



35 Years in Support of  
Small-scale Fishworkers



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No.64 | November 2021 | ISSN 0973-1156

# Yemaya

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 21<sup>st</sup> November, as well as the recent launch of the International Year of Artisanal Fisheries and Aquaculture (IYAFA 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. 🍷

# Post-war vulnerabilities

## Women in fisheries in the North and the East region of post-war Sri Lanka continue to face serious safety and livelihood challenges

By **Kasandra Marasco**  
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When the war between the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam ended in 2009, the Northern and the Eastern province of Sri Lanka resembled a disaster zone. Homes and infrastructures were damaged; many civilians were killed; many others had fled, and society was in complete disarray. Even today, military control continues in a few areas, along with settlers occupying houses and lands. This has prevented many from either returning home or regaining rightful access to their land.

Women and female-headed households have been amongst those most adversely affected by the war. Both are vulnerable groups in terms of the everyday challenges they face. The war has only made things worse. During my study, I analyzed the socio-economic challenges confronting women in fishing communities and the impact of these challenges on their quality of life. Three of the most serious challenges that women and female-headed households face are discrimination and violence, lack of access to education, and financial debt. These are a consequence of both the war and the lack of government action towards protecting these two most vulnerable groups.

Discrimination and violence are serious problems for women in the North and the East. Socio-cultural norms highly influence the way women are treated as well as perceived in sites such as the workplace. Studies have shown that women who have minority identities have to deal with many more incidents of discrimination and harassment. For example, Sinhalese women have more freedom, in terms of employment, than do Sri Lankan Moors women because Sinhalese is the dominant ethnic group. In fisheries, women are only allowed to partake in fish production processes, marketing and small miscellaneous jobs, such as net repairs. Only men can go out to sea to fish; it is regarded as taboo for women to do so. Such factors constrain women's ability to apply for jobs and go out to work.

In addition to the poor rate of participation of women in work, they also do not get the same wages as men. As in the case of most third-world countries, women in Sri Lanka too are paid a lower wage than men. Women in every stage of the supply chain receive wages that are insufficient to survive on, and as a result, they must work long hours or find additional work elsewhere. Female-headed houses have it worse, and women in such houses must work twice as

CORNELIE QUIST



Mullathivu fisherwomen in Northeast, Sri Lanka. Issues of indebtedness are significantly higher in post-conflict areas, and in the North and the East, women are suffering from what they call the household debt crisis

hard to make ends meet. As a result of limited employment and growth opportunities, women are pushed deeper into poverty.

Poverty also limits women's access to much-needed social support services. Daycare and childcare facilities are some of the essential services that women need but lack access to. The war destroyed many daycare centres, and when they were later restored, post-war, they were too expensive for women to afford. Today, with Coronavirus travel restrictions and lockdowns, many daycare centres are closed either temporarily or permanently. This has made it harder for women who relied on these centres to keep their children safely engaged during the workday.

The lack of childcare support significantly limits women's job opportunities. Women with children often cannot leave the house because there is no one to look after the children in their absence. Some find ways to make an income at home, such as weaving coconut leaves, while others will look for a job near their homes. Only those with proper childcare support are able to travel to another city for employment or to work longer hours, and thus enjoy stability at work. Therefore, adequate access to social support services is crucial for gender equality and to give women a better life.

In terms of financial debt, 2.4 million women are currently suffering from the indebtedness that patriarchal financial institutions have forced upon them. Issues of indebtedness are significantly higher in post-conflict areas, and in the North and the East, women are suffering from what they call the 'household debt crisis'. Due to the war, over 100,000 homes were destroyed which led to many people, including women and children, being forced into camps and settlements for internally displaced persons. Multiple organizations assisted in housing restoration in the North and the East by partially funding such reconstruction. However, those who received partial financial assistance still had to pay off the balance as well as grant installments in a timely manner. Many could not afford to do so. This led to further loans from financial institutions.

Many women had no option but to take loans at very high interest rates. They also faced many instances of corruption in financial institutions. The GoSL has failed to implement a standard interest rate and several financial institutions are functioning arbitrarily according to their own rules with differential interest rates based, in part, on the recipient's capacity. Women often lack financial understanding; they don't know how loan-agreements and credit work; this makes it easier for financial institutions to exploit them.

Additionally, women who borrow money are likelier to face harassment, and may even be driven to commit suicide due to the financial difficulties they face in paying back loans. COVID-19 has made matters worse with many women losing their jobs and income. Women reported that debt collectors seize valuable items

from their homes if loans repayment schedules are missed, and some demand bribes through favours, which in the case of these women were mostly sexual favours, either forcefully taken or given voluntarily.

To help women overcome these challenges, the GoSL must take strong corrective action and change the current legal frameworks that systemically discriminate against women. Sri Lanka ratified the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1981 but women's rights in the country instead of improving only seem to be getting worse. In 2017, CEDAW examined the rights of women in Sri Lanka and concluded that its laws and policies required amendment to ensure gender equality, and recommended greater involvement of women in decision-making processes for women's empowerment.

To resolve financial issues, such as the debt crisis, the government must work with financial institutions to evolve a standard agreement on loans. As mentioned, women are not aware of the current clauses that come with borrowing money from financial institutions, such as the increase in interest rates if loans aren't paid back on time. To reduce women from falling deeper into debt, the GoSL needs to actively monitor financial institutions to ensure that the proper guidelines are followed with respect to lending money as per the guaranteed standard interest rate.

Apart from policy and legal solutions, there are some practical steps that the government can take to aid women's livelihoods. Childcare services and daycare centres should be funded by the government and have longer operating hours to give parents, particularly single mothers, and among them, particularly those who work long hours in the fisheries, greater flexibility in terms of working hours. Free or subsidized daycare would help women manage their expenses and reduce their debts.

To summarize, women in fisheries play a significant role that fails to get the recognition it deserves. Their work fetches low salaries, and when they get home, they have additional unpaid work to do, often without the help of their husbands. Women cannot continue in this manner, and equality measures must be put in place to help improve their livelihoods and the future of their families.

Authorities, the GoSL and international bodies, who are all responsible for the protection of women's rights and to ensure gender equality, have failed. These institutions must work together to create a safe environment for women that offers equal opportunities and economic growth. The neglect of women's rights is a violation of the CEDAW and international laws on gender equality. The United Nations bodies must engage with GoSL to ensure that international law on gender equality and equity is applied in Sri Lanka. Without the assistance of international bodies, corruption is likely to continue in the government, and the wealthy are likely to prosper. ■

**Women and female-headed households were amongst those most adversely affected by the war**

# Looming clouds

**The dense fumes of fishmeal factories in the Gambia are like dark clouds obscuring the future of women in the country's fisheries**

By **Béatrice Gorez** (cffa.cape@gmail.com), Coordinator, Coalition for Fair Fisheries Arrangements (CFFA), Belgium and **Dawda Foday Saine** (dawda\_saine@yahoo.com), National Association of Artisanal Fisheries Operators (NAAFO), The Gambia

**I**n the Gambia, 10 percent of the 2.2 million inhabitants derive their livelihoods from fisheries, with activities concentrated in the artisanal fishing communities of Kartong, Gunjur Sanyang Tanji, Brufut, Bakau and Old Jeshwang.

