cent) of the workforce in the African fisheries and aquaculture sector. The great majority of these women are employed in post-harvest (91.5 per cent) making a significant contribution to food security, livelihoods and household incomes. However, although gender has been on the international development agenda for a long time, many inequalities remain and the role of women in fishery and aquaculture is often not given the attention it deserves. Women remain marginalised within the sector, both in terms of their fishing related activities and their role in decision making processes.

Cognizant of the above challenges, the African Union developed a Policy Framework and Reform Strategy for Fisheries and

Aquaculture in Africa (PFRS), which was adopted by the 23rd summit of African Heads of States and Governments in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea, in June 2014. One of the seven policy objectives of this Pan African strategic document is to guarantee, and sustainably strengthen, the contribution of artisanal fisheries to poverty alleviation, food and nutritional security and socio-economic benefits of fishing communities, specifically the fisherwomen, in Africa.

Two years ago, in 2016, the African Union-Inter-African Bureau for Animal Resources (AU-IBAR) organised a training workshop aimed at strengthening the capacity of women fish processors and traders associations on a range of issues, including: effective implementation of sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) standards; quality standards; the safe handling of fish and fisheries products for increased product shelf life; as well as access to markets and socio-economic benefits. The workshop led to a number of significant recommendations including the need to establish a continental network of associations of women fish processors and traders.

By April 2017, the dream of forming a network for African women in fisheries was realised in a consultative workshop organised by AU-IBAR in collaboration with the NEPAD Planning and Coordinating Agency (NPCA), World Fish and the Government of the United Republic of Tanzania in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. This consultative workshop brought together 55 participants from 28 African Union Member states, including Algeria, Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Chad, Comoros, Congo, Cote D'ivoire, D.R. Congo, Egypt, Ghana, Guinea, Kenya, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Sudan, Tanzania, Togo, Tunisia, Uganda

AU-IBAR



AWFISHNET members with the leaders of Tanzanian fisheries division and AU-IBAR after launching the network in April 2017 at Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. This consultative workshop brought together 55 participants from 28 African Union Member states

**The main objective of the network is to provide a continental platform for women fish processors and traders**

and Zambia. Also taking part in the workshop were regional institutions such as the Lake Victoria Fisheries Organization (LVFO), the Regional Commission of Fisheries of Gulf of Guinea (COREP) and the African Network of Women in Fisheries (RAFEP/COMHAFAT), as well as experts from environmental agencies, information dissemination agencies, donor groups and the AU-IBAR. This initiative gave birth to the African Network for Women Fish Processors and Traders (AWFISHNET). The official representatives of the new forum were elected with due consideration to regional representation and language, and an action plan was developed to guide the network's activities for the next two years. It was agreed that, pending further decision, Tanzania—the country elected as the secretariat—would house the network.

AWFISHNET members recommended that the continental network would function more efficiently if representation from each Member State came from associations belonging to recognised national women's networks. It was therefore suggested that each country establish a national women's network if it did not already have one, and further, that the capacity of these national women's associations and networks be duly strengthened. It was suggested that certain focal persons or associations be made responsible for aiding the formation of national networks and for mapping out the women's associations in fish processing and trade in their respective countries. The participating country representatives were also advised to send feedback to their fisheries line ministries.

The AWFISHNET network now uses a Facebook page and WhatsApp to communicate,

and to share indigenous and technical knowledge in fisheries and development as well as business experiences.

The main objective of the network is to provide a continental platform for women fish processors and traders to achieve a range of goals. These include: collaboration and cooperation among women fish processor and trader associations across the continent; sharing of best practices, experiences, technologies and learning; effective advocacy on issues affecting women's fish processor and trader associations, including, in particular, the establishment of an enabling policy environment; building and strengthening capacities of members to effectively implement continental policies at local, national, regional and continental levels; strengthening the role and participation of fish processor and trader enterprises owned by women as Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in the fisheries sector, with the objective of improving access to markets, expanding markets and marketing opportunities, thereby fostering the equitable participation of women fish processor and trader enterprises in intra-regional African fish trade.

AWFISHNET's dream of empowering women, improving access to markets; expanding markets and marketing opportunities and fostering the equitable participation of post-harvest enterprises in intra-regional African fish trade is not yet close to reality. Support is needed to strengthen the capacities of its secretariat and member groups as well as to encourage the formation of national women's networks where they do not exist. AWFISHNET sends out a call for support to recognise, utilise and enhance women's potentials and capabilities in the fisheries sector for sustainable and equitable development. ❏



## Milestones

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### Global Gender Gap Report

The new Global Gender Gap Report released by the World Economic Forum, estimates that, especially when it comes to women's workplace equality, it will be another 217 years before we achieve gender parity. The report ranks a total of 144 countries by economic opportunities, education, political participation and health. The top five best performers in reducing the gender gap and providing equal opportunity are Iceland, Norway, Finland, Rwanda and Sweden.

