



# Yemaya

ICSF'S NEWSLETTER ON GENDER AND FISHERIES

## From the Editor

**G**reetings! It gives us great pleasure to bring you this issue of *Yemaya*, redesigned, in response to your feedback, to don a new, more contemporary look and now with theme-based coverage of the key issues facing women in fisheries. The new look has been put together by the team at Design Difference ([www.design-difference.com](http://www.design-difference.com)).

With this issue, each edition of *Yemaya* will focus on a specific theme, but, as before, in the words of women speaking about their lives, their struggles and their aspirations. Interesting box items have been added that introduce you to inspiring women and point out significant news. And finally, we are delighted to introduce in this issue a new character who will, going forward, in a regular cartoon strip provide a quirky and humorous take on all the issues we find ourselves grappling with.

Happily, *Yemaya*'s redesign coincides with the occasion of March 8, the International Women's Day—a historic day that symbolizes women's unity and resistance. The theme of the current issue is, therefore, women's struggles in the fisheries.

Though the origins of March 8 are rooted in the militant protests of New York's garment workers a hundred years ago, the spirit and significance of the day remain unchanged. What can ring truer for women fishworkers battling injustice both inside and outside the home than the call for freedom from hunger, indignity and exploitation?

A hundred years of struggle. How substantive have the gains been? Women's issues have no doubt gained tremendous visibility. Their struggles are slowly forcing a change in the political landscape, and in some countries, paving the way for women's entry into leadership roles. However, it could be argued that the benefits of such political power-sharing are being undone by the simultaneous erosion of social, economic and human rights.

We might well ask whether the term 'gender', today used to describe the social basis of women's oppression, runs the danger of being reduced somewhat to rhetoric. Are research and advocacy efforts making a material difference to women's lives or do they merely follow an add-gender-and-stir approach, ignoring the symbiotic inter-relationships between women's oppression and other forms of injustice?

Indeed, globally, women in fisheries face multiple crises. The corporate takeover of the coasts; the retreat of the State from basic sectors; inequitable modes of fishing; iniquitous trade and tariff regimes; the large-scale depletion and pollution of coastal resources: while these adversely affect communities, the impact on women's lives is particularly pernicious. Forced to fend for the family, women find themselves pushed into the most exploitative labour arrangements, shackled in domestic chains and left vulnerable to fundamentalist forces within communities who recast women's roles in the most regressive terms.

To combat the crises, vital links must be made for what use are political actions that ignore the domestic sphere or advocacy efforts not rooted in women's struggles? How can the struggles of women in fisheries succeed in isolation of the struggles of all women? How can the struggles of women succeed in isolation of the struggles of all other marginalized sections? To be sure, as history has repeatedly demonstrated, there exists no short cut to women's freedom and wellbeing. We look forward to receiving your feedback at [icsf@icsf.net](mailto:icsf@icsf.net).



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# Women's struggles in fisheries: What have we gained?

This article, a reflection on the last decade and a half of women's struggles in fisheries, argues that much needs to be done to move from tokenism to substantive gains

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In the last 15 years since the launch of the Women in Fisheries Programme in the ICSF, much has happened. In several parts of the world, women in fisheries have come together, created networks, intervened in fishworker organizations and tried to spell out a feminist agenda for the future development of fisheries. What have we achieved? While I feel reluctant to make broad generalizations, some loud thinking might perhaps stimulate discussion.

Women in fisheries now find a place in conference agendas; as a separate topic of course, isolated from the main agenda of such



programmes. Generally speaking, and more so in India, research on women in fisheries is mainly in terms of gathering disaggregated gender data. The conceptual framework, however, remains confined to 'participation' and 'empowerment' with 'gender' appearing typically as an apolitical concept, a new variable. Unfortunately, the framework of patriarchy is rarely applied and hence dynamic inter-relationships do not get addressed.

Internationally, as scholarship in women in fisheries has increased, attempts have been made to involve women subjects in research processes and analyses. While this is an empowering methodology and has encouraged women to

voice their opinions in broader forums with policy makers, the overarching framework of planning, management, budgeting and trade practices in fisheries remains within the male domain.

At the level of fishworker organizations, there have been interesting developments. Women have certainly begun to organize as wives of fishers or as women in communities or as fishworkers themselves. Peche et Development reports that there are now several women who head the Comite Locale organizations in France; for the main part, male-dominated structures. In some countries, women have also received recognition for contributing to social security as members of the fishing family enterprise. In Chile, a woman working as a diver's assistant has been elected the president of the large national fishworker's organization: CONAPACH. The constitutions of recently created fishworker organizations, like the World Forum of Fishworkers and Fish Harvesters (WFF) and the World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP), make room for 50 per cent representation of women. In several Asian countries women are directly admitted as members of fishworker's organizations. In India, the National Fishworkers' Forum (NFF) has opened itself to membership by women workers' federations today. However, it is now up to the women to strategize and influence the broader agenda.

