



# Yemaya

ICSF'S NEWSLETTER ON GENDER AND FISHERIES

## From the Editor

In her intervention at the 28th Session of the Committee on Fisheries (COFI) of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), Zoila Bustamante, President of the Chilean fishworker organization, Conapach, questioned: “Why are women and gender not specifically mentioned in the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (CCRF)? She was speaking on behalf of the World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP), the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF) and the International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty (IPC).

Her intervention supported the civil society proposal, developed in a prior preparatory workshop in Bangkok, to add a specific Chapter on small-scale fisheries to the CCRF (see SAMUDRA Report No.51, page 7), which would address the rights—economic, social, cultural, civil and political—of women, men and indigenous communities.

Many argue that the CCRF has several references to the need to ensure participation of all stakeholders, be it men or women. Article 6.10, for example, asks States to facilitate consultation and the effective participation of industry, fishworkers, environmental and other interested organizations in decision-making with respect to development of laws and policies related to fisheries management, development, international lending and aid.

What needs to be kept in mind, however, is that the roles and realities faced by men and women fishworkers do differ. While fishing is often considered a male-dominated sector it is now well known that women are very active in all aspects of fisheries, particularly in post-harvest activities—in some regions women comprise almost 90 per cent of those in the post-harvest sector. They contribute in significant ways to food security, household and community wellbeing, income and employment.

It is also well known that women experience discrimination in very specific ways, particularly in terms of access to resources and to decision making processes. Can we then assume that ‘gender neutrality’ is sufficient and acceptable in such a context? Can we assume that gender neutrality will not, by default, reinforce the existing marginalization of women?

The 1979 Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) recognizes that additional means for protecting the human rights of women are necessary, noting that despite the existence of various instruments women still do not have equal rights with men and discrimination against women continues to exist in every society. Clearly, a specific focus on women’s roles in the fisheries and on the priorities and concerns articulated by them is not only important, it is an obligation.

It is important that the call from the small-scale fisheries sector for a special Chapter on small-scale fisheries in the CCRF is heeded. It is equally important that there is clear focus on the specific priorities of women fishworkers in any such instrument. ■



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# Women in Seafood Processing

**A study carried out in Gujarat, India finds that changes in the infrastructure of seafood processing plants post globalization has not really changed the status of the women workers in the industry**

By **Nikita Gopal, Geethalakshmi, V., Unnithan, G. R., Murthy, L.N., and Jeyanthi, P** of the Central Institute of Fisheries Technology (CIFT), India

The seafood processing industry in India is almost entirely export-oriented and is spread across all the maritime states of the country. A total of 0.61 million metric tonnes valued at US\$1.8 billion was exported during 2006-07. With increasing consumer awareness about the quality of food, the demands of importing countries for safe and good quality products has also increased. This has led to considerable improvement in the infrastructure within the sector with plants upgrading to meet European Union (EU) and other international standards. Since women dominate the seafood processing sector, the impact this has had on women needs to be assessed. Has the improvement in quality standards had any effect on the working conditions of women? A study was undertaken in processing plants in Veraval,

where, for every man, two women are employed. Men also dominated the supervisory categories. At the managerial level, the participation of women was just four per cent. Women are also seen in the quality control sector mainly as technologists.

The quantum of work in the seafood industry is directly related to the availability of raw material and tends to be seasonal. In Gujarat, the peak period is from September to April and the lean season from June to August. The women who work in this sector come from poor socioeconomic backgrounds and the average per capita monthly income of these families is Rs.1,483 (about US\$30). Sustainance of the family was the main reason cited for their taking up this employment and the women's share in the family income was, on average 42.5 per cent.

Studies in various other labour-intensive export-oriented sectors, like apparel and textiles, have shown that there is a distinct preference for young, unmarried women at the floor level. A similar trend was observed in the seafood processing industry—this study revealed that the average age of women workers was around 25 and that 63.28 per cent of the respondents were below 25 years of age.

Sixty-five per cent of the respondents had some level of schooling but many were dropouts. Out of the total respondents, 64.1 per cent of the women in processing units and 57.14 per cent of those in the pre-processing units, were single. This was despite the fact that almost all the pre-processing workers belonged to the same locality where the units were located. The majority of the workforce was thus without reproductive responsibilities. The average work experience was 2.6 and 3.8 years for processing and pre-processing workers respectively, substantiating the fact that women find it difficult to continue this work after marriage.

The dependence on large numbers of temporary women labour is one of the ways to reduce the cost of production and increase export-competitiveness. Increasing casualization of the workforce in export-oriented units as a result of the globalization of trade and increased global competition has been reported in studies in other developing countries as well. They reveal that the women are a generally low-paid and compliant workforce that helps these sectors to become highly competitive in the export market. The supply of this workforce is highly elastic and can be replaced continuously. The present study also reinforces this. It found that 88.39

CIFT



Women engaged in sorting at a fish processing plant, Veraval, Gujarat

Gujarat to explore this. The state's share in total exports was 30.71 per cent in terms of quantity and 15.12 per cent in terms of value in 2006-07. Twenty two of the total 64 processing units in Gujarat are EU-approved.