Iceland's new law, which came into existence on 1 January 2018, made it illegal to pay men more than women. Rwanda has the highest share in the world (three in every five seats) of women in parliament. Yemen, on the other hand, is currently the lowest ranked of the 144

countries measured in the report. The other countries to fall below the global average are China, Liberia and the United Arab Emirates. If the gender gap is to be reduced further, it will require men and women to embrace and promote diversity and inclusion.

The insightful report advocates that to achieve sustainable development goals across the sectors, governments must need to make gender equality a critical part of their nation's human capital development. This report will serve as a basic framework for continued benchmarking by countries on their progress towards gender equality. The report is available at: <https://www.weforum.org/reports/the-global-gender-gap-report-2017> ❏

# Then and Now—Women in Norway's Fisheries

**Twenty-five years after the introduction of the quota system, significant challenges confront women in Norway's fisheries**

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Norway is considered to be one of the largest fishery nations in Europe. Despite this, there are few professional women fishers in the country. According to statistical data released in 2017 by the Norwegian Directorate of Fisheries for 2016 (which this article mainly draws upon), the number of full-time women fishers in Norway was 274 compared to more than 9,000 full-time men fishers. Fishing and fishery politics have been so male dominated in Western societies that researchers have characterised fishing in general, and the quota system, introduced in Norway in 1990, in particular, as a patriarchal system. Women registered as fishers may be few but they have, particularly in the past, participated in fishing, performing tasks like baiting the long-lines, washing the boat, doing administration work or helping to deliver fish at the fish plants. In some cases, they were, and are, fishing near the coast. These days, women work outside fisheries and bring home an important salary. They still continue to shoulder household and community responsibilities. Women thus contribute to the efficiency of the fisheries, increase the security of fishing households and serve as an important link connecting fish boat, household and community.

Interestingly, in contrast to the farming sector in the country, in Norway's fisheries, women's work, regardless of the type of work, does not make them eligible for membership in fishermen's associations. This may be one of the main reasons why issues related to women in the fisheries seldom find discussion in important official policy papers.

As a researcher interested in gender questions and women's rights, I find the absence of gender issues in fishery politics rather strange in a country that has been noted by the World Economic Forum in 2017 for its politics of equality. In fact, for years, the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad) placed special emphasis on gender in the overseas projects they financed. However, if a gender perspective were to be properly applied, women and men contributing to fishing would deserve the same rights, independent of where they carried out their fishing tasks.

In many of my previous articles since the 1970s, I have focused on women in fishery households and communities. In this article, I will focus on women as fishers in small-scale coastal fishing. I will also try to point to some factors that can help to explain the low number of registered women fishers. Finally, I will end with examples of changes that have taken place and that may lead to improving the situation of women fishers in Norway.

In contrast to the number of male fishers, the number of registered women fishers in Norway has always been low. The number of women registered as primary or full-time fishers was highest (about 580) just before and just after 1990 when Norway introduced the quota system in coastal fishing. These numbers also included women working on ocean-going factory skips. In all, full-time and part-time women fishers accounted for only 3.1 per cent of registered fishers in Norway in 2016, and clearly, with only a few exceptions, they can be considered as a minority in the primarily male world of fishing.

The majority of full-time fishers are found in three of Norway's northernmost counties. In 2016, in the county of Nordland, there were 66 women and 2,191 men registered as fishers; in Troms, there were 28 women and 1,028 men; and in Finnmark, 57 women and 1,088. In the county of Møre and Romsdal

ANNE-LISE EKREM



The Sami Siida meeting was held in Øvre Alta, Norway and the laavo (the tent) was used as the meeting room where the professional women fishers met for the first time

**Women's status can be considered to be akin to that of guests at an all-men's table**

in western Norway, 63 women and 1,962 men were registered fishers. Between the years 1990 and 2016, the sharpest increase in the numbers of women who pursued fishing as a primary occupation took place in Finnmark, where the municipality of Nordkapp had the highest number of women fishers. Since their numbers are small women fishers tend to be dispersed amongst the many fishing communities along the long Norwegian coast.

The 2016 data also indicates an age-related decline in the numbers of women fishers who are most numerous in the age group 20 and 29 years, and progressively decline in numbers as the age range increases.

Women also own coastal fishing boats. In 2016, the number of women boat owners was 118 out of a total of 274 full-time women fishers. The corresponding number of male boat owners was 5,836 out of a total of 9,137 full-time male fishers. Even though both women and men own boats, the majority of owners are men.

