



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



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# Yemaya

ICSF'S NEWSLETTER ON GENDER AND FISHERIES

## From the Editor

**T**he global pandemic accompanies us into a new year that is witnessing the emergence both of aggressive variants of the virus and vaccines to combat it. As the global economy reels under the impact of lockdowns and restrictions, the fishing sector has been particularly hard hit. Fishing activities across the sector dipped with demand drops and labour shortage. For women in the fisheries, the year was extremely challenging.


According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), women, who make up nearly half the labour force in fishing and aquaculture, were particularly affected, on the one hand by reduced landings and the closure or reduction of processing and marketing activities, and on the other by an increased risk of infection as their activities necessitate contact with others at all stages of the value chain. Additionally, their concentration in the informal sector deprives women of any sort of work protection, while, at the same time, exposing them to greater levels of stress and exhaustion as working hours are intensified.

The multiple crises facing fishing communities are also being compounded in some cases by tardy governmental response. As the article from Mexico reports, despite repeated requests by small-scale fishing communities for COVID safety protocols applicable to the fish value chain, no such guidance it was issued. Amidst the chaos, illegal fishing has witnessed a spike, adding to livelihood difficulties and leading the authors to observe that COVID-19's impacts have exacerbated challenges in all the three dimensions of sustainability: social, economic, and environmental.

The articles from Bangladesh and Myanmar bear testimony to the fact that women in fishing communities in many parts of the world are among the poorest and most vulnerable sections of their societies. Economic dependence, social invisibility and lack of bargaining power keep them tied to exploitative work and abusive life conditions. The lack of data on women in fisheries leads policy makers to ignore their existence; in turn, the absence of policy reinforces the invisibility of women's lives and the continued exploitation of their labour.

Kate Bevvitt's conversation with Danika Kleiber and Meryl Williams, who are steering a collaborative global assessment of the contribution of small-scale fisheries to sustainable development, highlights the many problems pertaining to data on women in the fisheries. Women in harvesting are often not registered as fishers while women in processing and marketing, though disproportionately present in these post-harvesting activities, are left out by fisheries agencies. A major effort is needed to redress what the researchers call the "data sexism".

It was only after decades of organized struggle by women in fishing communities that policy makers began to acknowledge and address the reality of gender inequity and inequality in international guidelines and national policy frameworks governing the fishing sector. However, the present pandemic-induced chaos threatens to destabilize the small but significant gains that women in fishing have made. As the year begins, it is important to remember that the current crisis is also an opportunity to double down on the demand for the promotion of small-scale fishing towards promoting environmental sustainability, jobs and livelihoods, and social, particularly gender, equity. It is an opportunity to reach out to women in fishing communities who are facing unprecedented challenges, and to take all steps necessary to improve the lives and livelihood conditions of small-scale fishing communities, especially women and other vulnerable sections.

Yemaya wishes all our readers a meaningful new year! 

# Making women in fishing visible

**A recent study reveals that women in Bangladesh's coastal fishing continue to remain largely unrecognized, and that urgent steps are needed to rectify this situation**

By **Md. Mujibul Haque Munir**  
(munir.coastbd@gmail.com), Joint Director,  
COAST Trust, Bangladesh

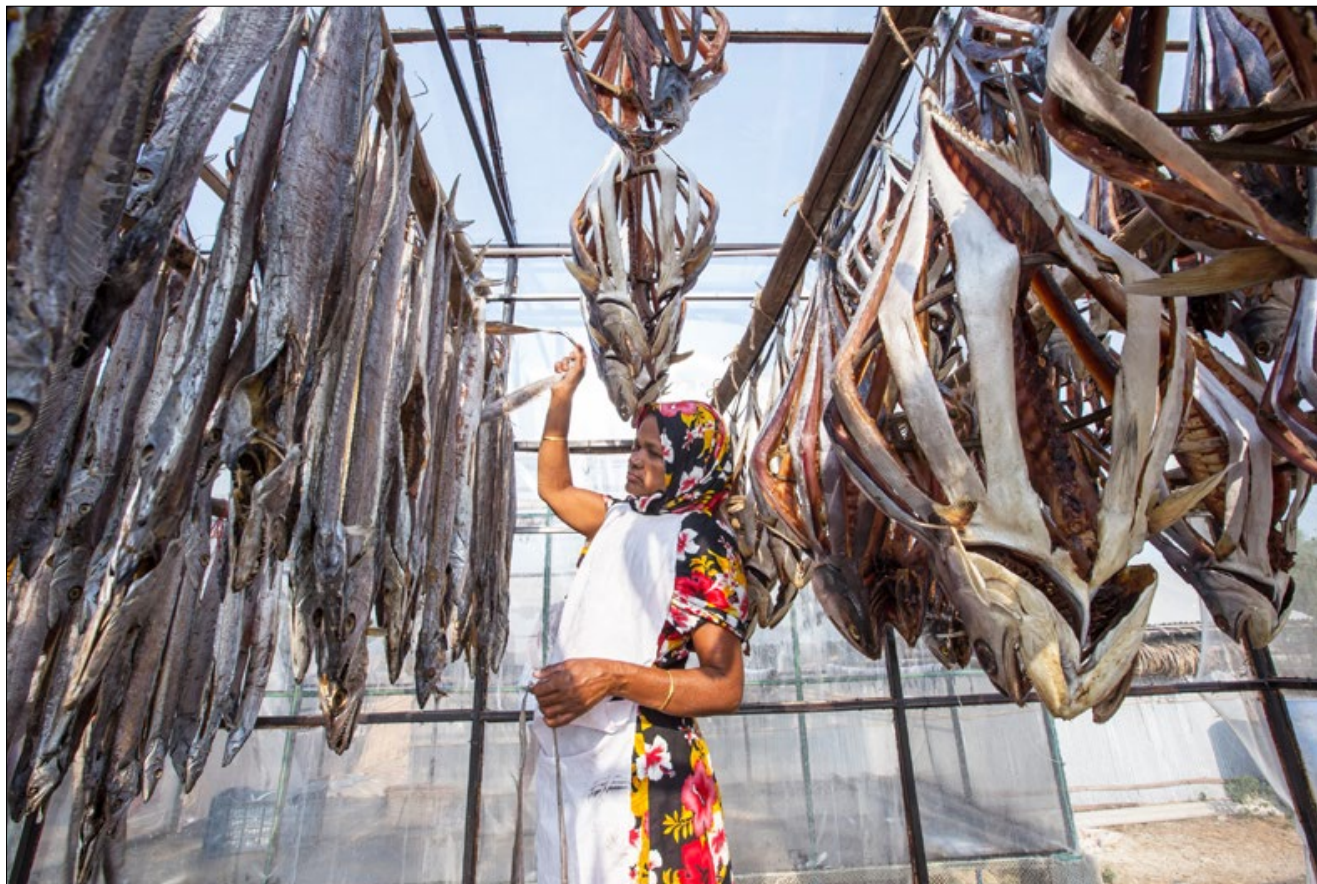
**B**angladesh is one of the world's leading fish producing countries, with a total production of 42.77 lakh MT in the year 2017-18. Aquaculture contributes 56.24 per cent of the total fish production. The average growth in this sector has been 5.26 per cent for the last ten years. The rate of growth in fish production is in conformity with the government's targets of Vision-2021. According to the State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture 2020, Bangladesh ranked third in inland open water capture production and fifth in world aquaculture production.