The distribution of workforce indicated that the participation of women was mostly confined to the floor level in unskilled work. Their participation in other higher categories involving decisionmaking is negligible. At the floor level, the male-female ratio in the processing sector is 1:1.74, with the ratio being higher for the contract or temporary category

per cent of the female workforce interviewed was in the contract or temporary category. Women who were permanent labour had an average experience of eight years. However, experience gained has not contributed to career advancement and most of them continue to do the same work they have been doing all these years.

Though the dependence on the contract workforce is high, the responsibility of the industry towards them is only partial as the main responsibility rests with the contractor or person who recruits them for the job. An important issue here is that of social security benefits. The responsibility to provide social security benefits, like the Provident Fund and the Employees' State Insurance Scheme, are mandatory on the part of the employer only in case of the regular employees. In the case of contract labour, the industry has no such responsibility—a fact confirmed by the present study. This has been one of the major effects of the casualization in the sector. There is also no job security and no assurance of work for the next season.

Migrant women's labour has been an integral part of the seafood processing sector. The present study observed that 46.1 per cent of the respondents were migrants, with almost two-thirds of migrants from the state of Kerala. There is a small but perceptible change from a few years ago when almost the entire migrant labour was from Kerala. Now, workers from Tamil Nadu and other states are also seeking employment in the sector. Among the migrants, 90 per cent were contract or temporary workers.

Migration is a serious issue, especially in the unorganized labour sector, as the women employed in these sectors can be subject to various forms and levels of exploitation. The generally exploited status of migrant workers in the seafood industry has been an area of study in many countries, especially in Asia. The migrant workers in India are protected under the 'Inter-State Migrant Workmen (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1979'. The Act applies to any establishment or contractor which/who employs five or more inter-State workers and ensures minimum wages, equality, health care, proper accommodation, protective clothing, displacement allowance at the time of recruitment, journey allowance and prevents gender discrimination. A court verdict in 1998, specifically for the women in the seafood processing sector, also ensures several statutory benefits.

The recruitment of migrant workers is usually done by contractors or agents who have a link with the processing units. According to the Act, all contractors must have valid licenses and must ensure that the women receive the

benefits assured under the Act. The contractors recruit the women after wage negotiations and the ultimate responsibility of the worker rests with the contractor and not with the industry. The wage is also generally routed through the contractor. In the present study, it was observed that the women received the allowances during journey as well as for displacement. However, the extent of allowance actually received by the women could not be ascertained. Since most of the migrant workers come under the temporary category they received no other social security benefits, though they were provided a medical check up before the start of the season, mandatory for EU-approved units. Accommodation in the form of dormitories within the factory premises, housing six persons in a room, are provided with minimum facilities like bedding and space for keeping their personal belongings.

The average monthly wage received by the women workers at the floor level in the processing sector is Rs.2594 (about US\$52), and in the pre-processing sector it was Rs.2525 (about USD 50). The wages conform to the Minimum Wages prescribed for the fisheries and seafood industry in Gujarat under the Minimum Wages Act, 1948. However, an interesting point to note is that the wage is just the minimum that the Act prescribes. No gender-based wage differential was observed in this sector. One of the reasons could be that men and women are not engaged in comparable jobs. Women are engaged in processing activities while men are assigned jobs in other supervisory and higher categories. Low-end jobs for men include loading and unloading, packing, transportation etc. which are considered 'heavy jobs' that women cannot undertake. Therefore, the segregation in the job seems to be the main reason for the absence of a wage differential.

About 99 per cent of the respondents felt that the work environment has improved significantly with the changes taking place in the export-oriented seafood processing units. The improvement in working conditions has been a direct result of the quality compliance requirements of importing countries that has forced the sector to make such improvements.

Annual health check ups for women at the floor level is mandatory for EU-approved units, to be arranged by the employers as per quality assurance requirements, with the health card to be maintained by the employer. All the respondents confirmed the health check up before the start of the season, after which 58.73 per cent of the respondents underwent a check up every month, while for the rest it was once in two or three months.

Majority of the labour force reported poor job satisfaction and continue to work because of family compulsions as their income is a major

**“Women in the export-oriented, fish processing industry have weak bargaining power and find it difficult to counter the producers' attempts to depress wages.”**

source of sustenance for the family. Though the income the women earn is a significant contributor to the family income, they have no role in deciding the family expenditure. It was either the father or husband who decided matters in the family.