Today, when coastal fishery is regulated by quotas, fishers have to reckon with the fact that politicians have a strong influence on the quota system since the size of a quota is set by the Directorate after consultation with fishery politicians and researchers. The quota system today is organised in a closed and open group and the quotas are allocated per boat and not per person. In 2016, fishers controlled 1,779 fishing permits in the closed group, and 1,493 of the permit holders were registered as residents in northern Norway. However, few women owned a boat with a quota in the closed group. In Nordland for instance, three women owned a boat with a quota in the closed group, two women in Troms, and eight in the northern most county of Finnmark. A quota in the closed group, as opposed to a quota in the open group, can be bought and sold, and can therefore represent a high value. According to local fishers in Finnmark, in 2017, quotas in the closed group belonging to boats between 10 and 10.99 metres could be sold for anything between USD 150,000 to 200,000. The high quota price is therefore a drawback for newcomers who want to buy a quota. Few women are able to afford this investment. Most women participate therefore in open group fishing. When a fisher in the open group stops fishing, the quota is returned to the Directorate of Fisheries which then redistributes them to new fishers. Norway also has an arrangement of recruitment quotas for people 30 years of age or younger. Annually, 10 to 15 recruitment quotas in the

closed group are allocated. Till date, only one woman has been allocated a quota under this arrangement.

Given the low numbers of women fishers, and the lack of formal acceptance for shore work by women, their status can be considered to be akin to that of guests at an all-men's table.

Why are there so few women fishers in a fishery nation like Norway? There are many reasons for the relatively low numbers not only of women fishers but also of women who are boat owners, and owners of closed group quota boats.

One explanation could be that fishing is a profession with a strong division of labour between women's and men's work. This division of labour is embedded in the fishery culture and seldom questioned. This was understandable in earlier days when both women's and men's work was hard and time-consuming, and their way of life could be defined as a peasant way of life with low commercialisation and little formal organisation. In Norway, many of the social welfare rights are based on paid work. Therefore, when the welfare system was introduced in Norway, mainly after World War II, it was men fishers' paid work that was registered in the tax files, providing a basis for holiday allowances, sickness compensations and pensions. Women's contributions were not taken into consideration except for some of the general welfare rights, like a minimum pension, that all Norwegian citizens are entitled to. Such a division of labour was also supported by an education system that perpetuated the notion of a gender divided fishery.

Furthermore, unionising in the fisheries fell into the male domain. The different fishermen's associations through the years had few women as full members. The exception is of women from the western part of Norway who own bigger vessels. They have been active in Norges Fiskarlag, participating in many relevant subsections and meeting. The fishermen's associations limited themselves to questions of resources, fish prices, payment, and relations to fish buyers and to the government. Women's issues were not problematised.

When women within the sector organised, they came together as members of associations for improving local peoples' health, or working for the temperance movement, and sometimes in Christian organisations. In the beginning, few became members of labour unions. With such gendered patterns, women from fishing



households had, and continue to have, negligible influence on fishing politics, while they are important actors in developing the economic and social life of the fishery households and communities. Fiskarkvinnelaget or The Fisherwomen's Association, which functioned from 1953 to 2011, and was associated with Norges Fiskarlag, organised women living in fishing villages, working hard to improve the social and cultural conditions in their communities, as well as putting fisherpeople's safety and security on the agenda.


The gender division in politics has impacted the content of official policy papers. The political decisions reveal a lack of cognizance of women's issues and gender perspectives. Most of the governmental white and green papers build on the notion that fishing is a male occupation, with little thought given to the fact that the boat, the household and the community are all strongly interconnected. This can also be related to the fact that during the post-war years in Western societies, married, adult women were strongly connected to the concept of 'housewives'.

Even up to now there is evidence that the official decisions excluding women's concerns have led to worsening' conditions for fishing families. For instance, women took the initiative in nation wide political actions as part of the Coastal Women's Action in 1989, when the cod moratorium was launched. Such actions sought to defend the rights of coastal fishing households and communities,

and oppose privatisation of fishery resources. However, when the Norwegian Minister of Fishery and Coastal Affairs in 2004 closed down the Regulation Committee that was mandated to advice on quota regulation, a lack of female representation in this Committee was given as the cause. A few years later, when Committee discussions around quotas were resumed, the official requirement of participation of at least 40 per cent women was dispensed with.

The lack of a gender perspective in policy-making means that the concerns of women are not taken into account, particularly the difficulties they face in combining fishing and motherhood and other caring duties in the household. Further, women seeking to go into fishing also face many obstacles on cultural, economic and social fronts. These factors explain why many of the young women who started in fishing in recent times have quit. While in other industries, gender concerns have been sought to be addressed, this concern has been totally lacking in the fishery sector. Despite the hurdles that women face in fishing as well as in running their households, their participation in community and other organisational activities demonstrate how they continue to be a force in many situations in the sector. Positive interventions, from the government, from the society in general and from the fishery population are therefore needed to support the participation of fisher women. The following highlight some possibilities.