In these fishing villages, brightly painted fishing canoes that use entangling gillnets, hook and line, traps and long lines bring ashore their daily catch. Not far from the landing site, hundreds of women fish processors, are sun drying small pelagic like sardinella and bonga in racks or smoking them in open ovens, fuelled by locally-found wood or palm tree branches. Other women are busy marketing the fish products. For the country, the work of all these women, making affordable fish food available to the local population, is of strategic importance; indeed, fish contributes to at least half of the country's total animal protein intake, and, for its taste and texture, artisanally-processed fish is what most Gambians prefer.

Whatever the weather, most women active in Gambian artisanal fisheries wake up long before sunrise, as early as 4 am, to travel to fish landing sites in order to be there when the fishing canoes return from the sea, their bellies sometimes laden with fish, or, as is increasingly the case, quite empty. Some of the women, knee deep in the water, unload the fish from the canoes big plastic basins heavy with round and flat sardinella and bonga. Then, other women, for their daily processing and marketing activities, buy what they need, or can afford. Some of these women would have pre-financed the fishing trips, providing the fishing crews with food, fishing nets and fuel for the boat, making it easier for them to have first access to the fish upon the fishers' return. This is a traditional activity, and women in fisheries associations, who depend on it, have been for long thinking about ways to sustain the activity, and have taken bold measures to promote responsible fisheries, for example, by rejecting juvenile fish landed by the local fishers.

But today, the dark fumes of fishmeal factories cloud the collective future of these women and their communities. A report titled 'Fishing for Catastrophe' published by the website [changingmarkets.org](http://changingmarkets.org) in 2019, highlighted that an increasing demand in

major markets – notably China – is responsible for spurring the high growth of West African fishmeal and fish oil (FMFO) production in the last decade: Citing UN Comtrade figures, the report states that: "...in 2016, West Africa produced 7 percent of the world's fishmeal. Some countries have experienced a particularly steep rise in production; for example, half of Mauritania's fish catch is used to produce fishmeal. Shockingly, in The Gambia, where GDP was a mere \$1,700 per capita in 2018 and people rely on fish as a staple food, our investigation found that the combined catch of just one of the country's FMFO plants accounted for approximately 40 percent of the country's total reported fish catches in 2016. Gambia's fish catch is turned into fishmeal at a rate of 5 kilos of fish for 1 kilo of fishmeal and exported abroad, mainly to China."

In the Gambia, the three Chinese owned fishmeal factories – in Gunjur and Sanyang – are using the same small pelagic fish that women need for processing: bonga and round and flat sardinella. These factories are partly supplied by Senegalese artisanal fishers, which has caused increasing tensions between Gambian fishing communities and Senegalese fishers. In Sanyang, matters came to a head on 25<sup>th</sup> March 2021, when canoes belonging to Senegalese fishers, the police station, and the fishmeal factory were all set on fire and destroyed.

These supply contracts with Senegal fishers are in fact illegal. Fishmeal operators go to Senegal and hire fishermen to fish in Gambian waters to ensure exclusive supplies for their fishmeal factories, particularly in Sanyang and Gunjur. The trips, which use fishing canoes measuring up to 30 meters and equipped with outboard engines are pre-financed and kitted with all the necessary gear, fishing nets and fuel. Housing within the premises of the fishmeal plant is also provided for as part of such contracts. This is illegal as due process is not followed. Indeed, to be able to import a fishing canoe or fish in Gambian waters, both foreigners and national citizens, are required to obtain a certificate of seaworthiness from the Gambia Maritime Administration (GMA) as well as a canoe registration number.

For the Gambian fishing communities, there is no doubt: these fishmeal factories



Fishermen unloading fish at the Gunjur landing site, The Gambia. Fishmeal factories compete with women for access to small pelagics, and encourage overfishing and illegal fishing

are depriving them of their livelihoods, and depriving the local population of food. The pollution these factories generate is another cause of concern. And the authorities by merely turning a blind eye, or even taking the side of the fishmeal factories, have done nothing to alleviate the fears of the fishing communities. In 2018, these factories were in fact shut and the owners arrested, but this was due to public campaigns led by environmental activists protesting against the pollution generated by these factories, more specifically, a leak in a wastewater pipe from the fishmeal factory which had provoked an algal bloom in a protected mangrove area. The National Environment Agency investigated the claim, and the issue was settled with a fine. The fishmeal factory thereafter simply resumed operations. Local communities view the willingness of the authorities to approve the operations of these fishmeal factories without placing any regulations to either limit their rapacious appetite for fresh fish or control the polluting foul stench, black smoke and toxic waste water effluents from these factories as simply wrong and unacceptable.

Fishing communities also suspect that part of the supply to the fishmeal comes from industrial trawlers making illegal incursions into zones reserved for artisanal fishers. These trawlers too supply bonga and sardinella to

fishmeal plants. These illegal incursions occur at night, with trawls cutting or dragging away artisanal fishers net. For the fisher, the loss of his fishing nets means the loss of his livelihood. But, still, there is no compensation. These trawls are not identified, and in the rare cases where they have been, their case was settled out of court, with payment of fines which end up nobody knows where. Fishmeal factories, and their supply chains, have created havoc in the Gambian fishing communities, in particular for women. Fishmeal factories compete with women for access to small pelagics, and encourage overfishing and illegal fishing. Women fish processors are deprived of fish to process; fishmongers have nothing to sell.

These fishmeal plants distort social cohesion as limited access to fish results in women moving to other fish landing sites where fishmeal plants do not exist. Economically, the high cost of fish and competition between fishmeal plants and women leads to difficulties for women to buy the fish and be able to sell at daily markets. This means their income is reduced to a minimum. Eventually they can no longer pay for their children's school fees, food and medical care. Other issues include health problems due to the inhalation of smoke and foul stench from fishmeal plants. As many women spend up to 18 hours per day, their health is severely affected.

**Fishmeal factories compete with women for access to small pelagics, and encourage overfishing and illegal fishing**

One woman fish processor, who was interviewed, said “Now I can’t even give my neighbors fish for free as I used to, because of the high cost of fish and all the access problems.”

Another woman noted: “The quantity of sardinella and bonga I used to cook for lunch at my house is drastically reduced because of overfishing. Poor quality fish and juvenile landings are all consumed by fishmeal plants.” She further added that even her cats at home don’t get any left-over fish these days.

The factories allegedly dump untreated waste in the sea while the smell of the fishmeal

processing has devastated local tourism. Waste from the factories is linked to mass death of fish and birds.

The ultimate victims are the Gambian consumers, who have no fish on their plates.

The Gambian artisanal fishers associations, notably the National Association of Artisanal Fisheries Operators (NAAFO), the All Artisanal Fisheries Cooperative Association (AFICOSA) and environmentalists in Gunjur are currently investigating the possibility of taking legal action against the fishmeal factories over human rights violations. **M**



## PROFILE

### **Proud and passionate : Despite several challenges, Lilia Briones Bermúdez, a community leader in Barra del Colorado, Costa Rica, remains steadfastly committed to the struggles of her community**

By **Vivienne Solis Rivera**, CoopeSoliDar R.L. (vivienne.solis.rivera@gmail.com), Costa Rica and Translated from Spanish by **Mercedes Rafael Ramos** (meche\_rafa@hotmail.com), Spain



Lilia Briones Bermúdez

**L**ilia Briones is a fisherwoman. She is also a community leader, in the forefront of the struggles of her community in Barra del Colorado, a small-scale artisanal fishing in Costa Rica’s Northern Caribbean coast. Her partner, Jesús Chavés, is a fisherman and the couple has three children.