According to the United Nations, the quality of employment and conditions of work includes regularity of employment, social protection, working hours, intensity of work, and possibility of career advancement or skill upgrading. Laws

are already in place to protect the women from exploitation and ensure fair wages and social security. A proactive implementation strategy can ensure that the benefits are actually passed on to the female workforce, including to contract labour. Employment in the sector *per se* has not led to any true empowerment of the women or ensured gender equality. The women have weak bargaining power and find it difficult to counter the producers' attempts to depress wages. ❏

## Getting on the Bus

**Bordering the Indian Ocean, Kanyakumari is peninsular India's southernmost district. Here, through years of struggle, women fishers have managed to significantly expand their citizenship rights**

By **Ajantha Subramanian** (asubram@gmail.com), Associate Professor of Anthropology, Harvard University, and author of the forthcoming book titled *Shorelines: Space and Rights in South India*. For more, visit [www.sup.org/book.cgi?id=16905](http://www.sup.org/book.cgi?id=16905)

Often, Kanyakumari district's fishing villages are stereotyped as places without history and their inhabitants as primitives existing outside the world of modern politics. Inland castes and state officials commonly reinforce prejudices about fishing populations: "They are as volatile as the ocean they sail"; "Fishers have no sense of the world. What they know is prayer and fish"; "The coast is a Catholic theocracy and the priest is the god of the fisherfolk. He can tell them to do anything and they'll do it!"

Such remarks assume that fishers are an isolated and ignorant people who have no comprehension of wider social dynamics and certainly no understanding of their rights as citizens. That their labour is mostly artisanal in nature seems to further consign these fishers to social irrelevance on the fringes of the Indian nation state.

The marginalization of India's southwestern fishers has been reinforced by a history of geographically organized power differences in the region. Here, social and political status has long been tied to physical location, with coastal residence implying social inferiority, caste primitivism, and second class citizenship. However, Kanyakumari's fishers have not simply accepted their own marginality.

When they have made claims for rights, they have posed considerable challenges to existing social and political norms. Their struggles—demanding an inshore artisanal fishing zone, crafting forms of alternative technology, carving out relationships with regional political parties—have transformed perceptions of the coast as a space without rights, and generated changes, not simply to coastal life, but to the larger fabric of Indian democracy. To put it differently, fisher political action has called into question the very distinction between the coastal 'margin' and the societal 'mainstream'.

One such political project was the struggle by Kanyakumari's fisherwomen for public buses to transport fish to markets. The stigma attached to fish vending is perhaps the most graphic instance of fishers' subjection to caste norms, placing them on a low social rung. The nature of fisherwomen's work brings them into

PETER VERGHEESE/VALLAVILAI



AJANTHA SUBRAMANIAN

Specially designed Passenger cum Goods (PCG) bus, operating in Marthandam-Kaliakavilai-Neerody-Thoothoor in Kanyakumari District, Tamil Nadu. Such transportation facilities have come about as a result of persistent struggles by women fish vendors.

a set of social relations from which fishermen are generally spared. Unlike men whose labour at sea largely dissociates them from other castes and communities, women's work requires them to mediate between the coast and the wider world. As fisherwomen travel to inland markets to sell fish, they encounter other social groups and confront their prejudices. Adding to the inland caste aversion towards the 'polluting' labour of handling fish is the disapproval of fisherwomen for not complying with gender norms. The stereotypes of women fish vendors as filthy, uncouth, argumentative, and lewd are everywhere.

Not only are such pejorative assessments of their bodies and behaviour insulting, they have also had serious effects on coastal women's livelihood. Until their demand for special coast-to-market buses with racks for fish vessels was granted by the Tamil Nadu government, women vendors were routinely denied passage on public transportation. Many older vendors recounted tales of daily struggle to get their fish to the market before it spoiled. Philomene Mary was one of the most outspoken vendors over the age of 45 whom I befriended during my time in Kanyakumari. She was particularly fond of mocking the horrified reactions of young women from the agricultural villages bordering the coast, who traveled to neighbouring Nagercoil for white collar work.

"If my *mundani* (covering cloth) slips even a little bit, or if my sari is wet, they start to whisper! They are so young, even younger than my granddaughters. They wouldn't dare to say something to me directly or even look me in the eyes. But they have learned from their parents that they shouldn't be like us, that they are better than us because we have to sweat and carry a heavy load. But their mothers buy our fish to cook! What would they do without us? They would have to eat tasteless rice and *kozhumbu* (curry)."

In the early 1990s, Philomene Mary and a number of other women vendors decided to, as she put it, "push our way onto the bus." In agitation after agitation, they took over streets and camped out in front of the District Collectorate chanting slogans such as "All mothers have rights!"; "Justice for fisherwomen!"; "The market is ours too!" and "No buses, no fish!"