**What's New, Webby?**



## Family Farming Knowledge Platform

<http://www.fao.org/>

The Family Farming Knowledge Platform (FFKP) was launched in June 2015 by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations. The FFKP gathers digitised quality information on family farming from all over the world, including national laws and regulations, public policies, best practices, relevant data and statistics, researches, articles and publications. It provides a single access point for international, regional and national information related to family farming issues and small-scale fisheries, integrating and systematising existing information to better inform and provide knowledge-based assistance to policy-makers, family farmers' organisations, and development experts, as well as to stakeholders in the field and at the grassroots level. More than 17,000 relevant content types are available on the platform and over 100 countries are actively participating.

Intended for a wide range of users, the platform is interactive, welcoming contributions from interested parties such as research organisations, universities, non-governmental organisations, development agencies and farmers' organisations willing to participate in the project by sending factual, notable, verifiable (with cited sources) and neutrally presented content.

Using the platform as a worldwide knowledge reference on family farming can assist policy-makers and other stakeholders by facilitating policy discussion, policy design and decision making on family farming.

The platform is hosted at <http://www.fao.org/family-farming/themes/small-scale-fisheries/en>

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ICSF

Experience shows that it is difficult to bring changes in a profession that is so closely connected to men's work and masculinity, locally, nationally and internationally

Since the 1989 Coastal Women's Action campaign, much has changed. Women have joined other action groups fighting for the rights of small-scale fisheries and against privatisation. Some have also become members of political parties. In fact, between 2005 and 2015 all the Ministers of Fisheries and Coastal Affairs were women. However, they too put little or no emphasis on the situation of women fishers.

Another change that took place after the Coastal Women's Action campaign was that the Directorate of Fisheries, through the intervention of some concerned civil servants, opened up options for women wanting to register as a full-time or a part-time fisher. They recognised the roles of women engaged in baiting long-lines, maintaining boats, helping deliver catch, and assisting their fisher husbands in the administration of the boat. By recognising this supportive role of women, a barrier was broken to their being registered as fishers. Examples from Finnmark show that opening up the registration to women even gave opportunities to women from abroad, sometimes married to local fishers, to gain rights as registered fishers.

Another example is the Action Plan for Women in Marine Sector, initiated by the Ministries of Fisheries and of Family and Equality Affairs. This initiative followed the disbandment of the Regulation Committee in 2004.

The plan focused on the low numbers of women fishers and women in aquaculture, and aimed to increase the number of women fishers to three per cent by 2010, four per cent by 2015, and eight per cent by 2020. The weakness of the plan was that no specific road map or implementation strategy was specified. The responsibility for implementation was in the hands of the participating institutions. Norway therefore remains far from reaching the Plan's objectives.

During the spring of 2017, the question of women's participation became an issue, through the intervention of the local and fishery media. A young woman fisher from Finnmark met with opposition and scepticism from fishers and the traditional fishing community, when she bought her own boat in 2016. After a vibrant discussion in the media, another woman fisher, Trude Karlsen Halvorsen, took the initiative to call a meeting for women fishers.

In May 2017, more than 15 women met in Alta supported by some of the fishery organisations. At the meeting, they exchanged experiences and discussed how they could

organise. The result was the formation of the Forum for kvinnelige yrkesfiskere (Forum for Professional Women Fishers) headed by Trude Karlsen Halvorsen. They formed a Facebook group, and one of the participants, Anne-Lise Ekrem, also launched a weblog (see <http://rosabloegger.blogg.no/>).

The participants in the meeting at Alta decided not to form a separate fisheries association. They continue to work as a forum. They decided to join already existing organisations, like the Norges Fiskarlag (Fishermen's Association). Subsequently, some of the Forum representatives met with representatives of Norges Fiskarlag, who showed willingness to work with issues of special concern for women fishers. These included recruitment of women in fisheries, access to finance for women fishers, and the special challenges of being a fisher or boat owner and a mother with young children.

The Forum has focused on other problems as well. For instance, it has been in communication with Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV), an important public institution dealing with a wide range of welfare rights. The results of this engagement are yet to materialise.

To conclude, the experiences from earlier initiatives show that there is a long way to go to realise the rights of women fishers, especially in a period of professionalisation, regulation and privatisation. However, this is a period when the income from fishing is relatively good, compared to women's income from other employment and opportunities elsewhere, and more women than earlier are considering taking up fishing. There is therefore the need to press with these initiatives.

Experience shows that it is difficult to bring changes in a profession that is so closely connected to men's work and masculinity, locally, nationally and internationally. The Forum with its young and hard-working women members can, however, make a difference.