Lilia Briones acquired her extensive fishing skills at a young age by watching the elders in Barra del Colorado catch fish. She

learnt a lot from her own father, who started off as a fisherman but later took to catching shrimp in 1997, the year this activity began in their community.

In 2013, however the Supreme Court in Costa Rica ordered the State to stop granting shrimp fishing licenses until it could provide scientific studies demonstrating the activity to be sustainable. Against this background, Lilia, alongside other women and men in her community, felt the need to stand up for their rights. She was pivotal in the establishment of the Women’s Association of Shrimp Handlers and Processors of Responsible Fisheries Marine Area of Barra del Colorado, Costa Rica, an association of fisherwomen that, together with the fishermen, started claiming the right of this small Caribbean community to catch shrimp and prawn.

She became the association’s first president, after a vote of confidence from her fellow fisherwomen, who trusted her clear vision on the need to obtain support from the Government and its institutional partners to resume trawler fisheries in the Northern Caribbean coast. The ultimate goal was to protect women’s rights to decent work, health and work safety, as well as to be fully recognized as fishworkers.

Lilia dreams of the day when her community will have the necessary infrastructure to develop their fishing activities and to market safer products. In her dream, every community member is involved and is making a contribution towards responsible and sustainable fisheries. Lilia’s dream is no mere fancy. In fact if it does not come true, it is likely that fishworkers’ incomes will plunge and their livelihoods will deteriorate, leaving them with no choice but to abandon the community.

Currently, Doña Lilia lives in a Protected Wildlife Area, where economic activities are restricted. Barra del Colorado contains both a Responsible Fisheries Marine Area (co-managed with INCOPECSA, which is Costa Rica’s Fisheries and Aquaculture Institute) and a Management Marine Area (under state governance through the Ministry for Energy and Environment, MINAE). In her opinion, both models for fisheries conservation and development require the participation of women in decision-making in order to reach the necessary balance between protection and development. At the moment, the community has no license to catch shrimp, and, since all land is owned by the State, land tenure remains an issue.

Notwithstanding all these difficulties, Lilia is passionate about her work and feels proud of her achievements. **M**

# A sea of opportunities

**A dialogue series conducted in Latin America during the pandemic explored ways to promote gender equality in the fisheries sector**

By **Jackeline Siles** (jackie.siles@iucn.org) Senior Gender Programme Manager, International Union For Conservation of Nature (IUCN), USA, and **Neyra Solano**, (nsolano@cobi.org.mx) Gender Equality Specialist, Comunidad y Biodiversidad, A.C. (COBI), Mexico

**S**ustainable fisheries are vital to achieving food security, alleviating poverty and increasing economic growth worldwide. In coastal countries, seafood represents up to 70 percent of protein intake and is an essential source of vitamins, fats and minerals. Globally, more than 40 million people work in fisheries-related activities, with an estimated 90 percent of them operating on a small scale. In the fisheries context, an estimated 2.3 million people in Latin America and the Caribbean are directly or indirectly engaged in fishing activities. The relevance of small-scale fisheries in the region becomes clear when it is recognized that they contribute a little over 10 percent of global catches.

Women have a major role in the fisheries sector, since, if post-harvest activities are considered, they represent about 50 percent of the global workforce. In Latin America alone it is estimated that women represent 30 percent of those employed in fisheries. Present throughout the fisheries value chain, women are involved in catching, processing, marketing, distribution

and leadership. However, persistent gender inequalities prevent their full participation in economic opportunities and decision-making, which ultimately constrains the potential of the sector. Furthermore, a limited understanding of women's unique roles and contributions leads to ignoring their interests and needs in policies and programmes, with a consequent impact on sustainable development outcomes.

Numerous studies and experiences confirm that reducing gender inequalities and addressing gender mainstreaming in conservation, adaptation and resilience efforts in fisheries and marine conservation lead to improved governance and sustainability outcomes. Gender inequalities are rooted in legal and social norms, including unequal access to education, economic opportunities and decision-making and other social factors, such as age and ethnicity, that dictate how women and men access, use and control coastal marine resources.

In line with the 2030 Agenda and the call to action for gender equality issued by member

BYRON LINARES / IUCN



Small-scale fisherwoman at Barra de Santiago, El Salvador. Panelists pointed out the positive impacts that women's involvement in conservation projects and sustainable fishing



Fisherwoman transporting fish in Cayuco, El Embarcadero, El Salvador. By the end of the three dialogues, more than 3000 participants from fishing cooperatives, government institutions, academia, and civil society organizations dedicated to promoting gender equality had been able to connect through the various streaming platforms

states at the United Nations Conference on Oceans to support the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 14: “Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development held in June 2017” as well as SDG 5: “Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls”, the Specialized Regional Organization of the Fisheries and Aquaculture Sector of the Central American Isthmus (OSPESCA) attached to the General Secretariat of the Central American Integration System (SICA), the International Union for

Conservation of Nature (IUCN), within the framework of the Regional Coastal Biodiversity Project, and Community and Biodiversity (COBI) through its Gender Equality at Sea program, organized three virtual dialogues on the Gender Dimension in Fisheries, thus contributing to the strengthening of gender equality in the sector.

A notable aspect of these dialogues is that they took place during the COVID-19 pandemic - a time of heightened vulnerability everywhere but particularly so in the fisheries sector. A recent study conducted in Mexico by

Lopez-Ercilla and colleagues shows that during the period March to June 2020, nine out of ten people in small-scale fisheries reported market closures and price drops. During this period, market prices fell and fishing declined greatly. However, women and men involved in fishery activities in Latin America were at the forefront of the response and recovery effort, despite the prevailing difficulties and uncertainties.

The series consisted of three dialogues. The first dialogue, 'Women and the Sea: Beyond Fisheries', provided an overview of priority objectives to address persistent gender challenges in the fisheries sector in the Latin America region, with a focus on Central America, and their linkages to the broader environment and sustainable development agenda. During the event the publication 'Advancing Gender in The Environment: Gender in Fisheries—A Sea of Opportunities – IUCN' by [genderandenvironment.org](http://genderandenvironment.org) was launched in Spanish. The dialogue stressed the need to collect sex disaggregated data in the sector in order to have a better understanding of women's participation in fish value chains and also to better inform fisheries policies and programmes.

The second dialogue, 'Good practices to promote the equal participation of women in marine-coastal zones', focused on initiatives from Chile, Costa Rica, Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala. These experiences described how a project like the 'Regional Coastal Biodiversity Project: a regional initiative for the management of coastal marine ecosystems in Central America', implemented by IUCN and local partners, and funded by USAID, is integrating the gender perspective in its communication, governance, conservation, small grants and key actions, in order to promote gender equality. Another presentation by CoopeSolidar emphasized the need to recognize women's leadership and collective action the fisheries sector; women's knowledge on biodiversity and its uses along the various value chains, as well as to empower women economically by identifying ways to achieve recognized and decent work for women and young women.

The event noted the urgent need for the fair and equitable distribution of benefits so as to acknowledge women's contributions both in the generation of scientific and traditional knowledge as well as in recognition of the links between women's work and the areas of climate change; economic and food security; and health and well-being. The event also underscored the importance of women's participation in public policy making to ensure the sustainable use and conservation of resources, as well as to ensure that development is compliant with human rights in the sector. At the end of the event,

participants identified the lessons learned and the challenges involved in implementing the gender approach in fishery projects.