Philomene Mary spoke to me about what motherhood meant: "What does it mean to be a mother? It means feeding your children, giving them life, helping them understand right

from wrong. We are poor people. For us, life is a struggle. No one understands this. Motherhood is a struggle...Without us who would raise the children? Who would feed them? Other mothers can be mothers without struggling but fisherwomen are different. Look, even the government doesn't want us to be mothers. How can we feed our children without selling our fish? Without getting to the market? They think we are dirty and just want to fight. But really, we just want to feed our children so we have to fight."

After several years of struggle, the Tamil Nadu government finally granted women vendors buses, specially designed for the transport of fish. The buses delivered upon the state's promise to support the labour of its artisans and brought the coast within the radius of a redefined, more expansive public. By asserting themselves as workers with rights to public services, fisherwomen forced the state to recognize them as an integral part of a larger citizenry. But this was by no means an undifferentiated body of citizens. In granting these buses, the state not only extended public services to the coast, it also built special buses that recognized the unique needs of a coastal citizenry. The layout of the buses—racks running along one side for the baskets and stainless steel vessels carrying fish, and seats along the other—brought together a modern form of transport with a household trade marked for obsolescence. In this sense, fisherwomen's political actions directly refuted the expectation that, with the mechanization of fishing and the entry of big merchants into the trade, their labour would disappear. For their part, women vendors boarded these buses with a newfound sense of ownership: these were their buses to facilitate their work. As Philomene Mary remarked, "It made us feel that we had a right to the bus, a right to the market; that we didn't have to just keep to our place in the fishing village."

This instance of fisher activism shows how, through their own political action, fisherwomen came to see themselves as members of a wider citizenry with a right to make claims on the state. In the process, the very definition of citizen was expanded. At the same time, belonging to a larger, rights-bearing public did not erode their unique identity. On the contrary, getting on the bus only strengthened fisherwomen's perception that their rights are tied to their multiple identities: as women, as fish vendors, and as coastal residents. ❖

**"By asserting themselves as workers with rights to public services, fisherwomen forced the state to recognize them as an integral part of a larger citizenry."**

# Marching for Justice

**A long march and a memorandum draw public attention to the fact that the lives and livelihoods of fisherwomen affected by the tsunami and the ongoing war in Sri Lanka's eastern coast, continue to hang in the balance**

By the **Eastern Women's Federation of Sri Lanka**, who can be contacted through Herman Kumara (wffp.gs@gmail.com and fishmove@slt.lk)

**O**n 08 March 2009, International Women's Day, over 1000 women from 30 villages in Ampara and Trincomalee districts on the east coast of Sri Lanka, displaced by the tsunami and the ongoing war, marched through the streets of Addalachchenai, Kalmunai demanding their right to lead a safe and dignified life. These women were members of the Eastern Women's Federation, a federation whose formation has been facilitated by the National Fisheries Solidarity Movement together with two partner organizations: DIFSO based in Ampara and TRIFSO in Trincomalee.

They marched to draw attention to the fact that nearly 33,000 women in the area have, so far, lost their husbands; and the children their fathers. Today, four years after the tsunami, women of fishing communities, many of whom

are now the primary breadwinners of their families, have still not been provided with basic facilities, proper housing and the means of earning a livelihood.

The women presented a memorandum to the Chief Minister of the Eastern Province of Sri Lanka, Mr. Sivanesanathurai Chandrakanthan, requesting government agencies and departments, relevant ministries, local bodies and non-governmental organizations to look into the specific problems faced by them.

The memorandum drew attention to both the general problems confronting the fishers as well as the specific problems women face. Many of the tsunami-affected families have still not been provided houses by the government. The LKR100,000 (US\$870) provided for the repair of houses was insufficient. People have no option but to continue living in camps even though living conditions are not good, and security, with many reported incidents of rape and child abuse in the camps, is a critical problem. Unemployment is on the rise and it is difficult to eke out a livelihood. Lack of medical facilities,

## Ecuador's new food sovereignty law aims to strengthen the constitutional right to food

Ecuador may be a small country, but it is rich in constitutional history. Since 1830, it has revised its Constitution 20 times, most recently in 2008, when the right to food got enshrined in constitutional legislation. Article 13 states that "the right to food includes free and permanent access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food for a healthy, high-quality diet, in line with the culture, traditions and customs of the people." This is an important advance on Article 42 of the 1998 Constitution, by which the State guaranteed the right to health, food security and access to potable water.

The 2008 Constitution has also been hailed by women's organizations for championing gender equity, and decrying discrimination on grounds of sex, culture, language or place of birth. Ecuador's attempt to eradicate illiteracy, which is particularly widespread among women, has also been praised, as has the move to grant housewives social security benefits. The first chapter of the 2008 Constitution recognizes the multiracial nature of Ecuadorian society and the vast cultural diversity of Ecuadorian women.