Women in fisheries have gained by organizing themselves for their rights. In Spain for example, women mussel gatherers managed to get access to inter-tidal resources and support for entrepreneurship. In several parts of the world, women have fought for space in markets to sell fish, for access to credit, for the right to travel on public transport, for recognition as workers in government welfare boards, and so on.

The efforts of the Community-based Coastal Resources Management Resource Centre (CBCRM-RC) in the Philippines resulted in women's involvement in fisheries management sometimes as chairpersons of the management committees but more often in unpaid labour surveillance tasks that really should have been done by the State. In the guise of decentralization, the State continues to abdicate its responsibilities, transferring the burden onto communities.

Sensitive men in fisher's organizations, while trying to articulate a non-patriarchal management perspective, come up against a wall because of the larger context of fisheries—a context limited to fish that ignores the sustainability of communities. This came up particularly starkly in a study we had undertaken on the impact of development on coastal populations and the environment in India.

The study found that though the fishery was booming throughout the 1980s and 1990s, there was no improvement in the condition of women in the community. Morbidity levels among women remained high; children of school-going age were not in schools; the female child sex ratio was on the decline and dowry demands for marrying a girl had risen phenomenally. At the same time, access to potable water and proper sanitation was very poor thereby increasing the burden on women. Also, with increasing capital costs and falling catches per unit effort, the fisheries were on the decline. So, not only was the development agenda not focused on women, it had, with high subsidies from the state, also ruined the fisheries. Moreover, access to fish both as food and for vending, that is, for both life and livelihood, was greatly compromised as more fish went to the export market. Women's work in fisheries was thus under constant threat.

The 2007 ILO Work in Fishing Convention, was also most disappointing as shore-based workers, for the most part women, were totally bypassed in the conceptualization of the Convention and, therefore, in its provisions. Why did the worker's organizations that sat in at the tripartite debates not insist on a woman-inclusive conceptualization of work in fishing despite the overwhelming representation of women in artisanal fisheries?

So, in the last decade, though the concept of 'gender' and the issues that affect women have received increased visibility, this has been more in an apolitical rather than in a substantive sense.

On the whole, the developments in fisheries are against life and livelihood. As the demand for fish keeps on increasing, aquaculture is being aggressively promoted. In the case of marine and brackish water culture, coastal communities are reacting against the pollution of their waters and the destruction of coastal lands. The unbridled demand for fish is at the heart of the plunder of resources. The complex nature of the struggle transcends the fisheries and the fishing communities and raises urgent questions about global lifestyles and increasing social inequity. The struggle may seem complex and unending but we should not give up. ❏

**“In the last decade, though the concept of ‘gender’ and the issues that affect women have received increased visibility, this has been more in an apolitical rather than in a substantive sense.”**

## AFRICA

## SOUTH AFRICA

# Women's net worth

## South African women struggle for their rights in traditional small-scale fisheries

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After ten years of struggle, traditional fishing communities in South Africa are finally on the brink of securing their historical fishing rights. In 2007, the Minister of Environmental Affairs signed an agreement which committed the government to developing a new policy that recognizes the rights of traditional small-scale fishers. This victory was the culmination of years of mobilization and action against a neo-liberal fishing policy based on the privatization of fishing rights and the prerogatives of the large commercial industry. Following this victory, men and women leaders from fishing communities along the coast have met to debate what kind of fishing policy they would like and how they will participate in the policy development process.

Key issues for debate have focused on the need for a community rights-based approach, founded on the principles of human rights, equality, sustainability, participation and co-

management. The challenging issues of gender equality, women's rights and women's future role in traditional small-scale fisheries have been central. Clearly, policy change has emerged as a site for women's continued struggle for their rights.

Why is the value of women's role and their rights now being questioned?

Women from traditional fishing communities along South Africa's coastal stretch have always played a critical role in the harvesting of marine resources and in household livelihood. The nature of their role, however, differs considerably from region to region. On the eastern seaboard, women can trace their harvesting of inter-tidal resources back to the Stone Age. In these areas, women and young girls are the primary harvesters of protein resources for their families. In the western and northern regions, women have traditionally played a key role in pre- and post-harvesting activities; many also work as seasonal workers in processing plants. Integration with global markets has meant a reduction in employment



**“Women are calling for a new policy: one that adopts an integrated approach to livelihoods and provides mechanisms for women’s participation in a range of opportunities.”**

opportunities in these regions as the bulk of the fish and seafood catch is now processed offshore or shipped live to northern markets.

During the process of mobilization and struggle, women have been at the forefront of advocacy actions. In one region, women fishworkers formed an organization called the Women’s Network in order to raise awareness about the rights of women and to continue the struggle for fishing rights. Women have been in key leadership positions in Coastal Links, the community-based network of fishing community organizations, bringing their rights to the forefront of struggle. The process has however been far from smooth.

Many male comrades are now questioning whether women should get ‘equal’ rights within the new fishing policy. Fierce debates have erupted, often leading to the expression of extremely negative, patriarchal and sexist stereotypes about women’s roles and capabilities.