The third and final dialogue, 'Voices of women fisherwomen: contribution to better management of fisheries resources', allowed fisherwomen from Latin American fishing communities to share their achievements, challenges and the lessons they had learned in their journey towards equal participation in the management of marine-coastal resources. In this dialogue, fisherwomen from Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Mexico highlighted elements such as the common good, teamwork and the alliance with civil society organizations, academia, and government institutions, which have been key to achieving gender equality.

Panelists pointed out the positive impacts that women's involvement in conservation projects, sustainable fishing and citizen science have had. An example of citizen science is the efforts of the fishing cooperative Mujeres Pescadoras del Manglar, in Mexico, who have actively participated in the processing of biometric data and physicochemical variables of the Lagunas de Chacahua National Park to improve the conditions of the mangrove ecosystem, which is essential for the survival of the species they fish. Thanks to these efforts, the fisherwomen have seen a recovery of their main fishery (*Mytella charruana*). Finally, the fisherwomen closed the session by calling for gender equality, and encouraging women to continue their involvement, despite all barriers, in the management of fishery resources.

These dialogues allowed the participation of fishermen and fisherwomen from Latin America as well as organizations and professionals working in the fisheries sector. Individuals and organizations working on women's empowerment and gender equality in the sector were also able to attend the dialogues. By the end of the three dialogues, more than 3000 participants from fishing cooperatives, government institutions, academia, and civil society organizations dedicated to promoting gender equality had been able to connect through the various streaming platforms.

In Latin America, the representation of women in leadership positions is low. Although the characteristics of each community determines the nature of women's status in that community, one of the main factors responsible for the absence of women in marine and coastal resource management is that their contributions to the fishing sector are invisible, ignored, and unrecognized. Therefore, the participation of different actors in this type of dialogue is essential to achieving gender equality in the fishing, aquaculture, and marine conservation projects of Latin America. ■

**One of the main factors responsible for the absence of women in marine and coastal resource management is that their contributions to the fishing sector are invisible, ignored, and unrecognized**

## ICSF's Posters on World Fisheries Day (November 21, 2021)



Photo credit: Adriano  
Gambarini (OPAN)



**Sustainable inland small-scale fishing in Amazonas, Brazil promotes food security, environmental conservation, income generation and strengthens community organization**



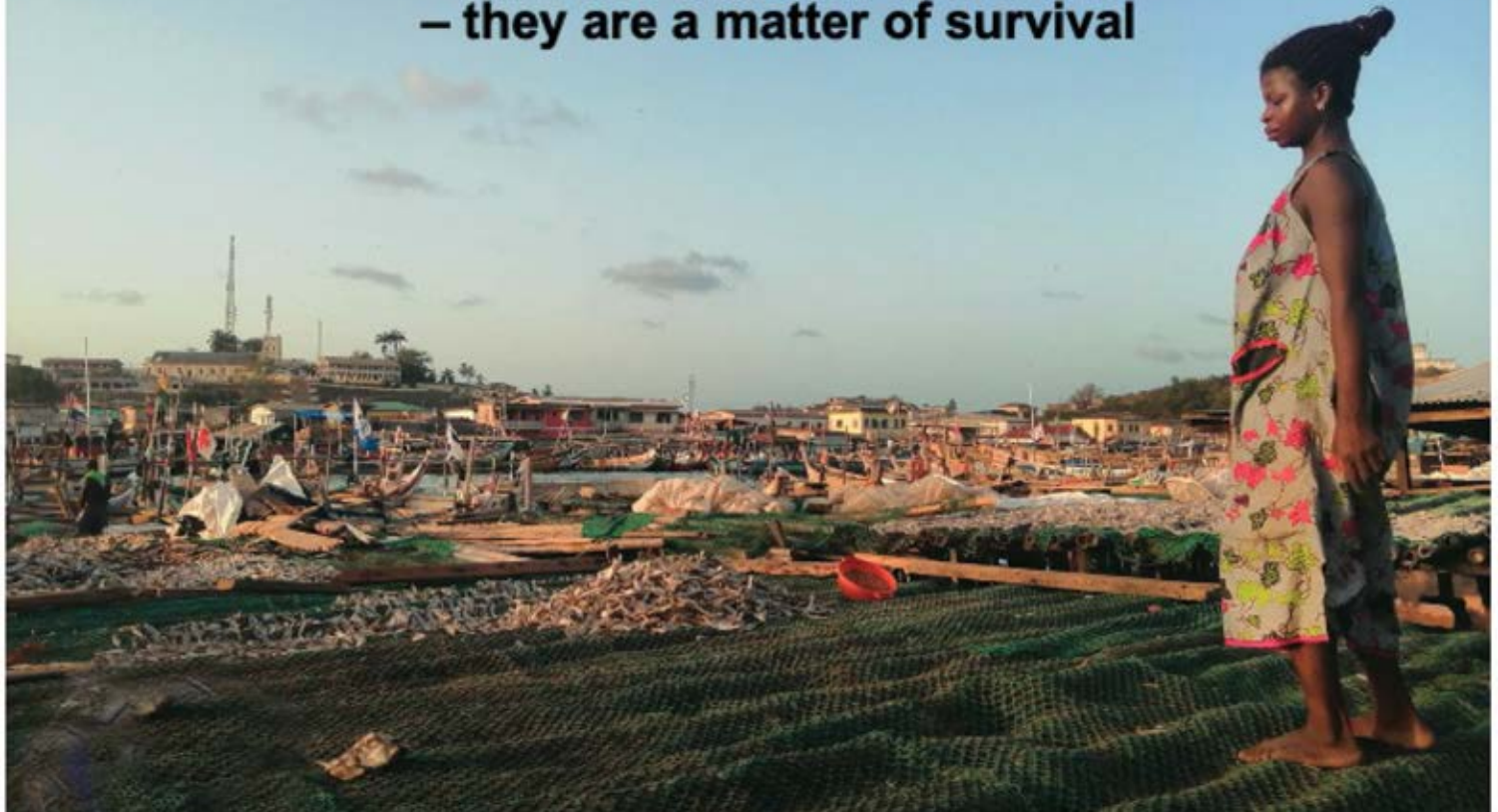
**WORLD FISHERIES DAY 2021**

## ICSF's Posters on World Fisheries Day (November 21, 2021)



### WORLD FISHERIES DAY 2021

**Small-scale fisheries in Ghana are more than livelihoods  
– they are a matter of survival**



## ICSF's Posters on World Fisheries Day (November 21, 2021)



*Artisanal fishery  
brings fresh fish from nearby  
that feeds you and me  
but needs a policy  
that is tailor-made year by.*

**Job, Sjaak and Miranda Bout**  
inshore fishers, The Netherlands

World Fisheries Day 2021

## ICSF's Posters on World Fisheries Day (November 21, 2021)

**WORLD FISHERIES DAY 2021**

### **“ Small-scale Fisherfolk Rights ”**

Small-scale fisheries provide livelihoods to coastal communities in 22 provinces in Thailand.


Therefore, the rights of small-scale fisherfolk must be officially recognised under the international instruments and must be transformed into practice on the ground.



**WORLD FISHERIES DAY 2021**

### **“ Women have the right to participate. ”**

We must work together and support each other in protecting our small-scale fishery rights, both at the domestic and community level. We must be eyes and ears in protecting the sea.