On 17 February 2009, the Ecuadorian National Assembly approved a Bill on Food Sovereignty, whose objective

is to assure self-sufficiency in healthy, nutritious, and culturally appropriate food for individuals, communities and indigenous people. The new law defines food sovereignty as the "right of people to define their own food production, storage, distribution and consumption policies and strategies, in line with the right to adequate, healthy and nutritious food for the entire population, respecting their cultures and their diversity of food production methods, trade and the management of rural areas by *campesinos*, fishers and indigenous people, in which women play a fundamental role."

The Food Sovereignty Law also recommends that rural women workers and small-scale producers should be given equitable access to land. While the law is certainly an important milestone for small-scale producers, including men and women of artisanal fishing communities, how it will be actually implemented remains to be seen. The process received a setback on 20 March when President Rafael Correa blocked several provisions of the new law, such as the requirement for returning to the State illegally acquired lands, including mangroves patches in coastal areas. ❏

## Milestones

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

inefficient health services, and shortage of doctors and drugs are some of the other issues highlighted in the memorandum.

In addition, women face a host of specific problems. They are unable to move about freely without protection. They are shackled by oppressive norms pertaining to education, employment, marriage and domestic duties. They face domestic violence and have to deal on a daily basis with alcoholism and drug addiction. They are also excluded from important decision-making processes.

Fishing communities are affected by poaching by foreign fishing craft; the destruction of fishing grounds by the use of destructive gear; uneven allocation of fishing grounds; and the arrest and detention of fishermen for long periods in foreign countries. Restrictions on night-time fishing, the ban on fishing in certain areas, and the closure of fishing grounds without any notice in the name of national security, are all issues that have led to a loss of income and livelihoods of the fishing communities on the east coast. The requirement to unload and load fish at checkpoints during the transportation of fish from Batticaloa and Ampara to the south and to Colombo, has increased expenses and reduced the quality of fish (and profits).

The memorandum asked for specific support from the government. A census of all tsunami-affected areas must form the basis of a concrete action plan, formulated in a participatory manner. The damage by the tsunami must be estimated and compensated. Housing must be provided on a priority basis, and must include basic facilities such as toilets, electricity and drinking water.

The memorandum also demanded specific provisions for women who have lost their husbands, the primary breadwinners of the family, due to either the war or the tsunami, so that they can gain from adequate employment options to sustain their livelihoods; if no employment is available, they should be provided with a dole.

Women should be helped in getting a fair price for their fish, and efforts to improve the quality of fishery products, through appropriate technology, are necessary. Basic facilities such as transportation and storage, and technical knowledge through vocational centres, must be provided. Women's access to credit, to enable them to start their own small businesses, must be enhanced. Imports should be controlled if they negatively affect women's livelihoods.



International Women's Day march at Addalachchenai, Ampara District, Sri Lanka.

Boats damaged in the war must be replaced. Craft and gear should either be jointly owned by men and women, or the women should be provided with separate ownership. The government should introduce surveillance boats to help fishermen in times of natural disasters.

Pertaining to the living and working environments of fishing communities, men, women and children should be educated about environmental hazards and taught to keep their surrounding environment clean. Local authorities should take steps to build proper drainage systems to prevent the spread of diseases where water stagnates.

Security must be improved and women must be trained in self-defense. Authorities must take note of the activities of paramilitary groups that are forcibly seizing a part of fishermen's catches along the eastern coast. Fisher people must be guaranteed safe working conditions.

Concrete action should be taken to put an end to the sale of drugs. This should be done through law enforcement at the village level. Legal action against offenders is not enough; they should also be provided with rehabilitation facilities and some alternative employment.

An effective security system for the transportation of fish, like the one in Trincomalee (through the sealing of vehicles), should be introduced in Batticaloa and Ampara Districts as well.

The memorandum concluded with a demand for a dignified life and sustainable livelihoods for the people of Sri Lanka's eastern province who have been affected by war, the tsunami and displacement by development projects. ❏

*“Today, four years after the tsunami, women of fishing communities, many of whom are now the primary breadwinners of their families, have still not been provided with basic facilities, proper housing and the means of earning a livelihood.”*

# Setting the Agenda

**A regional conference on Women in Fisheries held recently in Hanoi, Vietnam defined a regional agenda for the advancement of women and gender equity in fisheries**

By **Than Thi Hien** (tthien@mcdvietnam.org), Head, Research and Development Department, Centre for Marinelife Conservation and Community Development (MCD), Hanoi, Vietnam

**E**cologically sound practices, social and worker's rights, community participation, and women's rights. These four tenets formed the basis of a significant statement released recently, the Hanoi Declaration on Women in Fisheries, which aimed to define the identity of artisanal fisheries in Southeast Asia.