At a community meeting held last year, one man argued that his wife could not go to sea. “She is the mother of my children,” he declared. Another reasoned that women’s menstruation would ‘bring bad luck at sea.’ Also, there is confusion about what equality might mean. Are women demanding to go to sea and do the same work as men (and hence potentially taking work away from other men)? Are they demanding an equal share of the livelihood benefits of the marine economy?

Much of the tension is the result of past confusion created when the Fisheries Department allocated fishing rights. These rights were dispensed within an individualized and privatized quota rights system, which granted a limited number of rights and benefited only a small percentage of fishers. The introduction of gender equity within this limited context meant the transfer of a percentage of quota rights from experienced traditional fishermen to women entrants. Some fishermen were now employed by women quota holders; many others were thrown out of work. The changed power relations introduced considerable tension and discomfort. Men viewed women’s equal rights as no more than a denial of their own rights.

Women are now arguing strongly for the right to choose their level of involvement. This does not necessarily imply that they will all want to go to sea. Rather, they are calling for a new policy: one that adopts an integrated approach to livelihoods, provides mechanisms for women’s participation in a range of related income opportunities, allows community participation and maximizes benefits for the entire community. Women are calling for a policy that recognizes not only fishers’ rights but also the indivisible nature of fisher’s rights from other human rights. The challenge of developing such a policy is enormous in a context where age-old gender biases prevail and commercial companies

**What’s New, Webby?**



## ICSF’s Women in Fisheries Bibliography

The International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF) has published an online annotated bibliography on issues dealing with women in fisheries.

The bibliography, searchable by theme, region, keyword, author and title, can be accessed at <http://www.icsf.net/SU/bib/WIF>.

Specifically developed for use by those working on women’s issues in fisheries, the bibliography features articles, reports and other documents. These have been classified under eight

- themes: (1) Role of Women in Fisheries;
- (2) Role of Women in Aquaculture;
- (3) Status of Women;
- (4) Recognition and Policy;
- (5) Development Initiatives;
- (6) Globalization;
- (7) Struggles and Movements; and
- (8) Women and Resources Management.

The bibliography can be downloaded in its entirety, or as selected documents. The website also allows providing for feedback online. Comments and feedback are invited to improve the content and usefulness of the site.

view any attempt at evolving community-based control over nearshore resources as a threat to their interests.

In order to build alliances between women in different regions and to empower women leaders to engage in political and social debates on these issues, women representatives from fishing communities will come together on the

10th of March 2008. They will debate policy issues on their own, as well as with their male counterparts at a National Workshop for Small Scale Fishers. Hopefully, these efforts will go a long way in developing a gender-equitable, participatory and sustainable small-scale fisheries policy for South Africa. ❧

EUROPE

THE NETHERLANDS

## VinVis: The women in fisheries network

**This article charts the origins and significance of VinVis, the women in fisheries network of the Netherlands, consolidates its achievements and outlines the challenges it faces**

By **Cornelie Quist**  
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**V**inVis, the women in fisheries network of the Netherlands, is an autonomous women's organization. It consists of wives of fishermen from traditional fishing communities, who are concerned with a sustainable future for the fisheries and their communities and also feel that women's role in fisheries should be recognized and validated.

The origins of VinVis are rooted in a symposium held in April 2000 on the needs and aspirations of wives of fishermen in the Netherlands. Presented in the symposium were the results of a pioneering research study, commissioned by the Dutch Directorate of Fisheries, on the role of fishermen's wives.

The study revealed that in addition to domestic work and child care, the wives of boat-owner fishermen were largely involved in activities related to the family fishing enterprise. However, these activities were not registered in the accounts, and though officially invisible, were valued at an estimated one million Euro annually. The majority of the women were also engaged in voluntary community service. The study found that even though the majority of the women indicated they were interested in fishery policies, very few actually participated in meetings called by fishermen's organizations.

In the symposium, well-attended by wives of fishermen, the reasons for low participation were discussed. Why hadn't the wives of fishermen followed the example of women farmers in the country and formed a professional organization of their own? The younger women were less accepting of their present conditions than were their older counterparts. Towards the end of the symposium, a group of women, most in their late twenties, volunteered to start an informal network to explore new spaces for women's roles in fishing communities. On the 22nd of

June 2000, these women met again at the fish auction at Urk, an important fishing village. And so VinVis, the women in fisheries network, was born.

Problems afflicting the Dutch fishing industry aided the network's launch. The cod crisis of 2001 (precipitated by the EU decision to ban fishing in certain areas of the North Sea in order to combat stock shrinkage) and the shrimp crisis of 2003 (which followed the termination of production regulations by the Dutch anti-cartel authorities), brought a sense of mission to the network.