Around 10 to 12 per cent of those employed in fisheries in Bangladesh are women. Aquaculture alone employs more than 3 million fishers, 60 per cent of whom are women. In the

rural and coastal areas, 30 per cent of all women are directly or indirectly engaged in small-scale fisheries, primarily in aquaculture, shrimp culture, fish processing and net, gear and craft making. Women are not involved in active fishing from the sea, but accompany men in fish production from inland water bodies.

However, the work done by women and their contribution to the economy are largely unrecognized and women remain largely absent in decision making for the management and development of the sector. COAST Trust, a national NGO in Bangladesh, recently conducted a study covering three coastal districts, to explore the situation of the women members of the coastal areas of Bangladesh. The COAST study helps us understand the role of the

DIN M SHIBLY



Woman in a dry fish plant at Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. Around 70 per cent of women fishers are involved in different support activities, including drying fish, and net making. The low involvement of women in income generation hinders their empowerment and financial self-reliance in Bangladesh society





A woman working with dry fish in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. However, the work done by women and their contribution to the economy is largely unrecognized and women remain largely absent in decision making for the management and development of the sector

women members of fisher families, including their participation in decision making both in the family and society level. It also includes case studies of working women members of the fishers' families.

While more than 97 per cent of fisher families depended on fishing as the main source of income, surprisingly only two per cent of the women members were found to be directly involved in income generation. Women played an important role in pre- and post-harvest activities. Around 70 per cent of the women fishers are involved in different support activities, including drying fish and net making. The low involvement of women in income generation hinders their empowerment and financial self reliance in Bangladesh society. The study therefore found a low participation of women in the decision making process at both family and society levels.

The study tried to identify the reason behind the low involvement of women in income generation activities that involved working

alongside men, outside their homes. Fifty-five per cent respondents reported that working with males was 'bad'; 15 per cent said they had experienced verbal harassment from men.

All the respondents said they faced discrimination regarding wages. Twenty-one per cent accepted lower wages as they were women; 40 per cent said employers claimed they paid women less as they worked less compared to men.

The study showed that women and girls in coastal fishing communities lagged behind in formal education. The attendance rate of girls in primary schools was 92 per cent in Bagerhat, 95 per cent in Bhola, and 93 per cent in Cox's Bazaar. However, only 60 per cent of women in these families had completed Class Five; only 26 per cent had moved on to Classes Six to Ten. Out of 1200, only ten said that they had finished schooling and were attending college. Girls in fishing communities also lagged behind in general education performance levels among all girls in the districts.

**The work done by women and their contribution to the economy are largely unrecognized and women remain largely absent in decision making**

Nearly a third of the respondents took no part in decisions with regard to the assets of the family, especially in buying or disposal. Only 40 per cent participated in decisions related to the marriage of anyone in the family. The study thus clearly brought out the hold of patriarchy in family affairs. It also revealed the low levels of participation of women in different social structures. Of the respondents, 82 per cent did not participate in local 'Salish' or village courts; none were members of local institutions like the market or schools. Only 2 per cent of respondents had communicated directly with the Union Parishad (Committee) chairman on matters related to local services.

While most women said they could go out of their homes at will, there were restrictions. Almost all could visit their neighbours at any time. Less than half could go to their relatives' houses as they willed, so long as the house was not too far away. A third of the responders even claimed they could not get medical treatment when they felt it was needed.

Over 60 per cent of the respondents had been victims of violence. Nearly three-fourths reported feeling insecure when the male head of the family was out at sea, with families with

girls reporting the greatest insecurity. While three-fourths of all respondents had lodged complaints of harassment against neighbours or community, only 13 per cent of the complaints had resulted in satisfactory solutions.

Most women covered in the study were completely unaware of the importance of networking. There were no women's associations or organizations available for them to join. Half the women were members of microfinance groups; this was the only institution they could call their own.

None of the respondents were aware of fisheries related laws and regulations. None had ever taken recourse to legal action on any issue.

The COAST study came out with the following recommendations:

- Special policies and actions to identify women's contributions
- The involvement of women in economic activities
- The inclusion of women's participation in various fisheries programmes
- The implementation of labour policies for fisherwomen
- The issuance of ID cards to all women fishers

## A number of significant developments in support of gender equity and equality took place in 2020, a year otherwise marked by the COVID-19 pandemic



### Milestones

By **Meryl J. Williams**  
(meryljwilliams@gmail.com), Chair/  
Coordinator of GAF,  
Queensland, Australia

**T**wenty-fifth anniversary of the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action.

On 1 October 2020, to celebrate the 25th Anniversary of the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action – a vision for the empowerment of women – the UN General Assembly and UN Women convened a virtual high level meeting at which more than 100 countries committed to concrete actions that would advance gender equality for women and girls everywhere.

*COBI Mexico: COVID-19 Series* <https://cobi.org.mx/en/all-about-coronavirus-covid-19/>

Since May 2020, Comunidad y Biodiversidad (COBI) has conducted a consultation process with fishers in 12 Mexican states to learn about the impacts of the pandemic, as well as the roles of the state, the local solutions applied for fishers, gender equality, the use of technology and environmental impact. Each month until the end of 2020, COBI published a report on their surveys and consultations.

Global Marine Commodities Project releases "Basic Guidelines for a Gender-Responsive Fishery Improvement Project"

<https://globalmarinecommodities.org/en/publications/basic-guidelines-for-a-gender-responsive-fishery-improvement-project-indonesia/>

While many fisheries standards and certification systems continue to totally ignore gender in their guidelines, or pay only perfunctory attention to gender equality, the new Basic Guidelines of the Global Marine Commodities Project stands out.

We welcome several new women/gender and fisheries/aquaculture organisations that have been established, including:

- SAGE (Seafood and Gender Equality) in the USA (<https://www.seafoodandgenderequality.org/>)
- Women in Fisheries (UK) <https://women-fisheries.com/>



# Women's empowerment through climate action

## In Myanmar, FAO's FishAdapt project is strengthening the adaptive capacity and resilience of fisheries-and aquaculture-dependent livelihoods

By **Angela Lentisco** (angie.lentisco@gmail.com),  
Marine and Coastal  
Specialist, FishAdapt  
Gender Advisor, Thailand

**W**omen's empowerment and gender equality have been recognized as necessary conditions for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development. The SDG Goal 5 – 'Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls' – has 14 related indicators, and there are an additional 39 gender-related indicators across the other SDGs, including those that track the elimination of poverty and hunger, the reduction of inequality, the promotion of health, education and decent employment, as well as those related to sustainable cities climate change action, and peace.

Under SDG Goal 14 – 'Life Below Water – Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development' – which also looks at the management of the fisheries and aquaculture sectors, there is no direct gender target. However, one of the key targets is 'Target 14.b Support Small-scale fisheries – Provide access for small-scale artisanal fishers to marine resources

and markets'. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) tracks this indicator while analysing the efforts made by countries to implement the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines). The SSF Guidelines were developed to address the needs of small-scale fisheries as part of the implementation of the 1995 FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries. These Guidelines strongly emphasize the need for gender mainstreaming as an integral part of small-scale fisheries development strategies, calling on states to meet their obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, urging countries to address any existing discrimination against women in the fisheries sector, and encouraging women's participation in fisheries organizations.