The declaration was the outcome of a three-day conference held in Hanoi on "Women in Fisheries in Southeast Asia" from 2-4 December 2008, organized jointly by the Center for Marinelife Conservation and Community Development (MCD) and the Southeast Asia Fish for Justice Network (SEAFish).

Sixty participants from fisher peoples' organizations and non-governmental organizations in Southeast Asia attended the conference along with representatives from international development institutions such as Oxfam Novib, WorldFish Centre, and the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF).

The conference focused on the regional and international situation of women in fisheries; the setting of a regional agenda for women in

fisheries; and the harmonization of agendas and the development of a plan of action to promote women's rights in fisheries. A roundtable meeting with representatives of the Government of Vietnam and the media to announce the regional agenda and action plan on women in fisheries was organized.

Participants also visited the Giao Xuan Commune, a model of community ecotourism initiative supported by the MCD, situated in the district of Giao Thuy in Nam Dinh Province. The trip to the Giao Xuan Commune exposed participants to the role of women in fisheries, and to community organizations and local governance in Giao Xuan. It provided an opportunity for participants to obtain a firsthand account of the gender situation in the Vietnamese fisheries industry, and of actions being undertaken to advance the women's agenda in coastal communities in Vietnam.

At the conference, fisheries development efforts were contextualized in terms of poverty, social exclusion, ecosystem degradation and resource exploitation. Women's concerns in fisheries were also addressed in relation to social exclusion, poverty and the overall marginalization of artisanal fishers.

Women engaged in fisheries in Southeast Asia are facing a variety of issues starting from their household-based role in production



## Womenspeak

The latest newsletter of AKTEA, the European network of women's organizations in fisheries and aquaculture, is available at [http://www.univ-brest.fr/gdr-amure/site-cedem/aktea10\\_en.pdf](http://www.univ-brest.fr/gdr-amure/site-cedem/aktea10_en.pdf)

This newsletter, No.10, has a write-up of the annual general meeting held in June 2008 at Arcachon, France. It also carries reports of member organizations of AKTEA, elaborating on the activities carried out in the various countries in Europe where they are active.

All previous newsletters of AKTEA can be accessed from <http://www.fishwomen.org>

The Women in Fisheries Information Bulletin (No. 19) of the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) is available at <http://www.spc.int/coastfish/News/WIF/WIF19/index.htm>

This bulletin discusses issues related to women's fishing and women's contributions to sustaining households. The articles include reports on two unique forms of fisheries: one on octopus fishing by the women of Lofanga, Tonga, and one on sea hare fishery in Fiji Islands. There is also a report on the results of a study of gender roles in the coastal fisheries across seventeen Pacific Island countries and territories, as well as an article on changes in subsistence fishing activities and seafood consumption.



Participants at the conference on “Women in Fisheries in Southeast Asia”, Hanoi, Vietnam

and reproduction right up to their lack of representation in decision-making processes in governance. Discrimination against women and lack of gender equity are a common experience for women in fisheries. The role of women is under-recognized or ignored. Participation of women in decisionmaking and management and the low income of women fishworkers are areas of grave concern. The conference was thus a platform that united interested parties on a common regional agenda on women in fisheries and set the direction for fisherwomen’s rights and advocacy.

The focus on gender in socioeconomic development processes was an outcome of country case studies on women in fisheries carried out by the SEAFish Network. The countries covered by the research were Indonesia, Philippines, Vietnam and Cambodia. Apart from these case study presentations, women from fishing communities in Malaysia also shared their experiences at the conference.

The Southeast Asia Fish for Justice Network (SEAFish), which co-organized the conference, is a fisheries network comprising 15 non-governmental and fisheries organizations from Cambodia, Indonesia, Philippines and Vietnam in the Southeast Asian region. SEAFish envisions gender equity in access to, and control of, marine, coastal, and inland aquatic natural resources, and seeks to terminate the suffering caused by unsustainable resource use and privatized control over public resources.

SEAFish emphasizes the role of artisanal fisherfolk in policy formulation and decisionmaking in fisheries at the World Trade Organization (WTO), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and the Asian Development Bank (ADB). It urges the adoption of community-based coastal resource management as a framework for sustainable fisheries and trade. It advocates a reduction in

industrial shrimp aquaculture, and emphasizes socially and environmentally sound aquaculture practices that benefit communities and promote social justice. It also promotes a regional agenda on gender equality and women in fisheries, enriched by local and national experiences, with emphasis on women’s rights.

MCD, also a conference co-organizer, is a SEAFish member organization, dedicated to coastal community livelihoods, marine conservation and sustainable coastal development in Vietnam. MCD recognizes the living interdependency of coastal communities and marine ecosystems. The coastal and marine environment provides jobs, food and ecological services, and must be protected to ensure that the livelihoods of local people are sustained. As degraded marine ecosystems reduce present and future opportunities for coastal communities, MCD’s goal is to harmonize conservation with socioeconomic development. MCD seeks to improve the quality of life of coastal communities and marine ecosystems through coastal management, community development, life science, education and advocacy as well as institution-building.