In the words of a wife of a shrimp fisherman-boat owner: "While we were busy with our advocacy campaign on the land, our husbands went to sea, fishing. They had to, because of the high investments loans, which had to be repaid. The prices collapsed and our husbands had to go for longer fishing trips. We had no family life anymore...Our husbands were filled with negative energy and our community began to fall apart...Everybody in our village and our region has, in one way or the other, some relationship with fisheries and the sea. That is why I hope that unity will return for the sake of preserving a future for our children and our community... I regard my first mission as bringing back unity among the shrimp fisher community and finding support for our cause. I also want to have a family life again. I feel supported by our women in fisheries network, VinVis."

VinVis members began to participate in local fishermen's organizations. They also pioneered innovative initiatives at the local level such as the Sea-Fresh Fish Market of Wieringen. Their efforts succeeded in gradually enhancing the fishing community's image.

In the beginning, the men regarded the women's effort with some ambiguity. The women quickly realized that they had to develop business expertise, for even a single mistake could invite critical reactions. They began preparing themselves to participate



**“VinVis brought a community perspective into the fisheries debate and raised significant issues concerning the quality of life within fishing communities. Sadly however, the lack of adequate support has put the very future of the network at stake.”**

meaningfully in discussions. Supporting each other, women began to feel less inhibited about raising even ‘controversial’ issues, such as unsustainable fishing practices, crew concerns and internal divisions. In course of time, women’s participation won them respect. Nevertheless, men still find it difficult to accept women in leadership roles. Until now, only one woman of the VinVis network has been elected to the board of a local fishermen’s organization.

The VinVis network became an active participant in various public discussions. The women studied important documents, such as the Green Paper, to review the EU Common Fishery Policy (2001-2002) and formulated their own response. They met Ministry officials, researchers of fishery institutes, representatives of the fishery industry, environmental activists, and other stakeholders of coastal resources. At every meeting, VinVis highlighted the importance of the wellbeing of the family and community in the discourse on fisheries. They often reported their experiences in the widely-read Dutch national fisheries paper *Visserijnieuws*.

Although the VinVis network was not a formal representative organization, it won the recognition of the Fisheries Ministry and was invited to consultations for the Netherlands National Strategic and Operational Plan for the European Fisheries Fund. However, despite the fact that VinVis presented a position paper and intervened in consultation rounds, the administrators failed to adequately incorporate the perspective of women of fishing communities.

In January 2003, an EU Conference on the role of women in fisheries gave an important impetus to the network helping VinVis in building relationships with other women-in-fisheries

organizations throughout Europe. Between 2003 and 2005, VinVis became active in the participatory research of the FEMMES Thematic Network, aimed at promoting women’s role in fisheries and aquaculture, and in networking with other European women’s associations. In 2006, VinVis became one of the founding members of the AKTEA Network of Women in Fisheries and Aquaculture in Europe with a VinVis member elected as its vice-chairperson. Exposure to the wider problems of fishing communities all over Europe and opportunities to share experiences and strategies with other women’s associations were of great value and inspiration.

VinVis started as an informal and open network. However, this informality, particularly in the early years with women joining and leaving all the time, hampered the emergence of a collective long-term programme.

The women of the network had diverse backgrounds and interests. They came from different communities; some were from ship-owners’ families and others from crew members’ families; sometimes they came from rival fishermen’s associations. They had to deal with cynical and paternalistic reactions from their communities. They frequently faced a conflict between traditional expectations and modern aspirations. There was also the problem of inadequate organizational skills as well as a lack of resources such as time, funds and childcare facilities.

On the other hand, the informal and open structure had many advantages. It allowed women to make their own decisions, to share experiences and knowledge, to respect differences and offer advice and support. The active use of email communication added to this process, although face-to-face meetings remained most important. The network also welcomed the present author to play the role of facilitator, adviser and supporter.

By 2004, the VinVis network had evolved a stable core of about ten women who carried out the network’s mission with great enthusiasm, often using their personal resources to do so.

The activities of the VinVis network have not gone unnoticed by the Dutch Fishery Administration and professional fishermen’s organizations. This has led to a growing awareness about the potential role women can play, particularly on issues concerning the quality of life within fishing communities. Nevertheless, the enhancement of women’s roles and status fails to receive priority and is reflected neither in the agenda of fishermen’s organizations nor in the fisheries policy.

Inadequate support from the government and professional fishermen’s organizations

prevented the further growth of the network. The only aid received was a one-time grant of Euro 1000 from the Dutch Fishermen's Union (Nederlandse Vissersbond). However, the husbands of VinVis members belonged to different fishermen's organizations. Since none followed its example, the Dutch Fishermen's Union, although appreciative of VisVis' work, was reluctant to extend further financial support.

One of the active core members of the VinVis network says: "The women who are in our network at present feel that they can only participate because of the support of their husbands. Although our work is appreciated

by our fishermen's organizations and some of its leaders, the women of VinVis still face patronizing attitudes. Generally speaking, Dutch fisher communities are still very conservative in their perceptions about the role and position of women. As a result, women feel reluctant to join the VinVis network, even though they approve of our mission."