Fortunately, they are not alone in this journey. Internationally, women, as well as some men and some institutions, are aware of the importance of women's participation and contribution to the fishery sector and fishery communities. The combined efforts of all these concerned groups can result in better opportunities and working conditions for women in the sector, more women-oriented fishery politics and policy-making, and greater representation for women in influential positions. ■

# Perils and Prospects

**Twenty years of organising by women in Europe's fisheries have led to important gains, challenges and opportunities**

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In Europe, fisheries are considered a male activity, as men represent the main labour force on fishing vessels. This stereotype has dominated European society for many decades, despite the fact that several social scientists have brought to light women's contributions within fisheries enterprises. Women's contributions in fisheries were, and still remain, largely invisible, as they are rarely paid for their work, and women themselves consider their work as part of traditional domestic duties.

The desire to modify this common perception started in the mid-1990s, when French fisherwomen participated in fishers' movements against the economic crisis faced by the French fishing industry. Throughout these events, women participated in demonstrations and established survival committees. Their objective was to financially assist fishing families in meeting their material needs during the crisis. Women challenged decision makers with regard to the fisheries situation, and called for the survival of artisanal fisheries. At the end of this chaotic period, French women decided to create their own organisations to fight for the survival of their fishing communities and

also for their own rights. Based on the French model, many associations were established at a local level in other Member States of the European Union with help from scientists, NGOs and even the European Commission which supported projects on women's contribution to fisheries. So, by the end of the 1990s and the beginning of 2000, more and more women's groups were established around European Union. In 2006, the European Network AKTEA was established to federate the new organisations.

Carrying on, the actions of women's organisations moved from the defence of the fishing industry, communities and families, to claims related to women's rights and sustainable fisheries. Women claimed legal recognition for their invisible contribution towards work in the fisheries sector. They asked for training and education to satisfy their need to participate in enterprises and resource management. They brought into the public arena their claims, and became participants in debate and decision making, not only on matters of women's rights, but also of social issues concerning the fishing industry.

European fisherwomen's organisations can be divided into three categories: those organising women involved in fisheries harvesting and ancillary activities; those engaged in fisheries enterprise management; and those comprising wives of crew members. Each of these organisations has evolved its own mode of functioning, usually

AKTEA NETWORK



Shellfish gatherers in Galicia, Spain, harvesting shellfish. As soon as the Galician mariscadoras (shellfish harvesters) got the status of professional fishers, they integrated with the cofradías (predominantly male fisher organisations) as independent groups

**Through their actions women's organisations have become players in the fishing industry and influence policies linked to the sector**

either based on the history of the fisheries sector, or on the law of each country. In some countries, women's organisations are part of male organisations, and in others, they are wholly independent.

As soon as the Galician mariscadoras (shellfish harvesters) got the status of professional fishers, for example, they integrated with the *cofradías* (predominantly male fisher organisations) as independent groups. At first, the mariscadoras groups worked mainly for their own interests, but then they increased their power by taking over the leadership of some *cofradías* thanks to their capacity to lead and manage their own organisation and profession. A new organisation, *Asociación de Mulleres do Mar de Arousa* (Women of the sea of Arousa) has been established in Galicia. It is an independent organisation, bringing together different groups of women related to the sea.

Women from France, Portugal, Greece, Italy, United Kingdom and The Netherlands created independent organisations that ran on a voluntary basis. Crew members' wives joined either boat owners' wives organisations, or created their own to struggle for the working conditions and rights of their husbands. After 20 years of activity, authorities recognise that women's organisations are good interlocutors, addressing challenges that may jeopardise livelihoods.

Lack of financial resources is probably the main difficulty faced by independent fisherwomen's organisations. As they are not officially recognised, they cannot access public financial support. They are forced to devote more energy towards raising funds to run their organisations, than towards implementing their projects and meeting their objectives. Women actively involved in the organisation contribute financially to the different expenditures related to their activism. This however can only be done by women of financial means and, therefore, often excludes others. Thus, the democratic functioning of the organisation is challenged, as women with financial means generally represent the larger boats, and they hold the power within their organisations. Wives of small-scale fishers and crew have less financial capacity and often become marginalised.

Another difficulty is to keep membership active. Only a few members are ready to give time to voluntary work. Participation in meetings demands time, which not many women can contribute, given the demands of their domestic responsibilities and contributions to their fisheries enterprise. In some cases, husbands do not accept the involvement of their wives in organisations and in the public arena. The personal situation

of the different leaders indicates that most of them are greatly supported by their husbands. It is clear that lack of finance and husband's support are the main obstacles to the ability of organisations to find active members. Another obstacle is women's lack of capacity to run organisations in a collective manner, with women more often concerned with the interests of their own enterprise. To overcome this problem, women leaders need to be trained.

Another issue is the need for women's organisations to have external assistance. The most successful organisations are those that receive help from people who are not members of fishing families. These could include scientists, social workers, and members of NGOs. The external members may be willing to give their time to build and run fisherwomen's organisations because they believe that it is the only way to obtain gender equality within this industry. They may become facilitators of organisations and assist women in defining their objectives and projects and help them conduct their activities. The organisations that do not benefit from such external support have greater difficulties and conflicts to overcome.

