

# Men, Women Fishing Together

A training workshop in Honduras focused on the need for gender equity in the fishing communities of central America

*“All of us, men and women, youth, adults, the old... we all live on the coast and depend on artisanal fisheries, and we must all do our best to live together with greater equity and respect.” — Fidel Bonilla from Honduras*

In today’s world, discussing gender is a must. Gender is not an issue just for women; it concerns both men and women equally.

All actors participating in productive activities—in this case, artisanal fisheries—have the right to be recognized and valued for the work they do. Artisanal fisheries,

Historically, fishing has been considered a typically male activity and hence the common perception—which is far from reality—that women do not participate in either fishing or in the fishery.

*“Generally, we go fishing, but the men don’t want to acknowledge this and give due value to our work. They simply see us as shellfish gatherers, and this work is not valued as it should be. We women extract shellfish, we sell, we engage in trade, but the men don’t recognize us as fisherwomen.” — Hilda Elizabeth Mendoza from Guatemala*

Historically, in our society there has been a division between the public sphere (linked to men) and the private or domestic sphere (linked to women); the problem is that men’s work is given a social and economic value, whilst other work in the domestic (reproductive) sphere that generally falls to women is neither valued nor recognized.

The tasks undertaken by women in the private sphere should also be recognized as work that contributes to continuity in the artisanal fishery and to the complementarity of the roles which men and women play in accomplishing a decent living and wellbeing for their families and communities.

*“We face problems when fishing trips last more than three days. We have children and that means leaving them, but sometimes there is no one to care for them.” — Rosa Myriam Sandoval from El Salvador*

## Wider perception

Recognizing that both men and women participate in artisanal fisheries widens our perception, and allows us to discard preconceived

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like all other productive activities, involves the work and dedication of many people in harvesting (capture), and in pre- and post-harvest activities. Large numbers of women are involved in these activities, engaged throughout the artisanal fisheries productive chain. This adds value to the sector, in the sense that their contribution to the wellbeing of the community is immense.

In many cases, ancillary tasks directly related to artisanal fishing and carried out by women have not been recognized as such. In many countries and contexts, this acknowledgement and appreciation of the contribution they make to artisanal fishing have not been adequately recognized.

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ideas of what is and what is not of value in artisanal fisheries, widening the range of alternatives through which we can develop our potential as human beings in the framework of rights, duties and values, through a development process that is balanced socially, economically, environmentally and culturally.

Below we show, through practical examples, the realities of the men and women fishery workers, and provide ideas to integrate gender equity and equality in the debate and in the everyday life of artisanal fisheries in central America. Our objective is to increase women's participation and engagement in the debate, which is generally dominated by men, and to increase recognition of gender equity and equality in artisanal fisheries.

In February 2013 a training workshop was undertaken in Honduras hosted by the recently established Fishermen's Association in the Cuero and Salado Reserve, with inputs from the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF), the Central American Artisanal Fisheries Confederation (CONFEPESCA), CoopeSoliDar R.L., and the Honduran Community Tourism Network (RECOTURH). Seventy-four people participated in the event—49 men and 25 women—including fishermen and fisherwomen from six countries in central America, namely, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Costa Rica, Nicaragua and Panama. ICSF representatives from Chile, Brazil and Belgium also participated.

From the outset, in designing the training workshop we were committed to using creative ways of ensuring that participation between men and women should be as equitable as possible, to enable them to share their knowledge, impressions and needs, in an atmosphere of respect and solidarity.

The work began with invitations being sent out, initially to women and youth associated with artisanal fisheries activities and their

productive chain. Each country was asked to comply with a participation quota for fisherwomen. Even if a larger number of men participated in the workshop, there was a strong representation of women who contributed their views and ideas. Wherever possible, women took the opportunity to express their views and concerns on all the issues raised during the workshop.

On the eve of the event, men and women, as well as youth, were invited to share their knowledge and concerns on the issue of gender and youth. The discussion began after showing a video called "*An Impossible Dream?*" This highlighted the lack of recognition given to the work carried out by women in the home, in the community, and in artisanal fisheries.

Often the activities carried out by women are not considered as work, or as contributing to coastal economies. The debate was accompanied by the reading of some paragraphs from a book "*Women and Artisanal Fisheries in Central America*", which was written ahead of the meeting and provided a good reference for deepening the debate.

Starting with the experiences of working with artisanal fishermen and fisherwomen, it was agreed that the

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Participants at an ICSF training programme session organized by CoopeSoliDar R.L. in Honduras

training workshop should include gender at three levels, which we describe below.

### **1. Incorporate gender as a cross-cutting issue throughout the training workshop**

In technical jargon, this is referred to as 'gender mainstreaming'. First of all, it requires analyzing each of the issues without losing sight of the contribution or specificity of women. The methodology included using 'gender flags', with the aim of making women and their needs

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visible in the debate, so that their faces and their voices should not remain hidden once again, as happens in most mixed workshops.