Mrs. Sukhaneesa Norlar  
Lam-Klad Small-scale Fisherfolk Group  
Trat, Thailand

# Gender equality for better environmental outcomes

**Addressing gender inequality in fisheries value chains can lead to a variety of positive outcomes, including environmental ones**

By **Julie Kuchepatov** (julie@seafoodandgenderequality.org), Founder, [www.seafoodandgenderequality.org](http://www.seafoodandgenderequality.org)

The sustainable seafood movement, composed predominantly of environmental non-profit organizations based in the global North and Latin America, has the lofty goal of improving the environmental sustainability and social responsibility of global seafood production. The leading membership organization of NGOs in the movement, the Conservation Alliance for Seafood Solutions, has set a collective goal that “by 2030, at least 75 percent of global seafood production is environmentally sustainable or making verifiable improvement and safeguards are in place to ensure social responsibility.” Similar

goals have been set by individual organizations and alliances working to ensure environmental sustainability in seafood production.

Since the beginning of the sustainable seafood movement more than 20 years ago, collective efforts of fishers, NGOs, academics, scientists, government agencies, and the philanthropic community have led to 35 percent of global seafood production being either certified by a certification scheme like the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC), rated by a ratings organization like Seafood Watch, or in a Fishery Improvement Project (FIP). This information is available on the Certification

PEPE BRIX / IPNLF



Sao Jorge Island at the Santa Catarina factory in the Azores, Portugal. By 2030, at least 75 percent of global seafood production is environmentally sustainable or making verifiable improvement and safeguards are in place to ensure social responsibility

and Ratings Collaboration's Sustainable Seafood Data Tool, which consolidates data from five global programmes to provide NGOs and businesses a more comprehensive look at seafood sustainability. Many of these fisheries and farms were already well on their way to environmental sustainability, if not already meeting the bar. If we are to reach the goal set by the seafood community by 2030, more than double the amount of global seafood production should be certified, rated, or in a FIP in less than half the time. The question is "how?" Is building gender equality and women's empowerment the answer?

The short answer is "yes", yet, as with all complex problems, the solutions are complicated and multifaceted. The goal of the sustainable seafood movement was drafted in line with the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Global Development and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) - an "urgent call for action by all countries - developed and developing - in a global partnership." SDG14 - Life Below Water - contains a set of subgoals that guides many of the activities of marine conservation organizations working to increase the volume of sustainable seafood and accelerate ocean conservation. SDG5 - Gender Equality - is a cross-cutting theme of the SDGs and is considered an enabler and an accelerator of the other goals and is a key element that is not broadly integrated into the strategies of the seafood movement's collective, and individual, activities to achieve SDG14.

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, approximately 50 percent of people working in global seafood production are women; however, women's contributions to the sector remain largely unacknowledged and their voices in decision-making and management of the resources are seldom heard or valued. The greatest challenges facing our ocean - climate change, illegal fish harvest, social injustice, environmental degradation - disproportionately affect women, and solutions that fail to prioritize those most affected are not viable. Because no explicit gender equality target lies within SDG14, the onus to integrate gender transformative approaches into strategies to achieve better environmental outcomes lies with the implementers of environmental sustainability initiatives.

The comprehensive report by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), "Advancing Gender in the Environment: Gender in Fisheries - A Sea of Opportunities" provides a series of reasons why gender matters in fisheries, outlines the linkages between gender equality and sustainable fisheries management, and provides

recommendations and strategic interventions for addressing gender in fisheries. Gender in fisheries matters because "a growing body of evidence suggests that addressing gender issues and integrating women's empowerment interventions into conservation result in improved governance and ecological results." In sum, women's engagement strengthens fisheries management. The report also emphasizes that gender-based violence (GBV) is a key issue and a specific concern in the fisheries sector.

Environmental outcomes are linked to gender-based violence (GBV). As mentioned above, women generally lack access to decision-making discussions around fisheries management. The absence of women's voices in these discussions "cyclically limits opportunities for gender-responsive action, including informing conservation and addressing gender-based violence," according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) paper, "Gender-based violence and environment linkages: The violence of inequality." Men who fish must travel farther and stay out at sea longer when fisheries are in crisis and resources depleted. Often, social norms that perpetuate toxic masculinity dictate that they must reassert their dominance in the home upon their return, which could lead to increased GBV.

Addressing gender inequality in fisheries value chains can lead to a variety of positive outcomes, including environmental ones. In the paper "Fish Losses for Whom? A Gendered Assessment of Post-Harvest Losses in the Barotse Floodplain Fishery, Zambia," the authors examine post-harvest fish losses in western Zambia through a gender lens. They uncover that "female processors lost three times the mass of their fish consignments compared to male processors" and conclude that "addressing unequal gender relations in value chains, whilst also promoting the use of loss-reducing technologies, could increase fish supply and food security in small-scale fisheries." The authors identify the causes of gender gaps in post-harvest production and reiterate that reducing loss is an important strategy to enhance food and nutrition security and environmental sustainability. Froukje Kruijssen, Senior Advisor at the Royal Tropical Institute found this assertion to be true in a 2017 interview for CGIAR about why gender equality matters in fisheries and aquaculture, "Women do the majority of postharvest activities, and this is the stage when quality losses often occur because there is no access to electricity for refrigeration and storage of fish. These losses cause lower incomes for traders and retailers." In addition, it can be surmised that increased fish losses could potentially lead to increased exploitation of fisheries resources to make up

**We must recognize that gender equality is a mainstream principle of good environmental governance**

for these losses, therefore, addressing the root cause, gender inequality, could reduce pressure on the resource.

It has been shown that improved environmental performance leads to more equality. According to data recently released by IUCN, “Investing in environmental sustainability also offers critical pathways for achieving global goals on gender equality... Studies and field experiences alike confirm that the meaningful, visible, full, and effective participation and leadership of women in environmental and conservation efforts can increase women’s political, economic, social and personal empowerment.” However, progress on increasing the number of women in leadership positions is painfully slow and studies show that “1 of 71 major seafood companies have women CEOs and 90 percent of seafood company directorships are held by men.” Accelerating women’s access and pathways to leadership and participation in resource management decisions must be a priority.

But again, it’s complicated, and a few caveats should be mentioned. “Women should be involved in ocean management because they bring motherly care, motherly instincts and deep-rooted knowledge of ocean and ocean governance.” Alifereti Tawake, member of the founding Coordination Council of the locally-managed Marine Area Network (LMMA network).

Since time immemorial, women have been cast as nurturers and caretakers. Women tend to the children and conduct the majority of unpaid work in the home. Women, as resource collectors, are the most affected when water or firewood are scarce and when environmental degradation occurs. Women are the most affected when natural disasters strike and wreak havoc on ecosystems and communities. And women are holders of traditional knowledge, as Alifereti Tawake said. However, in building women’s empowerment and gender equality in global seafood production, we must avoid adding yet another burden - saving the planet - to already overburdened women. In their article, “Four assumptions about gender that distort how we think about climate change (and 3 ways to do better),” the authors caution that assuming that women are “innately caring and connected to the environment” means that “women get saddled with responsibility to act as saviours of their environments, families and communities. In the process, women’s labour gets doubled or tripled in the name of climate adaptation or mitigation.” We must avoid reliance on women to solve the planet’s environmental crises simply because they are considered to be nurturers and caretakers.