The conference concluded with the drafting of the Hanoi Declaration on Women in Fisheries (<http://www.fact.org.kh/Download%20online/Hanoi%20Declaration%20of%20SEAFISH2012.4.08.pdf>). The regional agenda focused on the integration of gender concerns into the SEAFish themes, which are Community-Based Coastal Resources Management (CBCRM) and Markets; Shrimp and Aquaculture; and Fisheries and Trade. It was decided that action points will be developed to ensure that the regional agenda is adopted by governments throughout Southeast Asia. SEAFish already sought the support of the Government of Vietnam and the media through the earlier-mentioned roundtable meeting. The regional agenda will be communicated at

**“Women’s concerns in fisheries were addressed in relation to social exclusion, poverty and the overall marginalization of artisanal fishers.”**

the regional level through the ASEAN Summit as well as through other international institutions.

The conference highlighted the issues of women in small-scale fishers in Southeast Asia, making an important contribution to the process of policy formulation at both the

national and regional level. Furthermore, it provided a wonderful opportunity for SEAFish members to express their friendship and solidarity with each other.

For further information about SEAFish and MCD, please visit the sites [www.seafish4justice.net](http://www.seafish4justice.net) and [www.mcdvietnam.org](http://www.mcdvietnam.org) 

## PROFILE

# Marie Ademar

**Marie Ademar is the President of the Maritime Family Association in Martinique and a Member of the World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP)**

Profiled  
by **Brian O’Riordan**  
([briano@scarlet.be](mailto:briano@scarlet.be)),  
Secretary,  
ICSF Belgium Office

**I**n Martinique, Marie Ademar is a rare breed: a woman active in the fisheries sector. “We don’t have many women in our fisheries sector”, she says. However, Marie shares much in common with women fishers from around the world. She combines her work in the fisheries sector with her work as wife, mother and grandmother. “My husband is a sea-going fisherman, with whom I have 4 children and 5 grandchildren”, she proudly announces.

“My job in the fisheries sector, as Vice President of the independent union and as President of the Maritime Family Association, is to defend the interests of sea-going fishermen. For example, when fishers find themselves in court, it

is my job to work with their defence lawyers to dig out legal texts, and it is the Association that puts together the lawyers’ fees”.

Marie Ademar has been doing this work for over 20 years. “I was elected Vice-President of the union at the General Assembly on 01 December 1986, 22 years back. In 1987, when the President resigned, I took over as President, a post I have held till now.”

Marie is no stranger to struggle. “My struggles began in the streets with fishermen who were mobilizing for the first time. There have been various struggles to gain recognition for the sector and for fishers’ rights. Through these struggles we have secured the bad weather unemployment benefit which can be claimed when the wind is more than force 5 and fishermen can’t go out fishing. There is now also an insurance policy, social security benefits for crew to cover accidents or ill health, and

retirement benefits according to contributions to social security over a number of years.”

Marie also works directly on fishery policies. “I participated in the setting up of eight protected areas that enable fishermen to manage resources and to prevent the fishing of juveniles. These areas will be opened up after a period of three to six years to the use of larger mesh nets.” Says Marie, “In my view, fishers must constantly struggle for their rights and to get the fisheries recognized as an economic sector that provides employment. It is the artisanal sector that must be defended at all costs to cope with tomorrow’s food problems.”

Regarding her contact with the World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP), Marie says, “It was in the year 2000 that I was invited to Loctudy in Brittany. I joined WFFP and so I became a spokesperson for the Martinique fisheries sector. Despite the language barrier, and despite all the difficulties, it is a highly enriching experience. I am discovering other countries and I see that there are huge difficulties to overcome. I am able to provide support and to help redress the grievances of women and of small artisanal fishers in all these countries.”

On gender equity, Marie observes: “Indeed women need to struggle to ensure that certain rights are applied and that other rights are recognized. There are still too many men who don’t recognize the role of women”.

What about the Bangkok conference? Says Marie, “The most important message I take from Bangkok for the fishermen of Martinique is this. They are already enriched by being able to work freely; to already have the means to stake their claims through the representatives of small fishers in Bangkok. I support artisanal fishing for its sustainable use of marine resources, for its contribution to poverty alleviation, and for providing food security for each of us. Small-scale artisanal fishing allows fishers to look after their families. This form of fishing does not take away resources from the poor.” 