Generally, it is the men who usually speak out and who take the decisions in such meetings. These 'gender flags', with women's symbols, were developed with the intention that both women and men could stand up and make their voices and issues heard and known.

### **2. Spaces for men and women to discuss separately**

In technical jargon, these are referred to as 'focus groups'. During the morning of the third day of the workshop, we included two working groups: one with men and the other with women. Whilst the women discussed their concerns and proposals, the men did likewise at the same time in a separate area.

A series of phrases was used which contained myths and realities about gender in artisanal fisheries, which served as a point of departure for reflection. In the case of the women, it provided a space for them to share their life stories, their experiences in artisanal fisheries,

their struggles, their dreams and their realities.

### **3. Meeting between both fishermen and fisherwomen**

Following the separate working groups, each focus group wanted to know what the others had discussed. But, most importantly, that also opened up a space to share what had been discussed by men and women, both in terms of points of convergence and divergence.

We will see the conclusions of this discussion later on. Concrete proposals were put forward about how solidarity could be improved between men and women; about sharing responsibilities for housework and work at sea; about achieving equitable participation in meetings and organizational spaces; and about respect and non-violence between the sexes. Both shared their points of view on the issue; their knowledge; their perceptions on themselves; as well as their commitment to face up to fears and to bring about changes in gender relations.

And on this subject, what did the women discuss? What were the concerns and views of the men? And what did they both agree on in the joint space provided by the meeting?

Let's start with the women. What did they have to say, what proposals did they make? A great diversity of women participated in the workshop, including artisanal fisherwomen and others engaged in trade networks, in 'lujado' (work mainly carried out by women to untangle lines, to prepare the gears, to bait hooks, etc.), in the administration of fishing companies (with most of them belonging to artisanal fishery organizations); and all of them assuming, in their turn, work in the domestic sphere, childcare and in community work.

#### **Brazilian women**

There were also women participants from Brazil who contribute to organizing small-scale fishworkers

and to their discussions. They played an important role in sharing their wide experiences of organizing and engaging in policy advocacy.

**Fisherwomen from Guatemala** who participated in the workshop commented on their involvement in a fish-trade network and their contribution to the artisanal fishery productive chain, not only through trade but also specifically in fishing.

*"I am a mother of three children. I fish, process and sell. Most of the women in my community fish."* — Hilda Mendoza

**Fisherwomen from Nicaragua** who participated in the workshop spoke about their dedication to fishing, fish collection and storage, and trade. Some of them had the chance to study, and are now professionals, but they have tried to continue contributing in various ways to the artisanal fisheries sector. Participating in the meeting were a lawyer and a nurse, with their history and linkages with artisanal fishing.

*"From the age of 10, my father took me to sea for fishing and also showed me how to haul the chinchorro (seine-net). When I reached 15, I went with my friends to fish and also went with my mother to market fish. I have two grandchildren of 10 and 14 years of age. They also help me with marketing. I am currently president of a co-operative. I am treasurer of the co-operative union in my region, as well as a member of the Steering Committee of FENICPESCA."* — Naila Fredericks

Also participating was a young fisherwoman from Nicaragua who besides studying, contributed to the organizational and administrative functions of the organization.

*"I am Nicaraguan and I live on the central Pacific coast of Nicaragua. I am fully occupied in the fishery. I am the secretary for acts and agreements in my organization. I am studying tourism and hotels administration. I co-ordinate the provisioning of international mercantile vessels that arrive at our port. I also administer a small business that consists of a kiosk which is used for selling different processed products like fish pies,*

*fish burgers, etc. In this way, the consumption of our products is increased and we guarantee the quality of life of our organization's members."* — Isamar Aguilar

**Women from Honduras**, most of them Garifuna women, brought with them a rich cultural experience, and similar problems experienced in their lives that arise from not being recognized in the artisanal fisheries sector.

*"I feel that I have been blessed by God and by my ancestors because I belong to a Garifuna community. There are many things that make me feel proud to belong to this community and about our culture, our dances, our traditions, our autonomy, our rites; thanks to God and our ancestors, I am where I am, and we must forge ahead because if we stop to ponder about carrying on in the same way, we will be marginalized as indigenous people, both as garifunas and as women."* — Ana Ortiz

**Women from Costa Rica**, many of whom fish and are involved in fishery activities, have also acquired new capabilities to engage in artisanal fishing

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organizations, as can be appreciated in the following testimonies.