Jennifer Bornstein said it well in her article, “On Mother Earth and Earth Mothers: Why Environmentalism Has a Gender Problem”:

“An environmentalism that makes daily life harder for a certain segment of the population is not ethical. Romanticizing unpaid labor disregards the burdens on the populations that perform it. Ultimately, environmental change will require far more than the calls of charismatic men (and occasionally women) to return to the kitchen, or to the farm. Instead, it will be those structural and technological changes that alter the lived realities of women in developed and developing countries alike that will succeed in meaningfully, and equitably, addressing both environmental and feminist concerns.”

Elma Burnham, a woman who fishes for salmon in Alaska and founder of Strength of the Tides, points out another nuance in an interview with the Pulitzer Center about how the Covid-19 global pandemic may intensify gender inequality. Sometimes while fishing, she says, “women are expected to make the weather call and say when it’s too rough to go out fishing. That responsibility shouldn’t be exclusively up to me because I’m the female, mothering, nurturing role,” and that decisions that affect the safety of the crew should be the responsibility of the entire crew. Again, the idea that a woman - because she is considered to be nurturing and therefore can make the best decision for the safety of the crew - puts yet another heavy burden on her. This example is particularly ironic considering that women’s very presence on fishing boats has been considered bad luck - a superstition perpetuated for centuries.

Finally, it is problematic to characterize SDG5, Gender Equality, *solely* as an enabler and accelerator of all the SDGs. The authors of the paper, “Gender equality is diluted in commitments made to small-scale fisheries,” found in their research that “Policy instruments, such as the SDGs, predominantly consider gender as an accelerant to instrumental goals, rather than of inherent value” and “we must recognize that gender equality is a mainstream principle of good environmental governance.” We must recognize that gender equality is a fundamental human right.

There is more than ample evidence as to how gender equality and women’s empowerment in global fisheries and fish farms can improve environmental performance, among other notable benefits, such as food and nutrition security. The time to recognize that gender equality is central to generating better environmental outcomes is now. This recognition will center women’s voices in the creation and implementation of solutions without generating further or additional burdens. Moreover, this recognition will support fundamental human rights of all people, as everyone benefits in a gender equal world. ■

# Gender equity and lived experiences

## A co-founder of ICSF addresses the issue of gender equity and social justice at a trans-disciplinary workshop

By **John Kurien** (john.kurien@apu.edu.in),  
Visiting Fellow, Azim Premji  
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On April 1<sup>st</sup> I opened my email to find a request from Too Big to Ignore, the global network on small-scale fisheries, asking if I would share my reflections on the question of Gender Equity and Social Justice at a workshop on trans-disciplinarity, which took place in April 2021. I replied to say that since the request was made on All-Fools Day, I would readily agree. The nature of my instantaneous response might perhaps have raised a doubt in the minds of the organisers on whether an elderly male from a tropical-majority country was indeed the right choice. So, if you find what I have to say on the topic disconcerting, or more likely, lacking in any disciplinary academic rigour, remember, don't send emails on April 1<sup>st</sup>! Now that I have taken anticipatory bail, I feel more relaxed to proceed.

As I set out to put down my thoughts on this topic of Gender Equity and Social Justice assigned to me by the organisers, I was confronted with the World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Report which downgraded India to a rather unenviable position among the nations of the world and even among our small neighbours in South Asia. The abysmal performance of India highlights our collective failure in ensuring gender parity across different realms as economic opportunity, educational attainment, health, and political empowerment. I have consistently highlighted that even in states of India which are touted to be models of human development, and boast greater gender parity in some of the above-mentioned realms – Kerala State is the classic example -- the situation in fishing communities calls for far greater introspection as to the real causes for gender inequality. (See my 1995 Paper on Kerala Model and Outliers)

I say this because I have worked closely with artisanal fishing communities and know first-hand the great potentials which they have to innately achieve gender equity. However, that does not seem to happen in reality – perhaps for a variety of historical, socio-religious, cultural and political reasons that seriously override and trump what is possible in the 'simple lived experience'. In the early 1970s, following business management studies and an unsatisfying three-month stint in the corporate sector, my first real professional engagement was in a small fishing village in Kerala. I lived there

for four years helping the fishing community to organise their fishery cooperative and also making efforts to extend the work to other villages. As a middle-class, city-bred and urban-educated person, raised far away from the sea, this shift to a poor rural setting near the sea, was a major change in my life. I undertook a lived experience with a trans-disciplinary team of three others – an Italian woman public health nurse, an urban-educated Indian woman professional community organiser and a rural-educated Indian male professional social worker from the local fishing community. Being placed with a responsibility to facilitate programmes which would result in improving the economic circumstances of the whole village community, I observed keenly the actions and involvements of men and women, in what I called various, "fish chains". The hallmark of the activities across these chains was that they were *highly interdependent, brisk, and tightly organised in space and time*. This is a necessary condition, mainly due to the high perishability of fish, and also the costs associated with any measures intended to extend its shelf-life, giving urgency to the need to move it to the realm of consumption as soon as possible. This is quite unlike activities along the value chain of other food products.

Men usually only labour at sea. There may be few who involve in fish marketing. But there are many who, at a later stage in their lives, give up fishing and labour on the beach/port. So usually, men's occupational interactions are very much at sea and their social involvements restricted largely around their coastal village spaces. Once men land the fish, their attention and responsibilities over the product of their labour seem to decrease considerably. Individual women, or men from other communities, take over. This is particularly so when there is no other organised institutional arrangement like a cooperative.

Women do not venture out fishing at sea. Nowadays there are the exceptions. Their visible presence is most evident at the fish landing sites – either in their role as wives of the fishers waiting to take fish home for consumption, or as fish buyers, or both. Along with men from other communities, women take a very sharp and keen interest in the fish which is landed, particularly if they are involved in its processing

and/or marketing. Women who take fish to market therefore get more opportunities to interact with the world outside their coastal spaces. The social interactions resulting from their commercial transactions, with rural and urban consumers, make them more out-going and astute in their dealings with people from outside their own socio-cultural spaces. As I learnt very early in my career from women retail merchants in the village – their “capital was in their tongue” and not in their purses!

One way to look at this gendered division of labour is to say that men’s labour ‘*creates the value by converting the stuff in nature into a resource*’. Women’s labour on the other hand, usually quite immediately, ‘*converts that resource into monetary value*’. A question therefore arises. How do we equate or calculate the worthiness of these different activities and roles, of men and women, in the realm of productive labour, when one form of labour cannot happen without the other? They are inextricably intertwined. When we discuss gender equity in fisheries, this question is something we should hold up seriously in our thoughts.

To me, the issue of gender equity in the activities of the fish economy is therefore a matter of how we perceive them and the attributes we assign to them in the process of assessing all the forms of labour which are undertaken in the productive activities of the fish economy. No form of labour is any less/or more worthy than the other. However, from my own observations, I came to recognise that the moment there is greater ingress of capital into the fish economy from outside the community, it becomes a matrix of activities and sectors creating the possibilities for generating a plethora of different fish chains connecting these different activities and sectors. The forms of labour, and the relationships between women and men along the fish chains is altered – sometimes radically, sometimes slowly. I have articulated this in both my more than four-decade old CDS working paper on understanding the fish economy of Kerala and my 1978 EPW article on the entry of big business into fishing and its impact on the fish economy.

However, when we move from the realm of labour in the productive economy to labour in the household -- including activities relating to care giving and to re-production of labour -- we have a different scenario. Here, it would seem that gender roles get excessively (stereo) typed. Girls and women are ‘expected’ to do the cooking, cleaning, provisioning for the household and caring for the children. And of course, women have the ‘burden’ of producing the future fishermen and women!