To sum up, the emergence of fisherwomen's organisations resulted from a fisheries crisis with their main aim being the defence of their fishing communities and their way of life. Through these organisations, the concerns of women have collectively evolved from social issues to more feminist issues, as they sought recognition of their own rights.

Through their actions, women's organisations have become players in the fishing industry and act to influence policies linked to the sector. Fisherwomen have become advocates for the social aspect of fisheries, and can play an important role in resource management.

Women's organisations take part in the decision making concerned with social aspects of fisheries, and even with resources management. Women, by creating their own organisations, have claimed their own rights. But their organisations are still weak due to lack of money, and low leadership capacity. Twenty years of experience demonstrates that these organisations have a specific role to play within the fisheries sector; however they need support. Their presence has contributed to the improvement of women's rights within this industry and to an improvement in socially informed European fisheries policies. AKTEA as a European network is lobbying at the European level for more support for fisherwomen organisations through fisheries structure funds. ❖

# Beach Profiling for Community Resilience

Women and men in fishing communities in South India work together to generate important beach related data

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India's 7,500 km coastline is a hotbed of transformation. The 'Territorial Sea', where fishing is allowed, provides an exclusive economic zone in the ocean, 60 per cent the size of its land area. India ranks third in world fish production with a harvest of 6.3 million tonnes. India's seas are also habitat to countless forms of marine and terrestrial life.

Beaches already undergo constant natural changes with the movement of sand by wind, waves, tides, currents and littoral drift. Man-made coastal structures, such as industries and ports, along with natural influences, affect coastlines and beaches. Shoreline ecosystems face a threat as we develop and progress without a basic understanding of shoreline dynamics and processes. The Shoreline Change Atlas of the Indian Coast indicates that 45.5 per cent of the coast is under erosion.

India's four million-strong fishing communities, especially on the coast, have seen their livelihoods go through multiple changes from small-scale artisanal fishing, to trawling and mechanised practices. They are vulnerable communities, steadily losing their homes, resources and space for livelihood activities such as boat parking, fish drying and net mending to the ocean as beaches are eroded.

In the state of Tamil Nadu in India, where the 2004 tsunami wreaked maximum damage, aid flew in and changed lives in many fishing

communities. However, self-reliance has not been a result of this aid. Small-scale fishermen see dwindling catch, lose out economically to trawlers, and are also losing the coastal land and beach space around where their homes are located.

Beaches aren't valuable from the standpoint of aesthetics and real estate alone. They form an essential first line of defence against the ravages of the sea, and soften the impact of lashing waves. Sandy beaches and dunes act as buffers, protecting the hinterland from the sea. Beach sand plays a vital role in restricting saline intrusion into the groundwater of coastal regions.

The National Policy on Marine Fisheries in India, gazetted in May 2017, appears biased towards privatisation of fishing practices, while being silent about constant violations to areas traditionally used by fishing communities, especially Coastal Regulation Zone-1 (CRZ-1) areas. In October 2017, the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change in India issued an amendment that relaxed guidelines for the mining of atomic minerals like uranium and thorium in CRZ areas. These amendments follow a string of policy changes drafted and passed without prior public consultation.

The proposed Sagarmala project promises to set up five or six mega ports, a host of smaller ports and 14 coastal economic zones. The implications of the Sagarmala project are alarming. Close to 1,500 km inland of the ports are to be claimed for special coastal economic zones. They reinforce how coastal communities most affected by these projects are not considered equal stakeholders in this process. The social, economic and ecological implications of such initiatives that directly affect the shorelines and fishing communities of India need further consideration.

Stewardship of coastal land is the primary challenge for coastal communities. Ground truth verification of land use patterns of coastal communities have not been carried out adequately, or verified with the perspective of access and rights for ownership. Regional resource maps often omit entire beaches and ecological features, to prioritise coastal development.

Sea level rise and the unpredictability of extreme weather events require local communities to play an active role in creating knowledge bases for appropriate action, to reduce disaster risk and recreate a healthy

SNEHA



Women volunteers recording beach profile, Karaikal, India and this programme has encouraged more women volunteers to get involved

## Stewardship of coastal land is the primary challenge for coastal communities

coastline. Beach profiles can be documented on beaches where there are already specific problems, or a lack of information about the status of the coastline. Examining this data can tell us how individual beaches respond to a variety of ecological phenomena and anthropogenic activities. The Beach Profile Monitoring Programme was envisioned as a way to empower fishing communities with the data, skills and knowledge to observe and understand what is happening to their coastlines, and be stakeholders in the process of building resilience to changes by stewarding their local ecology.

In 2013, Vivek Coelho, of the Social and Ecological Stewardship Programme (SESP), Tata Institute of Social Sciences, India initiated work in Puducherry on a mandate to work with fishing communities and create a citizen science programme. Interacting with advocacy groups and local communities led to ideas on measuring erosion and accretion patterns.