Women's contributions to the fisheries sector are significant, with women representing

ROBERTO SANDOVAL/FAO



A woman working at a shrimp paste processing factory, Myanmar. Due to high insecurity in jobs in fisheries, women (mainly young women) are migrating to Yangon, Mandalay and abroad, searching for potential jobs, including as factory workers

about half of the workforce, as estimated by the 2012 World Bank report titled 'Hidden Harvest – Global Contributions of Capture Fisheries'. Women's roles in fisheries are often concentrated in processing and trading of fishery products, though many women also mend nets, sort catch, glean and fish, and are usually the main care givers of the fishing households. Not taking gender issues into account leads to discrimination against women fishworkers; further, it also leads to productivity and income losses, and food and nutrition insecurity, especially in poor households.

To address these imbalances, interventions in the fisheries sector must recognize gender issues and include measures that empower women and enhance their participation in decision making. Calls for achieving gender equality in the fisheries and aquaculture sectors must be articulated into context specific gender guidance for fisheries and aquaculture projects working on the ground, including those trying to improve the sustainability and resilience of these sectors against climate change. One such example is the FishAdapt project in Myanmar.

The FAO project 'FishAdapt: Strengthening the adaptive capacity and resilience of fisheries and aquaculture-dependent livelihoods in Myanmar' is being implemented in Myanmar to address climate change issues and to promote resilience and climate change adaptation in fisheries and aquaculture. The main objective of the project is "to assist government to enable inland and coastal fishery and aquaculture stakeholders to adapt to climate change by understanding and reducing vulnerabilities, piloting new practices and technologies, and sharing information". The project is working towards strengthening national, regional and local regulatory frameworks and enhancing adaptation practices through fisheries co-management, integrated mangrove fisheries and aquaculture, inland fisheries and small-scale aquaculture, and addressing critical issues related to land and resource tenure.

The project builds on existing government and partner programmes and emerging good practices, following the Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management (EAFM) and the Ecosystem Approach to Aquaculture (EAA). These approaches provide practical guidance to implement sustainable development in the fisheries sector by identifying and encouraging balance between ecological and human well-being through good governance. The goal is to enhance the resilience of aquatic ecosystems to climate change impacts, reducing the vulnerability of fishing and fish farming communities. The project has a strong gender component to ensure that both women and men benefit from the project outcomes, and that project interventions directly contribute to

women's empowerment in the fisheries sector to reduce vulnerability and improve resilience.

The project has developed a Gender Strategy to enhance the capacity of project stakeholders for a better understanding of the gender issues encountered as part of the project, and to develop gender responsive interventions that meet women's and men's needs in Myanmar's fisheries and aquaculture sectors, and ultimately, contribute to the achievement of gender equality and women's empowerment. The Strategy was developed by the FishAdapt gender team, based on the findings of a gender analysis, to address gender issues as part of project interventions. The goal is to "Ensure that FishAdapt project interventions are gender responsive and contribute to the process of empowering women in fisheries and aquaculture communities in Myanmar".

The gender analysis was carried out between July and August 2019 to identify gender issues in fisheries and aquaculture households in nine pilot villages in Yangon (Chaung Wa, MeePya, and Zwe Bar Kone Tan), Ayeyarwaddy (Ah Mar, BawaThit and Tha Mein Pa Lae) and Rakhine (Kha Yaing, KularYaung and Nat Kan). The gender analysis provided useful information about gender roles and decision making in these communities, that can be addressed through the Gender Strategy of the FishAdapt project.

The gender analysis revealed the following key findings:

The first was that women have limited opportunity to work as wage labour in the fishing sector, especially in commercial fishing business. This could largely be due to the gender stereotypes considering women as physically weak and unsuited to the physical demands of fishing, though more studies may be required to explain the absence of women in commercial fishing boats (not only in Myanmar, but regionally and globally). Due to high insecurity in jobs in fisheries, women (mainly young women) are migrating to Yangon, Mandalay and abroad, searching for potential jobs, including as factory workers.

The second finding was that men, women and youth from fisheries and aquaculture households have poor awareness about action plans, policies and laws related to gender, fisheries and aquaculture, climate change and disasters.

Women and youth were found to have limited opportunities to be involved as participants, representatives or in leadership positions and decision making roles in fisheries and aquaculture bodies, including government administrative structures. This was true in urban and rural areas, both at local/village administrative levels, and at national levels.

Another key finding was that women of all ages from fishery and aquaculture households



Women working on shrimp paste processing in Ayeyarwaddy Region, Myanmar. There is a need to develop appropriate and conducive marketing facilities in areas where women fishers have easy and unhindered access. Credit policy also needs to ensure women's access to microfinance

are involved in pre-harvest and post-harvest activities: fish processing, small-scale fishing, fish selling and fish products distribution in local and other markets. However, they lack opportunities to access technical skills to enhance their livelihoods.

It was found that improving women's access to markets and storage of fish through provision of ice would help improve women's roles in fish processing and marketing. There is a need to develop appropriate and conducive marketing facilities in areas where women fishers have easy and unhindered access. Credit policy also needs to ensure women's access to microfinance without having to provide collateral or recommendation by other household members, such as the husband.


Reduction of post-harvest losses and improving fish processing beyond traditional drying and salting should be addressed. Training and support for women should also be provided to improve storage, packaging and distribution of fish as well as the management of enterprises.

To address the issues identified by the gender analysis, the Gender Strategy includes actions to improve the capacity of project staff and project stakeholders to become more aware of gender issues, and to be able to acknowledge them. The project also supports the implementation of specific gender activities that can identify the gender issues (for example, through the gender analysis mentioned above), and measures to address them, and support awareness raising.

The following are examples of the gender related activities being implemented as part of the Gender Strategy:

- FishAdapt project staff are trained and provided technical advice on gender issues whenever required by team members. Gender-specific data and gender sensitive indicators are collected, analysed and used throughout the project. A network of gender focal points has been set up. Capacity development events on women's empowerment in fisheries and aquaculture communities are conducted at a national, provincial and local level.
- An attempt is made to ensure the participation of at least 40 per cent of women and 25 per cent of youth in all project interventions, with some activities, such as post-harvest training, requiring 70 per cent of women's participation.

There is regular collaboration and coordination with stakeholders to share technical knowledge and policy advice. Women's leadership roles are being strengthened through FishAdapt village committees. Women's empowerment and gender equality awareness raising public campaigns, such as the 16 Days of Activism in Myanmar in 2019, are given support.

There is an attempt to promote gender-sensitive language in all documents, publications, website and peer to peer mobile application system produced by FishAdapt. 

**Women have limited opportunity to work as wage labour in the fishing sector, especially in commercial fishing business**



# Smoking fish efficiently

**The *ahotor* oven represents an improvement on the widely used *chorkor* smoker, and is an energy- and time-efficient fish smoking technology**

By Naana Nkansah Agyekum  
(nagyekum@oxfam.  
org.uk), Media and  
Communications Officer,  
Oxfam, Ghana

**M**y recent tours in some coastal communities in the Central, Western and Volta Regions of Ghana exposed me to a daily reality of fishmongers in the region. As part of a fisheries sustainable project being implemented by Oxfam and its partners, such visits to fishing communities are quite frequent.

