



35 Years in Support of
Small-scale Fishworkers

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ICSF'S NEWSLETTER ON GENDER AND FISHERIES

From the Editor

The climate crisis is being experienced in highly tangible and devastating ways today through frequently-occurring extreme weather events that are destroying lives and livelihoods. This is particularly true for climate-vulnerable coastal and marine areas. While global leaders discuss these issues within their ivory towers, calibrating mitigation strategies in country-specific emission standards and mitigation strategies, as evidenced in the COP 26 reports, their decisions might have little impact on the immediate issues faced by the artisanal fishers in coastal communities dealing with the crisis at hand. Fishers and fishing communities may have to devise their own immediate and situation-specific responses. In the context of World Fisheries Day on 21st November, as well as the recent launch of the International Year of Artisanal Fisheries and Aquaculture (IYFA 2022), an effective response to the climate crisis would be to recognize and valorize without further delay women's equal participation in the sector. There is in fact growing evidence to show that fostering women's equal participation in the fisheries leads to better environmental, social as well as economic outcomes, all imperatives in the present juncture.

A recent conference in Latin America highlighted the steps needed to improve women's role in artisanal fisheries. These include the collection of sex disaggregated data in the fisheries to better understand and strengthen women's participation in fish value chains; to promote good practices to enable women's equal participation through a comprehensive integration of the gender perspective and the promotion of women's leadership; and to promote the equal participation of women in fisheries resource management.

Examples of gender specific exclusion and violence continue to be rampant against women in fishing communities. As the article from Sri Lanka shows, the lingering effects of war are manifest in the lives of women from poor fisheries households in the country's North and the East where debt is today a household crisis. Unable to return to their now illegally occupied homes, having little or no social and child support, and facing increasing financial constraints and debt, women are driven to extreme hardship and sometimes to take their own lives.

The erosion of women's livelihood support in fisheries takes place in many other ways as well. In the Gambia, women's postharvest processing of pelagic species is critical for the country's food security. Fish meal and fish oil production companies, which use and deplete the same species, pose the greatest threat to artisanal fishery lives and livelihoods, with the growing tension culminating in violent clashes between fisherfolk and factories. These crises destabilize fishing communities, in turn affecting their resilience and ability to adapt to climate change impacts.

As John Kurien writes, "Lived experience of survival and struggle is complex and evolving. It cannot be understood by approaching it from any particular discipline or many disciplines. Yet, it cannot be understood without lived experiences and disciplines." The time is ripe for communities to look inwards to understand from their own and each other's experiences survival strategies in today's difficult world situation. Women are critical to weaving the fabric of this understanding. Gender equality therefore needs to become the corner stone in climate adaptation strategies for the small scale fisheries sector. ❏



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