The goal was to document and create locale specific evidence on shoreline dynamics in terms of erosion and accretion patterns of the beach; and to study beach features through sand grain size analysis and photo documentation. Understanding and documenting beach profiles and sand grain sizes provide basic tools for communities to strengthen their relationship as stewards of coastal ecology.

One method to do this, proposed in 1961 by K.O. Emery, is beach profiling, based on readings taken on the days of the lowest tide, with the use of two graduated poles, whose alignment and intersection with the horizon allow for the determination of elevation change along the profile line. The readings are taken along the profile line of a fixed structure on the beach, known as a 'control point' up to the low water mark. These are then calculated and plotted on a graph to document the profile of the beach in question. The graphs represent the length from the control point to the low water mark and elevation change along this profile line—the contour of the beach. Anyone with a basic working knowledge of reading, writing and mathematics can record and calculate readings. Sand grain size analysis reveals information about effects of tidal influences and man-made factors. It also reveals the presence of magnetic and mineral properties in beach sand.

Coastal communities did respond to initial training but with reluctance. Fisherpeople's lives are burdened with daily labour, commitment to their trade, additional jobs if necessary, running households and caring for children. They have little time to spare to take cognizance of the beach around them

and engage in citizen science or research. This was felt strongly in the state of Puducherry in India, where community mobilisation was a challenge. Another hurdle was the cost of the equipment used in the Emery method. The calibrated poles are fairly expensive, and impossible for fishing communities to access. Coelho first used wooden poles, two metres in length with one metre steel scales pasted onto them.

The equipment was bulky, and a five metre long thread was used to space the interval between the two poles. Thread and fingers were used as viewfinders to fix readings with reference to the horizon. The equipment proved to be bulky, expensive, and hard to maintain. Expensive equipment would make it challenging to expand the programme and work with more communities.

Finally, Vivek replaced the calibrated poles with PVC-U pipes and measuring tape, with women's hair ties as viewfinders. This method was formulated and termed the 'Adapted Emery Method for Beach Profiling'. It proved low cost, effective, lightweight, transport friendly and easy to maintain. With an annual cost of Rs 10,000 (USD150) to sustain the entire annual data collection process, the equipment is finally accessible to coastal communities. Engaging the interests of these communities, however, is more challenging. In recent years, industrial expansion into coastal areas has altered lives and livelihoods. Coastal communities can observe how changes in littoral drift and sand movement affect erosion and accretion patterns. But community interest needs to grow to address the changes that cause these occurrences.

The support of veterans working with coastal communities who understood ground realities encouraged community involvement in citizen science. The programme was lucky to build a partnership in the year 2014 with two NGOs, SNEHA (Social Need Education and Human Awareness) and LAW (Legal Aid to Women) Trust in the Nagapattinam region in Tamil Nadu, each of which had a long term relationship with the coastal community. Together, the team trained staff and volunteers to understand their ecological and environmental surroundings in the context of disasters. Trainings also included the processes to record monthly beach profile readings, make calculations based on these readings, plot graphs, and archive the data after every session.

Initially, community members and panchayat (village administration) leaders were nonplussed at the initiative. As a voluntary effort that did not offer monetary benefits and used up precious community time, it was deemed an unwise use of resources.

The manual, *A Tide Turns*, was written to make this initiative accessible to all coastal communities at risk from climate change. As training sessions continued, individuals displayed an interest and pride in understanding and mapping local beaches. The activity of beach profiling promoted principles of teamwork and leadership in volunteers and staff. Volunteers understood the correlation between graphs and what they saw on site; they learnt how to operate high-end cameras, manage a group, and more. They also created a database of monthly reports with readings for the locations archived at the community. Volunteers and external parties can now use the manual as a detailed do-it-yourself (DIY) guide to set up their own beach profiling initiatives.

Coastal communities eventually accepted the programme's benefits and showed support by offering temples, halls and other community spaces for volunteers to calculate readings, analyse sand grains, store equipment, have meals and so on. Fisherwomen in these communities were trained to collect data. Currently, there is an active engagement of the youth, both male and female, in the data collection effort, with older women and men playing a supportive role. In fact, the support that women have extended to the beach profiling programme has encouraged more female volunteers to get involved.

As the programme becomes a part of community life, grooms leaders and offers them ownership over their data, the way forward would be to use such locale specific data to create a healthy coastline. Local organisations and governance bodies could use the programme as an entry point to develop the practice of stewardship, the spirit of volunteerism and to initiate efforts that use traditional knowledge systems to address the urgent need for restoration and regeneration of local ecologies. The initiative's preparedness and mitigation action plans could improve community resilience and build ecological integrity.