During one such trip, interactions with some fishmongers resulted in my visiting a fish processing shed, and that was when I got a taste of the struggle that they have been going through all these years. Within the few minutes I spent there, my eyes reddened, and I found myself gasping for breath. I walked out feeling sorry for the women who are subjected to this torturous experience on a daily basis to ensure we get the smoked fish that we love so much.

But this daily hardship of the women could be lessened with the use of a new technology for smoking fish called the *ahotor* oven. The *ahotor* oven was developed by SNV Ghana under Sustainable Fisheries Management

Project (SFMP) to improve on the quality and competitiveness of smoked fish through the use of a clean smoking technology. The *ahotor* oven is designed as an improvement over the existing *chorkor* smoker.

The *ahotor* oven is energy efficient and helps women fish processors reduce the quantity of firewood in smoking fish. It also improves the quality of smoked fish and reduces the content of the Polycyclic Aromatic Hydrocarbon (PaH) contamination level, usually found in smoked fish. The combustion chamber in the oven ensures efficient combustion or burning of wood.

In contrast, the *chorkor* smoker, which is quite popular with most of the fishmongers because of its low cost of construction, poses a health risk to fish processors as they have to endure the high rate of combustion that it involves.

“We need special training on the hygienic handling of fish as well as support in the construction of the improved *ahotor* ovens for smoking our fish,” says Madam Emelia Abaka, a fishmonger in Axim. She adds, “The old *chorkor* smokers are not good for smoking as the fish absorbs a lot of smoke in the process.”

“The assistance of the government and the private sector is needed to subsidise the cost of construction of the *ahotor* oven to make it affordable for most women,” explains Emelia.

According to the Ghana Standard Authority, fish smoked with the *ahotor* oven also passes the standardization test and makes them acceptable to the other formal markets like the supermarkets. Quality fish that meets the standardization mark is not only healthy but increases the profit margins for the fishmongers.

Oxfam and partners conducted a research on Gender Enterprise Marketing (GEM) within the fisheries value chain and recommended the need for standardization of smoked fish.

According to the OXFAM GEM report, “The women need support in the area of training and capacity building in order to establish profits and ultimately improve their livelihoods. Support for the women is mostly from NGOs but this is not extensive and so accessibility is low. Government institutions like the National Board for Small-scale Industry can provide the needed assistance for the rural women.”

EMELIA ABAKA EDU



The *ahotor* oven is energy efficient and helps women fish processors reduce the quantity of firewood in smoking fish. It also improves quality of smoked fish





Fishmongers using the chorkor smoker, which is quite popular because of its low cost of construction, but which poses a health risk to fish processors as they have to endure its higher rate of combustion

Rubby Adukpoh is an Assembly Member of the Dzelukope Electoral Area of the Keta Municipality in Ghana. She is also the Leader for the National Fish Processors Traders Association. Rubby explained to me that in her municipality, most women – about 80 per cent – still use the chorkor smokers.

“They don’t have the money to construct the new ahotor oven which was introduced to them. As a leader, I’m trying to encourage them to use the new ones because I have observed the differences in using both,” says Rubby.

“With the chorkor smokers, the water that drains from the fish gets back to the fire but the ahotor oven has a chamber that drains the water separately,” Rubby explains. “The ahotor oven offers that extra time while processing your fish to do other things but you don’t have that flexibility when using the chorkor smoker as your fish can easily burn,” she adds.

Rubby Adukpoh is not only encouraging the women to use the new oven but also dialoguing with NGOs and the local district authority to garner support for the women for complete migration to the ahotor oven.

The cost for constructing the ahotor oven ranges from GHS 1600 to GHS 1800 (USD 274 to USD 308) but the chorkor smoker costs just GHS 200 to GHS 400 ( USD 34 to USD 68).

According to the Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture Development, 500 ahotor ovens have been distributed to fish mongers across the country, with 80 more under construction, to complement the initial supply.

Some fisheries projects in the past have subsidised the construction of the new oven for fishmongers. But like *Oliver Twist*, the women are asking for “more” as the support was far from enough to cover all the women within the coastal communities.

Rubby Adukpoh cannot overstate the importance of this. “I am appealing to all stakeholders within the fisheries sector to come on board to fully support the migration to the ahotor oven,” she says

She also wants government ministries and the agencies in charge of Ghana’s fisheries to pay frequent visits to coastal communities. She believes this will give them the opportunity to witness the socio-economic status of women in the sector first-hand so as to craft better and more effective policy decisions. **■**

**The ahotor oven is energy efficient and helps women fish processors reduce the quantity of firewood in smoking fish**





Following the historic route of the old herring fleet from Shetland to Great Yarmouth, fisherwomen weaves a compelling tale of a unique phenomenon in the herring industry.  
Portrait: Ilona, Stromness, Orkney | BY CRAIG EASTON / WWW.CRAIG-EASTON.COM / WWW.TENOCLOCKBOOKS





History of British women at work. The series is presented in three parts: Portraits, Heritage and Journey.

Portrait: Carly, Hull com | BY CRAIG EASTON/ [WWW.CRAIGEASTON.COM](http://WWW.CRAIGEASTON.COM) / [WWW.TENOCLOCKBOOKS](http://WWW.TENOCLOCKBOOKS)



# Illuminating hidden harvests

## The conversation around a global and collaborative small-scale fisheries study highlights the under-recognition and under-reporting of women's work

By **Kate Bevitt** (k.bevitt@worldfishcenter.org), WorldFish, spoke with the IHH gender co-lead, **Danika Kleiber** (danika.kleiber@gmail.com), social scientist, NOAA Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center, and IHH advisor **Meryl Williams** (meryljwilliams@gmail.com), Chair, GAF.

**I**lluminating Hidden Harvests: The contribution of small-scale fisheries to sustainable development' (IHH) is a collaborative study led by FAO, Duke University and WorldFish. The study, due out in 2021, consists of 58 country case studies drawing on existing secondary data, a survey of national fisheries administrations, thematic studies and global extrapolations. Gender is a cross-cutting theme in the study, which will provide one of the most comprehensive understandings of small-scale fisheries globally.

**Kate Bevitt** (KB), WorldFish, spoke with the IHH gender co-lead **Danika Kleiber** (DK), formerly a research fellow with WorldFish and ARC Centre of Excellence for Coral Reef Studies, and now a social scientist with the NOAA Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center, and IHH advisor **Meryl Williams** (MW), chair of the Gender in Aquaculture and Fisheries Section of the Asian Fisheries Society, to learn more about the IHH gender work.

**KB: Danika, given the lack of sex-disaggregated data in small-scale fisheries, what issues did you anticipate this would create for the IHH data collection?**

DK: For the 58 country case studies, the research leads were tasked with gathering and synthesizing secondary fisheries data. But we (the IHH gender team leads—me and Sarah Harper) were concerned that if the country case study teams hadn't been exposed to gender and fisheries, they wouldn't know where to look for gender data or even realize they were missing data. For instance, teams may not have known to look for gleaning or other women-lead fishing activities.

Another concern was ensuring the country case study teams were asking big questions—for instance, how do you capture the unpaid and mostly uncounted labour that women often do? This type of labour is all essential for small-scale fishing, so what does it mean if we leave it out?