Men, on the other hand, may involve in some occasional household maintenance and pampering of the children, and young boys

perhaps undertaking some odd jobs outside the home which are supportive of the work of women.

In my observations of fishing village life and the functioning of the fishers cooperative, my interactions with women were either on the beach or in the office of the cooperative where they brought in the fish sales receipts of their husbands to be encashed. This was a time when it was possible to talk to the women and to understand the roles they played in the present and the future of small-scale fishing communities. My simple (simplistic?) assessment then was that behind successful fishermen, there were women and girls whose labour and perspectives about life were crucial to that success. In 1986 – that’s now three and a half decade ago -- for ICLARM’s (WorldFish) 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary report, I wrote an article titled “*Empathy and Struggle: Elements in a Future for Small-scale Fishing Communities*.” Let me reproduce a few paragraphs, based on my understanding at that time, from what I said about the Rightful Role of Women in that article: (Quote) Let me start with the most neglected aspect: that of the place of women in fishing communities. One important lesson I learnt in my involvement with small-scale fishing communities was to look for the women behind the households of successful and happy small-scale fishermen. Often it is the wife, sometimes with the help of an elder daughter, that shoulders the prime responsibilities for the sustenance of the household – keeping it together as a contented social and economic unit. The fishermen’s success is really a function of his skills, perseverance and the integrating and supportive role played by his wife.

Women in small-scale fishing communities tend also to be more open and receptive to change, primarily because they interact more regularly with the larger social forces in society than do the men who spend more time away at sea. This is particularly so when women are involved in the marketing of the fish. I have also found that women in small-scale fishing communities are more sensitive to the deteriorating quality of life and the environment. Consequently, they have more educated hearts when it comes to the rationale of conservation and the need for a more harmonious relationship with nature.

Many of the good intentioned programmes tailored to the development of small-scale fishing communities have a strong gender bias stressing excessively the role of fishermen and thus fail to appreciate the dynamic role that women play in the economic, cultural and moral life of these communities. With the increase in the number of women social scientists and community activists in different developing countries, now working closely with small-scale fishing communities, we should expect more action on this front.

The recently formed International Collective in Supportive of Fishworkers (ICSF) which discussed fisheries development from a feminist perspective recorded in its statement of shared concern: We acknowledge the important role that women play in the sustenance of the marginalised fishery sector and are aware that they remain out of the mainstream of decision-making processes. We feel strongly that the condition of the fishworkers will not improve unless the situation and the potential contribution of women are given primary attention. It is not too late for the rightful role of women to be stressed and accorded appropriate attention. (Unquote) It took me a while to realise and understand that gender is not about the way we have been created as being female or male (and now more recently the consciousness that it is possible to be in-between these two). And gender is not only about pushing for greater role for women.

Gender is about the way we are taught to *perceive the roles* which we accept for ourselves, and for the functions we undertake as we perform our roles as female or male. It is about our upbringing, which in turn is considerably influenced importantly by social, cultural and

religious matters. Gender is therefore not about the body which nature has gifted us. It is more about the mind and attitude which we acquire by the manner in which we are nurtured.

However, when viewed from a global understanding, it is abundantly clear that the outcome of this nurturing has resulted in women getting an unfair deal on all aspects and indicators of human development which we value as part of our common humanity. And undoubtedly, the lack of equity in gender relationships may seem to be greater today, in many of the countries which have been designated as “developing”.

Consequently, gender, and gender equity, is not about including women in every activity which men are involved in -- or the other way around, as many may think. Specific human societies have evolved to assign particular roles for women and men in different economic, social, cultural and re-productive activity. To an outsider of a particular society, this assignment may seem strange, unfair or even a matter *without* choice. But in most societies, these assigned roles also evolve, and at times change radically. This is a function of many factors that may be endogenous or exogenous to the

HARRY LOGES/FAIR OCEANS (WWW.FAIR-OCEANS.INFO)



The fisherwomen's visible presence is most evident at the fish landing sites – either in their role as wives of the fishers waiting to take fish home for consumption, or as fish buyers, or both. Women who make a mark in these activities often work in groups and collectives pooling their finances, facilities and their enormous resourcefulness

**What is most needed is our true empathy in fostering and supporting the struggles of the women and men in the communities as they negotiate their approaches and tactics in creating the spaces, alliances and networks, which will result in a true liberation from the forces which constrict and constrain them**

society in question. This can be so in fishing communities as well.

Attaining gender equity warrants freedom. And freedom lies at the heart of justice. It is largely about how one can create facilitating and enabling conditions to allow men and women the freedom to achieve and fulfil their own capabilities. There is certainly no perfect solution for this. As Amartya Sen posits in his book ‘The Idea of Justice’, it is about “*how we can proceed to address questions of enhancing justice and removing injustice, rather than to offer resolutions of questions about the nature of perfect justice.*”

And thus, it is with gender equity too. Where there are obstacles and deprivations, they need to be removed. Perhaps this cannot (should not!) be done in one dictatorial sweep. Working with both men and women together in the process of action and decision making is the key to bringing about change in gender relations. While there is the part about changing our bodily actions, it is much more about the way we change the thinking of our minds.

In the fish economy -- and I say this based on my experience not only with Christian fishing communities in India, Buddhist fishing communities in Cambodia and Muslim fishing communities in Indonesia -- the greater inter-dependencies between women and men in the fishery activities, and their dual roles in protection of the eco-system in which they are placed, provides greater opportunities to raise the issue of gender equity and create a more gender-equal fish economy and community.

The strategy to achieve this must be multi-pronged and deal with creating more inclusive workplaces, educational opportunities, re-skilling, health and care systems, possibilities for more equal participation in leadership positions in economic and political bodies (cooperatives, trade unions, local political structures etc) and the freedom and opportunities to be argumentative. In short there is need for planning and embedding greater gender parity initiatives in all the realms to ensure a more just, participatory, self-reliant and sustainable future. We may never reach the perfect situation -- by must work towards it with hope.

The SSF Guidelines uses the overarching frame of international human rights and the state’s obligations under this, as the entry point for ensuring gender equity. However, the SSF Guidelines also stresses the fact that “*these strategies to achieve gender equality require different approaches in different cultural contexts* (8.1)”

The scope for using the various Chapters (Thematic Areas) of the SSF Guidelines, as an advocacy plank for achieving gender equity and social justice is considerable -- but will vary depending on the economic, socio-cultural and political context of the country.

*Responsible governance of tenure* and tenure rights, particularly with regard to riparian land for homestead rights, is one realm where achieving gender parity will give a great fillip to gender equity. It is well known and noted that even where fishers have rights of access to the fishery resources, their rights to riparian land are far less secure. This lack of land rights is one important reason for the poor habitat conditions in many fishing communities. Altering this situation, and providing title to women for the homestead, will be a major move to achieve better social development translating to higher human development indices and social justice in the long run.

*Sustainable resource management* is another realm where achieving gender parity will valorise the contextual knowledge of fishers -- particularly women’s perspectives which tend to be more holistic and are the result of their keener perceptions and attitudes of care and nurture. The knowledge of fishermen is more oriented to understanding the prey-in-context. But note that the knowledge- systems of women and men from fishing communities are more trans-disciplinary when compared to that of modern scientists.