# Policy but no Practice

Women fish vendors of India's Tuticorin District take to the streets demanding the implementation of a national policy on urban street vendors

By **Juliet Theresita**  
(ccs162@yahoo.com)  
Director, Centre for  
Community Services  
(CCS), an NGO based in  
Tuticorin, Tamil Nadu,  
India

On 20th January 2009, over one thousand women headload fish vendors from Tuticorin city and nearby villages in the coastal state of Tamil Nadu in south India, staged a demonstration demanding that the National Policy for Urban Street Vendors be implemented in the state of Tamil Nadu.

The National Policy for Urban Street Vendors, launched on 20 January 2004 by the Government of India, emphasizes the need to: "Provide and promote a supportive environment for earning

JULIET THERESITA/CCS



Women fish vendors at a demonstration in Tuticorin, Tamil Nadu, India

livelihoods to the street vendors, as well as ensure absence of congestion and maintenance of hygiene in public spaces and streets," and "to make street vendors a special component of the urban development/zoning plans by treating them as an integral and legitimate part of the urban distribution system".

Drawing attention to this policy, the petition, addressed to the District Mayor, the District

Collector and the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu included the following demands:

- The national policy on street vendors should immediately be implemented in Tamil Nadu;
- Women fish vendors should be provided with identity cards;
- Fisherwomen should be provided with bank loans and access to credit facilities;
- Basic facilities such as hygienic spaces and conditions for procuring, preserving, storing, processing, and selling of fish, clean toilets and access to clean running water, need to be provided in proper, well-designed and conveniently located markets;
- Spaces need to be clearly allocated for women fish vendors, eliminating all forms of discrimination against them and securing their safety against sexual abuse;
- Women fish vendors should have access to reliable and inexpensive public transportation in order to carry their products to market areas;
- Appropriate shelters at harbours should be provided to ensure security and safety of women who are otherwise prone to being violated sexually in the hostile environments of harbours during the night.
- Facilities for drinking water, toilets and crèches should be provided. This would contribute to hygienic fish handling and processing, while ensuring that basic needs of women are met in a dignified manner;
- The government should immediately release ice boxes to headload vendors affected by the tsunami, as agreed immediately after the tsunami of December 2004;
- Fish, a valuable source of nutrition, should be served as part of government-run noon meal schemes. ❏

## YEMAYA MAMA

...tries to crack the Code



BOOK

# Pacific Voices: Equity and Sustainability in Pacific Island Fisheries

Edited by Irene Novaczek, Jean Mitchell and Joeli Vietayaki, Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, Suva, Fiji, 2005

This review is by **Harini Kumar** (icsf@icsf.net), Programme Associate, ICSF

This book brings together a number of papers on gender and inshore fisheries in the Pacific. It juxtaposes the male-dominated, market-driven, commercial production of commodities for domestic sale and export with the subsistence production that women engage in and which provides the food for family consumption. Through gender-sensitive research, the interests of the various stakeholders in Pacific Island fisheries and their various interactions have been pertinently captured.

This book highlights the various roles women in the inshore fishery of the Pacific Islands play and the challenges that they face

and, in the process, makes a strong case for gender equity in the fisheries. Women are key stakeholders in the inshore fishery and make a valuable contribution to the food security and nutrition of the majority of Pacific Islanders. They are almost solely responsible for post-harvest activities and the distribution and sale of marine products. However, they are confronted on a day-to-day basis with many challenges, such as lack of credit facilities, irregular and unsafe transportation systems to and from market areas, and cultural norms and prevailing gender systems that have tended to exclude them from decision-making processes. Women are also increasingly facing a decline in resources in the inshore fishery, one of the reasons being the intensive exploitation of niche market export products.

The title of the book 'Pacific Voices' resonates with the narratives of women from the inshore waters of the Pacific Islands, as many of the case studies have been written by people from this region. The depth that local knowledge has brought to these various studies is evident throughout and exemplifies a research methodology that is welcome and much needed.

The articles in the volume clearly bring out that men and women experience development differently, pointing to the need for a gender analysis that explores the different interests of men and women and the different impacts of interventions on them, contributing to a more gender-equitable approach to fisheries development. Also, because the fishing activities of women are seen as marginal, even though they are the key stakeholders in the inshore fishery, they are excluded from contributing to resource use decisionmaking. The case studies highlight the urgent need for participatory community-based management that includes especially women and the youth, key to ensuring the future and sustainability of the inshore fishery of the Pacific Islands. ❏



PUBLISHED BY  
Chandrika Sharma for  
International Collective  
in Support of Fishworkers  
27 College Road  
Chennai 600 006  
India  
Tel: (91) 44 2827 5303  
Fax: (91) 44 2825 4457  
E-mail: icsf@icsf.net  
Web site: www.icsf.net

EDITED BY  
Nilanjana Biswas  
ILLUSTRATIONS BY  
Sandesh  
(sandeshcartoonist@gmail.com)  
DESIGNED BY  
P. Sivasakthivel  
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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.