**KB: A group of 28 gender experts were engaged to support the IHH country case study teams. Can you tell us more about this?**

DK: This was the best part of the whole project. Sarah and I both did our PhDs on different aspects of gender and fisheries, and if you are doing a PhD correctly, you learn how much you don't know! Because IHH is about

gaining detailed information from specific countries, we decided it would be best to invite gender and fisheries advisors with expertise in as many IHH countries as we could find.

These experts we called them gender advisors had on-the-ground knowledge and might even have known where to find sex-disaggregated data mostly because they had collected it themselves. We connected the gender advisors with the IHH country case study leads to try and make sure the data coming in that would be analyzed by the IHH core team would, as much as possible, include gender from the get-go.

**KB: How else did you engage with the gender advisors' expertise?**

DK: We knew that a lack of sex-disaggregated data was always going to be a limiting factor for the quantification of women's contributions to small-scale fisheries. But we didn't want that to limit our ability to say something meaningful about gender in fisheries. Sarah and I got together and came up with a list of questions for the gender advisors and asked them to fill in as many answers as possible. And we didn't just want quantitative data. We asked for any information they had, including their own observations—this way we would be able to contextualize the IHH data.

**KB: What impact did the involvement of yourself and the other gender experts have on the IHH data analysis?**

DK: Sarah and I have been making the case, from the very beginning, that some form of gender analysis is key to each of the four main IHH themes. For example, in the environmental theme this has meant a focus on foot fisheries, and in the economics theme, this has focused on finding data that can adequately capture women's participation. Sarah and I have been excited to work with the other IHH theme leaders, and they've been receptive when we've suggested that they report gender analysis relevant to their own theme, rather than just having it all reported in the gender chapter. We don't want to hoard the gender results! We really want them to be woven throughout the whole report.

**KB: Finally, what do you believe are some of the most exciting aspects of the IHH gender research?**

DK: It's super-exciting that the IHH study is focusing on fisheries that have been ignored

before. For instance, some of the IHH research disaggregates between fishers in boats versus on foot. Foot fishing is a gender issue—that's where women are doing most of their fishing. It's great that the IHH team has been able to incorporate that.

When I've spoken with some of the leaders in the field of gender and fisheries (like Meryl Williams!), they notice how gender work (or more specifically, funding for gender work) tends to go in cycles. It builds momentum, people start to pay attention, a few things get done, then there's a general feeling of 'we fixed the gender problem, no need to worry about that any more. Gender in fisheries is absolutely building momentum again, so the question is, how do we institutionalize change so that we can keep moving forward?

**DK: Thanks, Danika... Meryl, why was it important for the IHH study to put a strong focus on collecting data on women in small-scale fisheries?**

MW: Much fisheries data are markedly sexist, due to the conceptualisation of fisheries as a male domain. As Nalini Nayak and Cornelie Quist of ICSF reminded us recently, feminists see a "struggle within a struggle" in which poor marginalized women need to mobilize within the larger struggle of the marginalized fishing communities, led by men.

In many countries, women working in harvesting cannot even be registered as fishers; the areas of the fish value chain in which women dominate, such as processing and marketing, are not covered well by the fisheries agencies; and most fisheries policies ignore women. No wonder, therefore, that data on women are sadly lacking and a major effort is now needed to redress this data sexism. IHH is an ideal opportunity to do so, and activism and expert knowledge such as resides in the IHH gender network members is needed to do so.

**DK: What is significant about the IHH gender research?**

MW: Women and gender studies, and also action, has been going on for some decades in fisheries, but it has not gained much traction in the rapid development of fisheries (and aquaculture) research. Indeed, in some countries and fisheries, such as the Canadian Atlantic fisheries that experienced the collapse of the cod stocks in the early 1990s, strong research on women's roles and contributions was sidelined in the policy and management decisions and key researchers turned their efforts to other fields of gender research. This shows the difficulty of making a difference with the knowledge gained and in maintaining continuity in efforts.

The IHH study is key because it is being implemented in the era post the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-

scale Fisheries Guidelines in the context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines) and this is the first global fisheries agreement that has gender equality provisions. Thus, IHH has a wonderful opportunity to show the importance of women in small-scale fisheries by fully counting and recognizing them.

**KB: How does the IHH gender work support progress on greater inclusion of gender within fisheries research?**

MW: In the fisheries sector, small-scale fisheries are one of the two major areas where women make huge but unrecognized contributions and can suffer if their roles and opportunities are not counted and valued. The other major area is post-harvest in industrial fisheries. If IHH does not do justice to the gender dimension, then this will be a huge lost opportunity for those of us promoting gender equality in fisheries.

If they are to succeed, major data discovery exercises such as IHH need to bring in strong contextual knowledge. By including gender experts from many of the case study countries into the project, a huge amount of knowledge from actual localities is being brought into the case studies and therefore the IHH project. The whole of the IHH project, and its predecessor 'Hidden Harvests', is predicated on making the data on small-scale fisheries more complete and therefore accurate. These data are not readily available in mainstream fisheries data systems, otherwise the project would not be needed. But we know from the evidence of a myriad of small projects on women and gender in small-scale fisheries that women are major but often invisible participants. It needs gender experts to bring this information out in an ethical way.

**KB: Why is the involvement of gender advisors in the IHH study so significant? How can and should this work be continued and supported in the future?**

MW: Their involvement is significant because the small-scale fisheries data system being constructed by IHH has an ethical imperative to be gender equal, and yet this will not happen without inclusion of gender experts. Its predecessor, the 'Hidden Harvests' study, did make a first rough global estimate of the number of women workers in world fisheries but it was not transparent about how the estimate was derived. IHH is moving beyond this to a more transparent approach and is making more effort with collecting sex-disaggregated data. To be realistic, however, even this project will not be able to do a complete job. If the IHH gender network is continued, then in subsequent IHH projects, I am confident that really exciting data discovery work will be done.

**KB: Thanks, Meryl.**

Feminists see a "struggle within a struggle" in which poor marginalized women need to mobilize within the larger struggle of the marginalized fishing communities, led by men

# Needed – a gender sensitive biodiversity framework

**Future global biodiversity goals must recognise the vital contributions made by women and girls, particularly from indigenous and local communities**

By **Vivienne Solis Rivera**  
([vsolis@coopesolidar.org](mailto:vsolis@coopesolidar.org)), Member, ICSF, and  
Director, CoopeSolidar  
R.L., Costa Rica

**T**he Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) is perhaps the most relevant and ethical convention for the conservation, the sustainable use, and the fair and equitable distribution of benefits of marine and continental biodiversity use. In the next ten years, there are two ways through which the CBD can, clearly and effectively, address the issue of gender in its management framework.

First, the new Framework for Global Biodiversity, being prepared for approval at the 15th Conference of the Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity, is an excellent opportunity for member states of the CBD, civil society and private companies to develop a strategy imbued with a clear gender vision – one that recognises the contributions towards conservation that women and girls make, and further, one that is based on a framework of human rights, thus ensuring the

well-being and the improvement in the living conditions of women across the world.

Second, the process being developed by the CBD for the review and generation of a new gender action plan provides a further opportunity for decisive action on gender. In fact, both the proposed action plan as well as the previous such programme and its evaluation are excellent opportunities for decisive gender action.