VinVis brought a community perspective into the fisheries debate and raised significant issues concerning the quality of life within fishing communities. Sadly however, the lack of adequate support has put the very future of the network at stake. ❏

**O**n 25 November 2007, history was created in Chile when CONAPACH—the Chilean National Confederation of Artisanal Fishermen—elected their first woman President. CONAPACH represents about 60,000 Chilean artisanal fishermen, a sector dominated by men and notorious for its *machismo*.

Zoila Bustamante, the new President of CONAPACH, is a woman fishworker from Chile's southern Los Lagos Region. The daughter of a shellfish diver, she is no newcomer to fishing. For the last 12 years, Zoila, now 40, has worked as a divers' assistant, serving as Union

and other shellfish on board the "Marbella", an outboard motor-powered vessel where she works as divers' assistant. "If the catch is good we can get home by about two in the afternoon; otherwise, it's nearly night by the time we get back" she says.

As President of CONAPACH she will have to travel constantly to Valparaiso, the headquarters of the Confederation, taking her away from her husband, a shellfish diver, her 16 year-old daughter, and her father, who two years back had to have his leg amputated.

Sad and tragic events are a part of life for the hundreds of fishers spread out along the coast of Chile. Zoila too has had her share of hardship. She has lost several working companions and once nearly died when her boat capsized off the coast of Valdivia. "We were out in search of *machas* (razor clams) and the boat capsized with a full load, after a bad manoeuvre. We found ourselves under water, and it is only thanks to my father that we got out alive", she recalls.

Zoila Bustamante's presidency is in keeping with an upsurge of women leaders throughout Latin America. In this rapidly modernizing region, girls make up for a higher share in school than boys, and women voters outnumber men. Here, women leaders, often perceived as less corrupt, more task-oriented and with a friendlier leadership style, are occupying newly emerging political spaces.

The election of a fisherwoman as President of CONAPACH is a sure sign of change in the male-dominated world of artisanal fishing in Chile and a source of inspiration and courage to women fishworkers around the world. ❏

## PROFILE

# Meet Zoila Bustamante

In Chile, CONAPACH creates history by electing its first woman president

Compiled from several source by  
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Office

Representative in her local syndicate, El Futuro, in the *caleta* of Estaquilla.

Says Zoila Bustamante: "It does not worry me to work in a man's world. As kids we began to work at sea. As in all kinds of work, there are good days and bad days." The new CONAPACH President also declares that she has no political affiliations: "My only allegiance is to the artisanal fishers. Being elected President is amazing, but it will require a lot of work. Trawl fishing and pollution caused by transnational companies are two of our main concerns."

Meanwhile Zoila continues her work as an artisanal fisher. Every morning she sets out from her *caleta* in search of *loco* (Chilean abalone)

# Women as fishers: Issues and struggles

**This article outlines the threats facing artisanal fisherwomen in the Philippines and their struggles to foreground gender issues**

By **Maria Divina Munoz** (gonzalesiza@yahoo.com), member of Women in the Fisherfolk Movement, Philippines

In the Philippines, the fisheries sector comprises four sub-sectors: municipal (capture) fisheries, commercial (capture) fisheries, aquaculture and fish processing. The majority of women and men for whom fisheries is a source of livelihood are found in the municipal fisheries sub-sector.

Municipal fisheries refer to coastal fishing activities by means of traditional and simple fishing tools, primarily for subsistence. As such, it is similar to artisanal fisheries but would also include aquaculture workers and small-scale aquaculture producers.



Women in Philippine's coastal communities participate not only in fishing but also in pre-fishing and post-fishing activities and should, therefore, be recognized as artisanal fishers. For example, most women help their fishermen husbands prepare or repair fishing gear. After the fish is caught, women are usually the ones who sell it in the local markets, drying or smoking what is left unsold. Women also take up small-scale seaweed farming and oyster farming. While the majority of women are not active fishers, in parts of Cebu and other Visayan islands, women do go out to sea with their husbands to help with fishing.

Today, the fisheries sector in the Philippines is facing a worsening crisis related to issues of ownership and control of coastal resources. The

primary issue is the open-access regime under which big players—investors in the commercial fisheries and aquaculture sub-sectors—taking advantage of the weak enforcement of fishery laws and the lack of aquaculture regulations, have come to own or control coastal resources.

Commercial fishing operators have overfished most nearshore fishing grounds while aquaculture operators have gained control of shore and foreshore areas, destroying large tracts of mangrove forests to make way for fishpond development. In the process, they have displaced artisanal fishers, many of them women, from their traditional gleaning and fishing grounds.

Another issue is the threat of increasing liberalization of fisheries trade worldwide. Tariffs have been reduced to minimum levels to increase market access for fishery products, without regard to effective fisheries and aquaculture management. In fact, reduced shrimp tariffs in markets in Japan and other developed countries have provided an incentive for the Arroyo government and local investors to promote the farming of the exotic Pacific white shrimp. But this is being done without a parallel effort to establish effective aquaculture regulations and standards to mitigate the related social and environmental costs.