*"For some years, since 1999, I have been a fisherwoman in Costa Rica. I come from a fishing family and in 2005, along with fishing, I dedicated my time to managing a co-operative enterprise called Consorcio Por la Mar, R.L., and, in recent years, I have grown both as a person and as a woman."* — Jeannette Naranjo

*"I am a young woman and I work in a co-operative, the Consorcio Por la Mar R.L., in the central Pacific region of Costa Rica. I prepare the gear so that fishermen can go to fish. I also compile the co-operative's database, and I am secretary of the*

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Women from the Garifuna communities of Honduras participating in the boat competition as part of the Sea Festival

sea and technology) so that they can keep abreast of what's going on in their sector); the right to participate in organizations; and the right to non-violence. Below are some testimonies:

- Asserting our rights in fisheries through getting organized, uniting, and through mutual support. *"We are not going to be given our rights; they must be fought for."* — Ana Ortiz from Honduras
- Combat violence and abuse. *"As women, we must not put up with being forced to do things against our will. We must combat violence and abuse, and strive for our identity and self-esteem."* — Naila Fredericks from Nicaragua
- Access to better opportunities and ease of access to social security. *"Women don't have easy access to social security as fishworkers. Generally, the organizations assure women workers of their rights; but often they don't want to be part of an organization, they feel that it is not their place. That must change."* — María Amparo Flores from Honduras

What do the men think about gender? What proposals do they have? The men recognized that there are inequalities between men and women in the fishery, and that women have fewer opportunities to participate in artisanal fishery organizations.

They feel that the issue of gender is new for men and several times they expressed their fears about fisherwomen having the capacity to take decisions and about displacing them from senior-level decision-making positions.

### Violent attitudes

Others acknowledged attitudes about having power over women, but commented that, bit by bit, these must go, because men were also losers as human beings when violent attitudes prevail, when they don't share in child rearing, and when they have feelings of jealousy and possessiveness, which destroy human relations. However, other men, still insensitive about the

*co-operative's Steering Committee."*

— Laura Morales

*"I belong to the Limón Independent Fishermen's Association, located in the Costa Rican Caribbean. I have been working in the fisheries sector for approximately 10 years. My job is to help fishermen obtain tax exemptions on fuel and fishing equipment. I also hold the post of vice president of the association."* — Jessica Jackson

**Women from Panama** who participated in the workshop belong to fishing organizations and contribute to their management and administration. They have received leadership training and are facing new challenges as regards the participation of women in artisanal fishing, both in the workplace and in the organization.

*"Getting recognized in the fishery has come at a cost for Panamanian women. It is a daily struggle. We are now seeing the fruits, with more of us women participating in organizations and taking decisions. There is much to be done to rid society of its machismo and to get people thinking about fair opportunities for men and women."*

— Martha Machazek

The women emphasized the issue of rights, in all forms—the right to be recognized and be valued; the right to dignity; the right to health and social security; the right to land,

subject, maintained a strong resistance to, and were angry about, women having the possibility to leave their places in the home to go out for meetings and to be able to fully develop other aspects of their lives.

Against this background, they proposed:

- Men must change their macho attitudes and truly commit themselves to the needs of women.
- Many men are unaware that their behaviour and actions may often be violent. Violence and jealousy are not natural emotions.
- Organizational plans must include training for women in administrative and technical subjects to strengthen their leadership in local, national and regional organizations.
- There should be opportunities for women who want to develop as entrepreneurs in the sector.
- New steps must be taken to provide innovative training for men and women to change relationships of power, authority, violence and mistrust, making it possible to adopt new values and relationships based on respect, solidarity, co-responsibility in educating boys and girls and in undertaking domestic tasks, in ways that bring about equity in the relations between men and women who work in artisanal fisheries.

Based on what was said by both men and women, it can be seen that various threads emerged that point to changes in the power relations between men and women, and in the need to construct more harmonious ways of life that strengthen cultural identity, the right to the sea and to live a life free from violence. Three main themes were put forward in the debate.

#### **4. Recognizing women and their engagement in fisheries-related work.**

*“Women are taking part in fishing; this must become more apparent every day - that we gain recognition for what we do and for what we can do for the wellbeing of*

*our coasts and communities.”* — Naila Fredereicks from Nicaragua

#### **5. Women’s participation in fishery organizations and in decisionmaking.**

*“It’s important that as women we get organized in our own organizations to unite better and defend our fishery-related interests, as men occupy positions of representation and decisionmaking in fishery organizations and other associations.”* — Jeannette Naranjo from Costa Rica

#### **6. Regarding respect, equality and equity between men and women.**

*“We will get nowhere if men and women don’t recognize each other as human beings who share and discuss matters.”* — Oscar Marroquín from Guatemala

It is a fact that things are changing and today various efforts are being made to improve the quality of life for the people who live facing the sea. To reach agreement on equity, to improve communication amongst people, to improve all-round security, to promote the sustainable use of marine resources, to demand alternatives for access to land, and to enjoy economic, social and cultural rights are challenges that must guide us towards wellbeing on the coasts and at sea. †

#### **For more**



[sites.google.com/site/jornadadeaprendizaje1/home](https://sites.google.com/site/jornadadeaprendizaje1/home)

**Jornada de Aprendizaje. Spanish website**

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=S-jJGqLaTRc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S-jJGqLaTRc)

**An impossible dream?**

[www.coopesolidar.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=43&Itemid=55](https://www.coopesolidar.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=43&Itemid=55)

**Women and artisanal fisheries in central America**