Today, more than ever before, the role of women and girls in biodiversity conservation is becoming evident in a world that has been unable to change its inequitable model of development, and where women, who represent half of humanity, have worked unceasingly to provide food security, to maintain traditional knowledge of sustainable biodiversity usage and have supported collective action for greater environmental justice in their territories. Despite all these contributions, the world still only timidly, if

ATIKUR RAHMAN



Fish landing centre in Manpura, Bangladesh. Civil society groups have asked for an integration of the human rights based approach and pointed out that the right to land, marine territories and access to resources in these ecosystems be recognised as a central challenge impeding gender equity





# Local Biodiversity Outlooks 2

The contributions of indigenous peoples and local communities to the implementation of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011–2020 and to renewing nature and cultures.

A complement to the fifth edition of the *Global Biodiversity Outlook*.

Published by Forest Peoples Programme, in collaboration with: Centres of Distinction on Indigenous and Local Knowledge, Indigenous Women's Biodiversity Network, International Indigenous Forum on Biodiversity, and Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

at all, recognizes the impact of productive, reproductive and collective actions in the territories of life closest to the biodiversity that we wish to protect.

Poverty, together with the lack of opportunities for women in education, adolescent pregnancies and domestic and sexual violence, cannot but be part of the work of our societies to change the situation of women and girls throughout the planet, based on the assertion of their fundamental human rights and sustainability, which is unattainable without true gender justice.

These new strategic lines of action can bear fruit only if civil society is able to thoroughly reflect upon the findings of the previous Global Biodiversity Framework, evaluated at the CBD level in the Global Biodiversity Assessment. This official evaluation offers many great lessons and a clear path of action, in addition to civil society's own evaluation of this process which is intended to complement the fifth edition of the Global Biodiversity Outlook (GBO-5).

The evaluation from civil society, titled *Local Biodiversity Outlooks 2*, reviews the practical action undertaken en route to 2020 and makes it clear that, in the face of current challenges, progress is possible only if certain vital issues are addressed: tenure (securing

land, customary and community rights), food security, governance (decision making and participation), local and solidarity economies, and incentives and finance.

The importance of these issues has been underscored during the COVID-19 pandemic, where the revitalization, the strengthening of traditional knowledge, the relationship between food security and health, and the strengthening of organizational capabilities have been found to be fundamental for gender equity and equality.

Civil society groups and organizations working with a vision of gender equity and equality have reviewed the drafts presented by the CBD for the Global Biodiversity Framework and offered their contributions in the form of a second draft that is now available for global discussion.

Viewed from a gender perspective or a feminist lens, the draft appears to leave out certain fundamental issues with respect to gender and the conservation of biodiversity. Civil society groups have asked for an integration of the human rights based approach into the document and pointed out that the right to land, marine territories and access to resources in these ecosystems be recognised as a central challenge impeding gender equity and equality in the fisheries. ■

**Viewed from a gender perspective or a feminist lens, the draft appears to leave out certain fundamental issues with respect to gender and the conservation of biodiversity**

# Hard times

## Fishing communities in Mexico grapple with the challenge of maintaining sustainable practices during the pandemic

By Araceli Acevedo-Rosas (aacevedo@cobi.org.mx), Comunidad y Biodiversidad, A.C. Guaymas, Sonora, Mexico, Francisco Fernández-Rivera Melo (ffernandez@cobi.org.mx), Scaling Catalyst of change, COBI, México, and Inés López-Ercilla, (ilopez@cobi.org.mx9), Connectivity Catalyst of change, COBI, México.

COVID-19's impacts have exacerbated challenges in the three dimensions of sustainability: social, economic, and environmental. As social and economic issues have been prioritized worldwide through the emphasis on the access to health, food production, basic services and jobs, environmental issues have taken second priority. Mexican small-scale fishers, aware of the importance of protecting fishery resources, have implemented solutions and good practices towards sustainability and marine conservation over many years, thus improving their quality of life. However, due to the global crisis, today the Mexican small-scale fisher finds herself between a rock and a hard place as she is forced to choose between livelihood or sustainability. How are they to maintain sustainable practices during times of such adversity?

In October 2020, COBI (Comunidad y Biodiversidad AC) conducted a national consultation with 161 fishers (20 per cent women) from 62 fishing communities, covering 14 states in the Pacific coast, Gulf of California, Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean, to understand the impacts of COVID-19 on

the environment. Half of the interviewed people (54 per cent) reported complying with no-take-zones (official and voluntary reserves) regulations in their communities. They further reported that the management of these areas, in general, has not changed due to the pandemic with fishers continuing to respect the rules.

However, this may be related to the fact that 91 per cent of the interviewees reported to have suspended or changed their economic activities at the sea, mainly small-scale fishing, since March 2020 due to lockdown measures. While fishing, classified as an essential activity, was never banned, because the severe lockdown of the first three months of the pandemic effectively shut down markets, fishers had all but given up fishing. Lockdown restrictions were gradually eased, and seven months down the line, 85 per cent of interviewees reported having resumed their activities (mainly small-scale fishing) while following conservation and sustainable fisheries practices. Before the pandemic, 51 of the 62 communities that were interviewed mentioned having been involved in implementing sustainable practices. 67 per cent of the interviewees (29 women and 79 men)

YANETT CASTRO



Fisherwomen in Altata, Mexico, sorting shrimps by size. Government agencies should provide adequate support so that the right measures are collectively implemented across the fisheries. United efforts are needed for the inclusive and sustainable revival of the small-scale fisheries in Mexico

reported that before the pandemic struck, they used to participate in at least one of the following activities: beach cleanups; collaborative research with universities; enforcement; and fishery, oceanographic and underwater monitoring. During the pandemic, almost half of this group continued carrying out sustainable and marine conservation practices despite the lockdown. Twenty-one per cent of the interviewees reported that they had suspended these activities in the beginning but resumed them later, while 35 per cent reported having discontinued these activities altogether.

One of the main global concerns for the fishing sector, threatening sustainability and marine conservation, is illegal fishing. Throughout our interviews, the one activity that most people reported participating in was enforcement. Half of the interviewees (83 individuals) monitored their fishing grounds, beaches and piers, and conducted night patrols in 46 communities during the crisis period. It may be mentioned that enforcement is led by

fishing cooperatives, with marginal involvement of government agencies.

Of concern, however, is the fact that even though fishing communities were implementing sustainability programmes to take care of their resources, illegal fishing became much more widespread during the pandemic. This had had a discouraging effect on sustainability volunteers, potentially affecting their involvement and willingness to collaborate with others. Furthermore, the federal government has been unable to respond to the fishing community's urgent requirement for proper safety guidance for the small-scale fishing sector. Effective protocols for the fishing sector addressing the complete value chain are missing.

Government agencies should act quickly to provide adequate support and coordination so that the right measures are collectively implemented across the fisheries. United efforts are needed for the inclusive and sustainable revival of the small-scale fisheries in Mexico. **M**

**COVID-19's impacts have exacerbated challenges in the three dimensions of sustainability: social, economic, and environmental**

## Whats New, Webby?



By **Vandana Babu Menon**  
(vandanamenon@manakinpr.com),  
Media Professional  
and Content Writer,  
Bengaluru, India

## Covering COVID-19

**W**hile there is little doubt that the COVID pandemic will eventually be conquered, it has left the world to cope with long lasting damage. The damage has not been uniform. Rather, pre-existing inequalities have determined who will be hit the hardest. As a new report puts it, "Women and girls are disproportionately affected by the crisis simply because of their sex."