Beach restoration is more than keeping beaches clean. It is a holistic approach to recognise eroding, vulnerable beaches and regenerate them. Soft solutions include planting sand binding varieties, indigenous coastal vegetation and building sand dunes. Exploring ecologically aligned and sustainable livelihoods can build community resilience, restore ecology and create a cadre of first responders in the context of disasters.

Evaluating ongoing and proposed development activities along the coast with an ecological lens, and ensuring effective coastal planning requires location specific data to inform decision making processes. India's commitment to implement Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is a step towards protecting coastlines. SDG 14 prioritises conservation and the sustainable use of the oceans, seas and marine resources. Community-led ecological monitoring and context specific coastal resource stewardship is critical to disaster risk reduction and should be non-negotiable in the implementation of SDG 14. The programme is open to partner and share knowledge with all stakeholders and decision making bodies to ensure scalability along the Indian coast. Our partner organisations and community volunteers have undergone a 'Resource Stewardship Leadership Development Programme'—specially designed by the SESP-TISS team, with support and supervision from Dr. Monica Sharma, a former director of leadership and capacity development with the United Nations.

The extensive length of India's coastline and its administrative jurisdiction under ten states makes it challenging for government agencies to monitor the coast. With a fishing village located almost every two kilometres along the coast, community monitoring of beaches using citizen science can provide the data to understand the changing dynamics of our beaches. More importantly, it provides a platform to usher in coastal resource stewardship. 🌊

**Community-led ecological monitoring and context specific coastal resource stewardship is critical to disaster risk reduction and should be non-negotiable in the implementation of SDG 14**

## YEMAYA MAMA

## Direct action!



FILM

## Women at the Water's Edge: Lives of women in climate changed Sunderbans

English and Bengali (with English sub-titles); 22.36 min.

Directed by Ronodeb Paul; produced and narrated by Kuntala Lahiri-Dutt

By **Megnaa Mehta** (megnaam@gmail.com), PhD Candidate, Department of Social Anthropology, London School of Economics

The Indian poet, Bhupen Hazarika's soul-stirring composition 'O Ganga Boicho Keno (Oh Ganges, why do you flow?),' inspired by Paul Robeson's "Ol' Man River", plays as we see footage of communities facing irrecoverable loss of their homes, lands and assets by an aggressively advancing river. *Women at the Water's Edge* is a film shot on Mousuni, one of the 54 inhabited islands of the Sunderbans delta in West Bengal, India.


The Sunderbans forests of West Bengal have acted as a refuge, albeit an inhospitable one, to several political and ecological refugees for decades. The independence of Bangladesh resulted in displacing thousands of men and women who came to settle in the then forested regions. In other parts of Bengal, as floods ravaged homes and assets, displaced families moved in search of a new life. For more than a century, as a result of these different waves of migration, including of adivasis, or indigenous communities, brought in by the British for paddy cultivation, the Sunderbans—a mangrove delta in the Bay of Bengal—has become home to four and a half million people, the majority of whom belong to historically marginalised communities of dalits (Scheduled Caste), adivasis (Scheduled Tribes)

and Muslims. *Women at the Water's Edge* tells us the story of these people, and of the islands.

The film reveals the catastrophic effects of climate change on the lives of the region's residents. With producer and narrator Professor

Kuntala Lahiri-Dutt, we traverse the Sunderban rivers and the precarious dirt paths of its inhabited villages. Conversations with residents reveal that it is the women who suffer the most as a result of the havoc wrecked by rising sea levels. Just obtaining drinking water, for example, is a daily challenge. Simultaneously, the islanders' very survival depends on keeping the surrounding brackish water out via embankments. Ultimately, what is most striking is the depiction of the highly contested relationship with water.

The narrator asks, "What will become of these people? Where will they go?" Environmental catastrophe is no new phenomenon for Sunderbans islanders. Floods, cyclones, and tidal surges have repeatedly ravaged the region since time immemorial. Climate change is only one of the many forces of displacement. Equally responsible for displacement are wildlife protection laws, now more stringently enforced by the Forest Department, as sea levels rise. These laws have turned thousands, whose livelihoods depend on natural resources, into 'trespassers.' With small land holdings, and without viable alternative livelihoods, they are forced to migrate to the interiors of India for work, leaving behind their families and homes. Leaving the Sunderbans, their desh (hometown), is not merely a physical departure from one's land, but implies the loss of an entire life-world, of knowledge and social practices.

The Sunderban islanders were being rendered invisible even before the 21<sup>st</sup> century's alarm around global warming. The long history of structural and systemic violence, denial of access to healthcare, roads and electricity—all served to oppress the people. Kuntala Lahiri-Dutt and director Ronodeb Paul, powerfully demonstrate, however, the resilience of the women even as the islands are on the brink of disappearing. The documentary may be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2BI2NkP9k9k&t=10s> 



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Writers and potential contributors to YEMAYA, please note that write-ups should be brief, about 1200 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.