Perhaps the biggest threat to coastal fisheries and to fisherfolk communities is the alarming privatization of foreshore areas, areas supposedly inalienable under the Philippine Constitution. Investors are now engaged in massive conversion and reclamation of foreshore areas, building permanent structures, not only wharfs and jetties but also hotels, shopping malls and factories, where mangroves formerly stood. Bulacan's "Aqua City" and the Masinloc Coastal Economic Zone are just two examples.

Fisherwomen in general face multiple burdens. Besides looking after domestic chores and children's wellbeing, they supplement their husband's fish catch and add to the family's daily food by gleaning for fish in mangrove areas. The conversion of mangrove areas to aquaculture has meant less food on the family table. A woman fisher, thus, experiences more acutely the impact of economic dislocation and resource degradation caused by commercial aquaculture.

Some fisherwomen have been absorbed as labourers in aquaculture. Typically, in this case, a woman would help her husband, the fishpond caretaker. While the husband would receive a small share of the profit at the end of a



production cycle spanning several months, the woman's labour would remain unpaid. In a few coastal areas, there are small-scale fish farms providing subsistence for fishing families. In such cases, the woman and her husband work as co-producers and the meagre profits are regarded as family income to be managed by the woman.

However, as mentioned, the biggest threat in recent years has been the convergence of commercial and industrial investments in coastal areas, uprooting and dislocating fishing communities. This new form of "development aggression"—as it is now known—adds to the burden of fisherwomen who must help their families cope with the impact of dislocation.

In 2002, the Kilusang Mangingisda (Fisherfolk Movement) was formed to address the worsening crisis in fisheries. A coalition of 14 national and sub-national fisherfolk organizations, Kilusang Mangingisda (KM) seeks greater equity in property arrangements, participatory and accountable governance and the responsible use of fishery resources. Although KM is mainly engaged in advocacy campaigns, it also carries out research on fisheries.

From the start, women have been active participants in KM and its member federations. An initial question was whether a separate women's group was necessary to address gender-specific issues. The women finally decided to remain in KM, but banded together to form a committee called Kababaihan sa Kilusang Mangingisda (Women in the Fisherfolk Movement).

Kababaihan sa Kilusang Mangingisda (KKM) was formed around the same time that the Banilad Declaration came out in September 2003. This declaration outlined KM's views on the Philippine fisheries situation and the threats facing artisanal fisheries.

One of KM's major campaigns was a 1,000 km-long caravan campaign to highlight the fishing community's opposition to the government's aquaculture programme—Aquaculture for Rural Development (ARD)—and other forms of development aggression in coastal areas. The caravan passed through fisheries and aquaculture producing provinces in Luzon Island, from north to south, stopping in every major coastal community to educate local artisanal fishers about the adverse impacts of commercial and industrial investments in coastal areas. A woman from KKM was present at every meeting to discuss the gender-specific impacts of development aggression.

This campaign was followed by direct action, in which women from KKM also participated, involving the dismantling of fish cages constructed illegally outside designated zones.

The fisherfolk coalition also campaigned actively on the issues of trade and subsidy. At the national level, KM launched a countrywide conference of artisanal fishers in May 2005 to discuss the impacts of fisheries trade liberalization in the World Trade Organization (WTO) and that of fisheries subsidies on the sustainability of artisanal fisheries. The conference provided a forum for Philippine's artisanal fishers to develop a position supporting 'sustainable fisheries and trade'. KKM provided the gender-specific dimensions to this position.

At the regional level, KM engaged with other artisanal fisher organizations in the Southeast Asia Fish for Justice (SEAFish) network, a regional advocacy network of fisherfolk organizations from countries such as Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam and Cambodia. At a conference in Jakarta in September 2005, SEAFish members formulated a common position on fisheries

**"A woman fisher experiences more acutely the impact of economic dislocation and resource degradation."**



## Milestones

By **Katia Frangoudes**  
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### FRANCE

**1993-1996:** During the massive strikes organized by fishermen, fisherwomen participate actively by establishing survival committees to support the families of striking fishers.

**1996:** Centre d'Etude et d'Action Sociales Maritimes (CEASM), an organization working on the social aspects of fisheries initiate specific work on women in fisheries and collaborate with women involved in survival committees. The demand is that fishery laws, being debated in Parliament, recognize the contribution of wives to the family enterprise.

**1997:** A new fisheries law recognizes fisherwomen's invisible work by formulating the concept of the collaborative spouse.

**1998:** Two national-level women's federations are created: FIFEL and 3FM, both focusing on fisherwomen's contributions.

**1999:** A bye-law defines the conditions under which the collaborative spouse status may be applied. Women can now contribute individually to retirement benefit schemes.

**2001:** FIFEL, in collaboration with CEASM, prepares a list outlining women's contributions within fisheries and shellfish enterprises.

**2001-2007:** National fisherwomen organizations negotiate with French authorities for improvements to the collaborative spouse status clause.

**2007:** The collaborative spouse status is conferred on all women contributing in fisheries enterprises. Women's organizations demands are, however, not taken into account.

trade and subsidies, which was subsequently called the Jakarta Declaration.