The report 'Gender inequality and the COVID-19 crisis: A Human Development perspective', a collaborative publication of the Human Development Report Office and the Gender Team, examines the gender differentiated impacts of the COVID-19 crisis through sex-disaggregated data, and presents the evidence in the form of data dashboards.

The first part analyses countries with respect to two indicators on capabilities at risk – health and economic. These are the major contributors since women are on the frontline on both these fronts constituting at least 70 per cent. On the economic front women are similarly vulnerable, often found in the informal sector, unprotected by labour rights.

The second part of this report depicts a series of measures of safe space at the household, unequal food distribution and chores, unpaid labour hours. The analysis goes beyond the household and tried to examine the degree of agency that women actually experience, on the premise that agency gives women the ability and freedom to make their own decisions and constitutes a powerful tool for resilience and overcoming new barriers.

The report represents a laudable effort to use sex-segregated data in order to derive relatively fine-grained insights into the gender implications of human crises. The success of any policy reforms based on this report's findings will be reflected in how effectively such reforms help to reduce gender based vulnerability and increase the resilience of women and girls.

The report may be accessed here:

[http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/covid-19\\_and\\_human\\_development\\_-\\_gender\\_dashboards\\_final.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/covid-19_and_human_development_-_gender_dashboards_final.pdf) **M**



# Leading by example

**By electing a woman, Nadine Nembhard, to lead it, the World Forum of Fisher Peoples is sending the right message to fishing communities**

By **Vivienne Solis Rivera**  
(vsolis@coopesolidar.org), Member,  
ICSF, and Director,  
CoopeSolidar R.L.,  
Costa Rica

**Nadine's message to fisherwomen of the world is to be optimistic even though there are so many hardships to be faced**

For many years, *Yemaya* has been carrying articles related to the World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP), a mass based association of small-scale fisher people from across the world, founded in 1997 by a number of mass based organisations from the Global South. WFFP was established in response to the increasing pressure being placed on small-scale fisheries, including habitat destruction, anthropogenic pollution, encroachment on small-scale fishing territories by large-scale fishing fleets, illegal fishing and overfishing, and more recently, climate change.

Twenty-nine member organisations from 23 countries representing over ten million fisher people make up the WFFP. As it supports its members to strengthen their organisational capacities and advocates for the rights of fisher people, the WFFP is led by a woman as its General Secretary – Nadine Nembhard.

Nadine Nembhard is a fisherwoman from Belize, a Caribbean country in the northeastern coast of Central America.

Belize has around 3000 fisher people, including artisanal fishers, fishing for lobster and conch, exported mainly to the US. There are also finfish fishers, who sell at the local fishing market. Many fishers are members of fisheries cooperatives, who support them with market access and other benefits.

Nadine is 37 years old, and has been working in the sector for the past 15 years. She spent nine years working with the Belize Fishermen Cooperative Association (BFCA), the umbrella organization for the fishing industry in Belize. The BFCA helped with capacity building, lobbying with the government on policy and legislation, and finding opportunities on how fishers can improve on their livelihoods. In Belize, cooperatives were first formed in the 1960s, for ordinary fishers to fight against the private sector in fisheries. BFCA has existed since seventies. Nadine's work at the BFCA came to an end six years ago. The fisheries cooperatives sustaining BFCA were themselves in financial trouble because of recession, and BFCA was forced to downsize. However Nadine continued to be associated with the fisheries sector, and is

now the first female General Secretary of the World Forum of Fisher Peoples.

According to Nadine, the life of a fisherwoman is full of hardships. It is a struggle for survival, with challenges from many quarters – the weather, policy conditions, coast guards out to disturb fishers. Fishers are never sure of having everything in order given the many restrictions obstructing them from carrying on with their work freely. In addition there is the ever-present competition from the private sector, threatening their livelihoods.

Nadine's message to fisherwomen of the world is to be optimistic even though there are so many hardships to be faced. She believes that the sector has strong leaders at every level, whether national, regional or global. In the case of the Caribbean countries, there are organisations like the Caribbean Network of Fisherfolk Organisations (CNFO) at the regional and the WFFP at the global level, all of them fighting for the rights of all fisher people. In Nadine's opinion, there is now a special interest in women, stemming from the 2014 endorsement of the SSF Guidelines. This development brought about greater awareness regarding, and increased documentation of, the struggles of women along the fish value chain, together with an interest in improving the conditions of women in the fishing industry. The SSF Guidelines, in particular, Section 8 on Gender Equality, are in Nadine's view a good starting point for going forward.

When asked about the role as the first woman General Secretary of the WFFP, Nadine says that the WFFP never had a woman or a young person as its General Secretary ever before. If fishworkers' organizations across the world are to be vibrant and inclusive, in particular attracting larger participation from the young and from women members, it was important for the WFFP to lead by example. She hoped that her position at the helm would send a strong, positive message regarding women's capacity for leadership across to the membership.

Nadine is married to a fisherman, and is the mother of two children, a son aged 17 years and a daughter aged two years. Her son is hoping to get a fisherman's licence even as he is tries to make a decision on his life choices. **Y**

Fifty-year-old Jharna Acharya is a social activist and a popular name among the Sabar, Lodha and Baiga communities of Paschim Medinipur and Jhargram districts of West Bengal.

Her father, Kashinath Acharya, was a well-known activist of his district and had a profound influence on her life. He was associated with the Land Reform Movement of the state and founded the Keshiari Kusumpur High School. Jharna Acharya also acknowledges the role that her mother Minurani Acharya played in inspiring her to work for the poor and underprivileged sections of society.


Born in 1968 at Keshiari village in Paschim Medinipur, Jharna grew up with the aim to devote her life to the social welfare of the poor and deprived communities of her locality. Completing her postgraduation in Bengali from West Bengal's Vidyasagar University with a special paper on

the DMF, leading the movements and struggles of women fishers and playing an active role in mobilizing them around their issues, rights and demands throughout the state of West Bengal.

She now travels extensively at the national level to participate in workshops and conferences where she represents the voice of the fisherfolk communities, particularly the women. In 2019, Jharna represented the women fisherfolk community of West Bengal at the National Platform of Women in Fisheries. In short, she has come to represent the face of the movement of West Bengal's Lodha, Sabar and Baiga communities. As a result of her perseverance and struggle, nearly 2000 people were able to get land pattas (titles) in her area.

Apart from her work as an activist in the fisheries sector, Jharna has several other laurels to her credit.

She works for the betterment of the lives and livelihood of the sculptors in the area. She is the acting president of the Lodha Sabar Community of West Bengal, the Adivasi Baiga Samaj Unnayan Samity, and supports the Development Committee of Stone Artists. She also plays an important role of an advisor to the Medinipur Chhatra Samaj (Medinipur Student's Association). She is associated with many different social and non-government organizations that are fighting for the development of the backward and marginalized section of the society in Purba and Paschim Medinipur and Jhargram districts. She is also a member of West Bengal Save River Committee and is working on the Forest Land Right Act with DISHA, an NGO).

