



35 Years in Support of
Small-scale Fishworkers

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ICSF'S NEWSLETTER ON GENDER AND FISHERIES

From the Editor

Across the world, more than a year since it first struck, the COVID-19 pandemic continues to take lives, destroy livelihoods and paralyse economies with unprecedented lockdowns and supply chain disruptions. Lockdown and physical distancing measures in particular impact vulnerable small-scale fishers; the frequent disruption of economic activity is an enormous challenge for sustenance of the small-scale fishery activity, which is based on small margins and business turnover. Women fishers in particular have been hard hit; the pandemic has served to intensify systematic inequalities that have always discriminated against them. The safeguard of their rights, in particular livelihood rights, is critical for the sustainability in the fishing sector during this difficult period.

In these times, examples of mutual support, innovation and solidarity in struggle among small-scale fishing communities continue to provide lessons in sustenance.

In this issue we see how women engaged in small-scale fishing in the Netherlands and supplying fish through fish retailers found new ways to directly reach consumers. They combined new product development with the use of social media to contact their customer base. These measures promise to increase viability, and direct outreach may be a sustainable way to carry on activities despite the pandemic-induced disruption of traditional marketing chains.

Mutual aid and support have been crucial factors in the resilience of fishing communities in COVID-hit Alaska where women form over ten percent of the fishers and 30 percent of fish processors in the artisanal sector. The Alaska Longline Fishermen's Association along with the Alaska Sustainable Fisheries Trust distributed over 630,000 seafood meals to families in need in Alaska and the Pacific Northwest, thus helping forge new partnerships. One outcome has been a growing coalition of small-scale fishing communities campaigning for a paradigm change in the state, to move away from an oil-based economy to one economy based on salmon fish and renewable energy sources, in balance with nature.

In Senegal, traditional women fish processors from the municipality of Bargny, about 35km from Dakar, have been for more than a decade struggling against development projects that jeopardise their environment, health, and livelihoods. From July 2020, the Association of the Women Fish Processors of Bargny Guedj Khelcom has strongly opposed the setting up of a mining and steel complex operated by the Turkish company, Tosyali. This struggle, coming at a time of COVID, underscores the importance of continuing solidarity against non-sustainable development.

A study on the impact of COVID-19 on fisheries and aquaculture food systems by the FAO published in November 2020 underlined the importance of local food sourcing and markets when the pandemic has created barriers to logistics and long distance transport. Producing fish closer to consumption could serve both food security and sustainable livelihood during this juncture. Even when the effects of the pandemic wane, it is unlikely that life can return to pre-COVID ways. More sustainable development paradigms will become necessary. The examples of women from small-scale fishing communities could provide some of the essential learning for these times to come. 📌



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