The Jakarta Declaration called for the differential treatment of artisanal fisheries with respect to tariff elimination. It argued that public investments (or subsidies) are necessary for the sustainable development of artisanal fisheries. However, it called for the elimination of most subsidies in developed fishing nations on the grounds that these create trade distortions and lead to overcapacity and overfishing.

The SEAFish position set forth in the Jakarta Declaration was taken forward by member organizations in their respective countries. During the WTO Ministerial Conference in Hong Kong in December 2005, SEAFish members made a presentation before WTO officials. They also conducted a fluvial parade in Hong Kong to dramatize the plight of artisanal fisheries under the WTO regime.

International activities go hand in hand with local ones. Lobbying with governments is necessary at both the local and national level for accessing funds allocated for gender and development programmes, for social services, for the resettlement of displaced fisherfolk and for fish processing and marketing activities.

KKM has succeeded in bringing gender issues to the fore within the KM coalition. At the village level, it conducts awareness-raising among women on fisheries. It also tries to expand the ranks of organized women. Fisherwomen are made aware that they are capable not only of domestic chores, but also of work in the economic and social spheres.

The assertion of rights of the individual woman begins at the village level. Women's organizations have, therefore, been formed in villages and these provide much-needed support to individual fisherwomen. ■

## Yemaya over the years

**This article explores the role and significance of *Yemaya* over the years as a newsletter that tries to enlarge the space for women's perspectives, issues and struggles in the fisheries**

By **Harini Kumar** (icsf@icsf.net), Programme Associate, ICSF

Over the years, *Yemaya* has brought together articles from all over the world about struggles of women fishworkers as well as their initiatives and efforts to organize and create their own space.

Women's perspectives have been documented through direct interviews and at times, written contributions, often from fisherwomen themselves. These are integral to

*Yemaya* as they present stories and struggles through powerful personal narratives, giving fisherwomen a space to voice their views and recount their personal stories. These are women who have made important contributions to their community, organizing perhaps as solidarity networks, community groups, associations and federations to defend their own rights and community interests.

One of our earliest articles was about a courageous woman, Lourdinha Rodrigues of the *côlonia* of Ponte de Pedras Goiana in Recife, in the north-eastern state of Pernambuco, Brazil, who worked to give women fishworkers a voice and helped them discover their own identity in a system that did not know the value of their work. Lourdinha helped her fellow fisherwomen to create their own national organization, overcoming resistance from their families and even other women. *Yemaya* has also carried personal accounts of women from various other parts of the world; women who have struggled to acquire basic rights such as right to social security and maternity and unemployment allowance, for women fishworkers.

Over the years *Yemaya* has detailed several of the key problems being articulated by women of fishing communities. Articles, for example, have focused on the impact of globalization. While globalization has opened up new opportunities for some women, it has also undermined their economic independence and increased the challenges they face in supporting themselves



and their families. An article on the Asian Fisherfolk Conference of 2002 described how participants felt that globalization had led to loss of income and livelihood, dislocation from fishing grounds, denial of access to rights and loss of traditional knowledge systems among other impacts.

Often women are the first affected when it comes to natural or manmade calamities and environmental degradation, given that their work is often concentrated on the shore and in nearshore areas, such as mangroves and estuaries. This is why developments such as the destruction of mangroves due to shrimp culture, impact their lives the most. They are also the first to be affected by coastal tourism and industrial developments that not only create an ecological imbalance, but also affect coastal access. For example, an article in *Yemaya* from India describes the impact of one India's first and largest amusement parks, on fishing communities inhabiting the area—it damaged the mangroves, polluted the coastal resources and destroyed the boats and nets of fishermen fishing in the nearby creek. From Indonesia, *Yemaya* carried an article on the impact of gold mining on fishing communities. The disposal of tons of mining waste into the sea polluted the water and destroyed coral reefs. It also devastated the only source of livelihood of coastal communities. Importantly, the article also traced the journey of a woman whose livelihood and health suffered due to the consumption of harmful chemicals that were in the fish she was eating.

*Yemaya* has also carried articles that highlight the difficult working conditions faced by women in fish processing plants, from countries as diverse as Chile, India, Pakistan and Canada. These articles describe how women's health is often adversely affected due to the poor and unhygienic working conditions and also due to the weak enforcement of labour laws. In Newfoundland and Labrador, many women workers have contracted work-related illnesses such as Snow Crab Occupational Asthma (SCOA).

Articles in *Yemaya* have importantly often captured struggles of women fishworkers, as for supportive legislation. In France, for example, the Fisheries Orientation Law passed on 18 November 1997 was achieved as a result of the demands of fishermen's wives in Brittany, following the crisis in the fisheries sector in the country. Women demanded the status of 'fisherman's wife' in order to benefit from social security (retirement) provisions, professional rights and professional training.