For her innumerable contributions and multifaceted activities towards the development of all these adivasi and indigenous communities, Jharna Acharya has received multiple awards. In 2015, the Kohl Samaj Hayam Sanagam Society recognized her work with a prestigious award presented to her by Sri Madhu Koda, former Chief Minister of Jharkhand. In 2016, she received an award for Social Welfare Work towards Popular Culture and Tribal Culture from the Sonarpur Book Fair Committee, South 24 Parganas, West Bengal. In 2018, the Helping Hand Organisation recognized her special contributions to society with an award. The following year, in 2019, the Hero of our Society Smarak award was given to her by the Medinipur Quiz Kendra Social Welfare Society. On Women's Day the same year, she received the Special Achievement Award from the Purba and Paschim Medinipur District Chamber of Commerce. 

## PROFILE

### Born to serve: Jharna Acharya has dedicated her life towards the social welfare of the poor and the deprived

By **Shilpa Nandy** (shilpanandy@yahoo.co.in), Assistant Professor, Khudiram Bose Central College, Kolkata, India, and Advisor, Women's Wing, Dakshinabanga Matsyajibi Forum

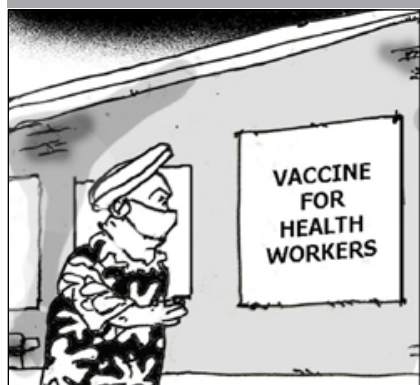


Jharna Acharya

Popular Culture, she began her journey as a researcher with a stint in survey work conducted by the West Bengal Centre for Popular and Tribal Culture in 1997. She also undertook surveys on behalf of the West Bengal Archaeological Department and the Department of Sculpture at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) in Kharagpur. As a result of her work as a researcher, she came into contact with diverse backward and neglected sections whose voices remain unheard by the rest of society. Among the foremost of these marginalized sections were the fisherfolk in the districts she travelled.

Jharna developed strong linkages with fisherfolk organizations and began participating actively in raising awareness about the issues and rights of fishing communities. Soon, she became the Assistant Secretary of Dakshin Banga Matsyajibi Forum (DMF), a registered trade union of Bengal fisherfolk communities. She also assumed convenorship of the women's wing of

## YEMAYA MAMA



## Mama's vaccine policy!



## BOOK

### ***Fisherwomen* by Craig Easton; Ten O' Clock Books, UK; 24 page limited edition**

By **Vishakha Gupta** (icsf@icsf.net), Programme Associate, ICSF

Early in the Scottish summer, the traditional herring trade starts to flourish. Shoals move from Shetland in the north towards Great Yarmouth in southern England. Fleets of Scottish fishing boats follow the shoals south and haul in their catch. From 1860 onwards, these journeys were further mirrored on land by the 'herring lassies' – thousands of Scottish, Irish and English fisherwomen. These pioneering women not only managed pre-harvest work, household chores, childbearing, raising and caregiving, as well as carrying their men out to the fishing boats to ensure they went to sea in dry comfortable clothing. They also travelled over a thousand kilometers every year to expertly gut, pack and sell the freshly caught herring along Britain's coastline. Photographer Craig Easton's book, *Fisherwomen – Portfolio Edition*, explores this long tradition and celebrates the fisherwomen who sustain it. In December 2020, ICSF connected with Craig to talk about his wonderful book.

From 1860 to the peak of the fishery in 1913, when over 6000 women would come to Shetland at the start of the season, much has changed today. Overfished herring stocks are no longer as abundant. An increasingly mechanized and capital-intensive fleet allows longer fishing trips and onboard processing. Without the need for daily halts along the coast there is no need for skilled fisherwomen to travel to process and market the herring. And so, the annual wave of 'herring lassies', which made its way down the coastline in special trains, slowly came to a draw. The women who were a common sight at the quaysides, markets and towns – as iconized in the paintings and photographs of Winslow Homer, Isa & Robert Jobling, John McGhie and others – no longer make this journey. They have started working behind closed doors in larger processing plants and local family run businesses.

Easton's *Portfolio* dives deep by exploring the traditional journey and the women who keep it alive – both today as well as in its heyday. The portraits of the fisherwomen working today showcase a sense of deep pride in their work, confidence in their abilities, capability in themselves and support from their community. The up-close portraits of the fisherwomen who worked as young women over half a decade ago, requires the viewer to absorb the stories visible in the folds around Mary

Williamson's eyes, in the set of Rita McNab's shoulders or the tilt of Edna Donaldson's chin. The portraits are accompanied by incredibly insightful excerpts from the fisherwomen, which have the ability to vividly convey not only the incredibly difficult and skilful nature of their work but also the camaraderie they offer each other. The older generation's stories capture the heady thrill of young, highly skilled and confident women travelling across the coast and thriving in their financial and social independence. In the penultimate story, Sheila Hirsh – a trawler skipper – shares the terrifying experience of going overboard, only to nonchalantly conclude with, "It was quite fun, but that was my first time over the wall."

Across the *Portfolio* we see the support and strength that the fisherwomen share with each other; not only amongst their peers but also inter-generationally. The last series of breathtaking sceneries shades in the context within which these traditions, journeys and connections existed. In our conversation, Craig spoke of the increasing number of migrant fisherwomen from countries such as Malaysia and South Korea who are joining the processing workforce alongside women from local traditional fishworking families. In the book, Dawn Wilton comments that while many new employees might know the history of the women who came before them, those who don't are quickly introduced to their shared heritage. Considering today's workforce – both local fisherwomen and migrant fisherwomen – we can see that the traditions of travel, perseverance, skill and community are still very much alive and hopefully evolving to make space for new possibilities.

Easton's work deftly weaves together the rich traditions of skill and tenacity in the histories of these fisherwomen, their spaces in time and the connections built, fostered and lost between people from different parts of the country.

What truly shines through is the individual fisherwomen – visible through their portraits and audible through their stories which are shared in their vernacular speech. One is almost able to feel their individual stories of courage, struggle, independence, passion, determination, fear, belonging and good times!

Further information is available at [tenoclockbooks.com](http://tenoclockbooks.com) and [craigeaston.com](http://craigeaston.com). You may also explore Craig Easton's entire series *Fisherwomen* on his website. The photographs titled *The hands the gut the herring I, II, III and IV* are particularly noteworthy (see pages 10-11). **Y**



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22 First Floor,  
Venkatrathinam Nagar, Adyar,  
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Tel: (91) 44 2445 1216  
Fax: (91) 44 2445 0216  
E-mail: [icsf@icsf.net](mailto:icsf@icsf.net)  
Website: [www.icsf.net](http://www.icsf.net)

EDITED BY  
Nilanjana Biswas  
ILLUSTRATIONS BY  
Sandesh  
([sandeshcartoonist@gmail.com](mailto:sandeshcartoonist@gmail.com))  
DESIGNED BY  
M.S. Vasanth Christopher  
Writers and potential  
contributors to YEMAYA, please

note that write-ups should be  
brief, about 2000 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.