Movements and networks of women fishworkers and women's participation in fishworker organizations have been covered extensively in *Yemaya*. Articles have covered, for example, women's participation in Confederacion Nacional de Pescadores Artesanales de Chile (CONAPACH), a major artisanal fishworker organization from Chile that instituted its Women's Department in 1998, women fishworkers in Senegal who organized as part of Collectif National des Pêcheurs Artisanaux du Sénégal (CNPS), women of Nova Scotia, Canada, who formed the Coastal Communities Network, and women of Katosi, Uganda, living around the shores of Lake Victoria, who organized to form the Katosi Women Fishing and Development Association (KWFDA). There have also been articles on women's participation in unions, such as in Kerala, as part of the Kerala Independent Fish Workers Federation (KSMTF).

*Yemaya* has fostered a sharing of experiences and views of women from all over the world. It has always been receptive to information in any form—there have been quite a few poems—whether scholarly articles, real life stories or reviews of interesting books and of films, such as the documentary film 'Darwin's Nightmare' on the Nile Perch fisheries. It has attempted to foreground the struggles, aspirations and efforts of women in fisheries, to build better livelihoods for themselves and their communities. This will surely continue to be the direction for *Yemaya* in the coming period. ❏

### Interview with Maria Cristina Manesch, Professor at the Federal University of Para, Brazil and member of ICSF

By Harini Kumar (icsf@icsf.net), Programme Associate, ICSF

#### What are the main issues facing women in fisheries in Brazil?

Brazil is a big country and so many issues are area-specific. However, in general, the most important concern is the recognition of women in fishing communities and their status and value as women fishworkers. They often lack public services, resources and opportunities. Sometimes they have the qualification but no access to the markets and resources.

#### Have women organized to deal with these issues?

Yes, definitely. In some cases women form their own associations. Often they try to enter Fishers Unions and register as members. Having a forum to voice their views, especially with regard to policies and rights of fishing communities, is their main concern.

#### What are the important changes that have taken place in the last two decades with respect to women in fisheries?

At present there is an independent organization called "National Articulation of Fisherwomen in Brazil". This organization is stronger in the north-eastern states of Brazil but they definitely do have contacts in the south. The objective of this collective was to facilitate discussions, the exchange of ideas between fisherwomen and to organize to have their voice heard. Also, in the last decade, in several parts of Brazil in the coastal states, there has been a process of creating Marine Protected Areas. Local communities are also being consulted. It is important that women take part in the management regimes to address the challenges that are facing many fishing communities. ❏

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



BOOK

# Mukkuvar Women

*Gender, Hegemony and Capitalist Transformation in a South Indian Fishing Community* by Kalpana Ram. Premier volume in “Women in Asia Series”, published on behalf of the Asian Studies Association of Australia, by Allen and Unwin; Zed Press, and by Kali Press for Women, New Delhi (1992)

This summary is based on information from the following website: [http://www.anth.mq.edu.au/staff/staff\\_kram\\_research.html](http://www.anth.mq.edu.au/staff/staff_kram_research.html)

Selected for Choice’s annual list of Outstanding Academic Books in 1993, the book *Mukkuvar Women* was the product of Kalpana Ram’s doctoral field work conducted among the Mukkuvars, a Catholic fishing community in the west coast of south India. It remains a landmark piece of scholarship on the question of development as a form of exclusion and inclusion in relation to women and minority groups in India.



Western scholarly writings on caste and Hinduism tend to assume that these frameworks have identical meanings for all social groups in India. This book questions such representations from the standpoint of one among the many groups excluded from the dominant perspective. Kalpana Ram explores the ambiguities and complexities of caste, religion, class and gender among the Mukkuvars.

These coastal villages have been shaped by distinctive elements: a history of colonization by Portuguese Jesuits, the work of fishing, and an unusual sexual division of labour. In addition, the micro-politics of power within the villages is being redefined by the new place of the fishing industry within the world economic order. Against this background, Ram traces the participation of Mukkuvar men and women in the construction of a culture that cannot be easily classified as Catholic or Hindu, peasant or proletarian.

The research documented the erosion of the capacity of women in the fishing community to negotiate a much stronger position for themselves than is the norm in caste society in India, even while men are included in wider forms of mobility and labour.

The broad scope of *Mukkuvar Women* covers questions of gender and migration, capitalist development, goddess worship, healing, and the consciousness of minorities. These issues are discussed through a variety of critical approaches. In her analysis the author draws on Marxist, feminist and anthropological methodologies, while evaluating blind spots in each canon. ❖

“To write of the Mukkuvars of Kanyakumari is to write of difference.”



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Writers and potential contributors to *YEMAYA*, please note that write-ups should be brief, about 500 words. They could deal with issues that are of direct relevance to women and men of fishing communities. They could also focus on recent research or on meetings and workshops that have raised gender issues in fisheries. Also welcome are life stories of women and men of fishing communities working towards a sustainable

fishery or for a recognition of their work within the fishery. Please also include a one-line biographical note on the writer.

Please do send us comments and suggestions to make the newsletter more relevant. We look forward to hearing from you and to receiving regular write-ups for the newsletter.