*Social development*, which includes inter alia, housing, health, education, energy, sanitation, are public goods which are human rights for which the state has an obligation towards all its citizens. In India, fishing communities have been outliers in attaining these rights. In states where they have been achieved, there is a strong correlation with the collective action measures which have been spear-headed by women in the fishing community, often with the facilitation of civil society organisations. Here again, what we witness is that, it is in the struggle for enhancing capabilities through social development that the seeds for attaining gender equity also lie. Women are always the worst affected when social development standards are poor.

*Value-chain, post-harvest and trade* are key realms in the fish economy where gender parity needs to be ensured. World over, when men enter these realms, it is always with a greater advantage due to issues like their greater access to finance, to the use of infrastructure, market information and so forth. It is observed that women who make a mark in these activities often work in groups and collectives pooling their finances, facilities and their enormous resourcefulness. Identifying such initiatives among women and helping to foster them will be a major step in ensuring greater gender equity leading to sustainable businesses and livelihoods for women.

*Disaster risks and climate change* are known to result in increasing gender inequality. One important reason for this arises from the fact that both the planning and execution



Fish market at Mumbai, India. It is observed that women who make a mark in these activities often work in groups and collectives pooling their finances, facilities and their enormous resourcefulness

of adaptation and mitigation measures are undertaken without adequate and proper, quality consultations with coastal communities. Only with such consultations will the proximate and the ultimate causes for increased hazard and risk, and importantly their differential impact on men and women, be identified. Since it is the marine fishing communities who first experience the impacts of disasters originating at sea, including the effect of “creeping” climate change, the documentation of their experiential reality and the accumulated knowledge and perspectives which they garner through experience is invaluable. Scientists and others dealing with these issues from the macro-global levels need to consider more trans-disciplinary approaches which will contribute greatly towards better predictions and greater risk mitigation. Such participatory processes alone will contribute to valorising people’s knowledge and contribute to greater gender equity and social justice.

Legal provisions, participatory guidelines, trans-disciplinary workshops and the several other means which we – academicians and

practitioners – are demanding and bidding for, may be one means towards achieving gender equity and social justice.

However, I sometimes wonder whether our preoccupation with new found wordings, idioms of speech, academic frameworks and looking for wicked problems, are at times usurping, purposely distracting and even preventing the emergence of people’s actions from below. In our efforts to ‘understand, interpret and reinterpret’ the world do we stubbornly remain as ‘inert catalysts’, and in this process unknowingly delay the efforts of the people to ‘re-envision and change’ the world?

In my opinion, what is most needed is our true empathy in fostering and supporting the struggles of the women and men in the communities as they negotiate their approaches and tactics in creating the spaces, alliances and networks, which will result in a true liberation from the forces which constrict and constrain them.

Currently, the discourse and the narratives of fisheries, coastal zones and oceans – consider the pervasive Blue Economy fashion for example

– are becoming increasingly more and more oriented towards greater pursuit of material well-being and financial profits. Humans are no more are the centre.

The subjective, experiential and the relational elements of our well-being within which we are called to situate the material analysis cannot be lost out. These are the elements of human relationships which are most precious and which we cannot afford to – using the language of the market – trade-off for other gains.

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. I think this is where going “between, across and beyond” towards a new transcendence becomes important.

Thank you. 🙏

## Milestones

By **Ahana Lakshmi**  
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## Sombre tidings The Gender Gap Report 2021

In this year's Global Gender Gap report, 156 countries have been benchmarked with the sombre tidings that there has been a step back compared to 2020 and as an extra 36 years have been added to the time remaining to close the gender gap. The 2018 report had stated that the world had closed 68 percent of the global gender gap, as measured in terms of four key pillars: economic opportunity; political empowerment; educational attainment; and health and survival. These figures had seen marginal improvement in the intervening years.

The 2021 report says that the gender gap is at 68 percent, with the deterioration partly attributed to a widening political gender gap in several large population countries. Iceland remains the most gender equal country for the twelfth time. The five most improved countries this year have bettered their score by at least 4.4 percentage points. They are Lithuania, Serbia, Timor-Leste, Togo and United Arab Emirates. On its current trajectory, the political gender gap is expected to take 145.5 years to close, compared to 95 years in the 2020 edition of the report, an increase of over 50 percent, driven mainly by negative trends in some large countries; but since the previous edition of the report, there are more women in parliaments, and two countries have elected their first female prime minister.

Two opposing trends are seen in indicators describing 'Economic Opportunity' and the participation of women in the workforce – a rising proportion of women among skilled professionals and progress towards wage equality versus the persistent lack of women in leadership positions. Now it is expected to take 267.6

years to reach parity in this dimension. A new measure created in collaboration with the LinkedIn Economic Graph team to capture the difference between men and women's likelihood to make an ambitious job switch indicates that women experience a bigger gender gap in potential-based job transitions in fields where they are currently under-represented such as cloud computing. Under-representation in the labour market remains one of the most important sources of inequality between men and women.

The data available for the 2021 edition of the report does not yet fully reflect the impact of the pandemic but projections from select countries indicates that gender gaps in labour participation are wider since the pandemic began, partially re-opening gaps that had been closed. Overall, gender gaps in education and health are nearly closed. However, the 'last mile' of progress in 'Educational Attainment' is proceeding slowly and on its current trajectory, it is expected to take another 14.2 years to completely close this gap.

In 'Health and Survival', 96 percent of the gender gap has been closed, registering a marginal decline since last year (not due to COVID-19) and the time taken to close the gap remains undefined. Requirements such as investments in the care sector to support women in the workforce flagged in earlier reports have been emphasised in the current pandemic which has shown that care responsibilities fell disproportionately on women, contributing to higher levels of stress and lower levels of productivity.

The report also offers ways for countries to work towards closing their gender gaps and is available at [http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_GGGR\\_2021.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2021.pdf) 🙏

## IYAFA 2022

### International Year of Artisanal Fisheries and Aquaculture

The United Nations General Assembly declared 2022 the International Year of Artisanal Fisheries and Aquaculture (IYAFA 2022), highlighting that fisheries and aquaculture is about people as much as it is about fish. The objective of IYAFA 2022 is to focus world attention on the role that small-scale fishers, fish farmers and fish workers play, thereby increasing global understanding and action to support them. To make the most of this opportunity we must work collectively to ensure IYAFA 2022 a memorable year. A dedicated website in six languages was designed to facilitate collective action. Please visit the site and help bring attention to the important role that small-scale fishers, fish farmers and fish workers play in global food systems!

Here are a few things to look for on the website and ways that you can support IYAFA 2022:

#### List your events on the official IYAFA events page

Activities and events are being organized around the world to celebrate IYAFA2022. Feature your activity or event on the IYAFA 2022 webpage by registering at the link below. <https://www.fao.org/artisanal-fisheries-aquaculture-2022/events/en/>

#### Contribute a human-interest story

Human-interest stories will be featured as part of IYAFA 2022 to share with the world special people, groups or organizations that have made a meaningful contribution to small-scale fisheries and aquaculture. To contribute please use the template provided here and send it to the IYAFA Secretariat (IYAFA@fao.org) no later than

31 January 2022.

#### Utilize official IYAFA campaign materials

Communication material is available in the six official languages of FAO to make it easy for all partners to join the IYAFA global campaign. This includes key messages, the visual identity, an IYAFA 2022 brochure and website, a promotional video, social media cards, hashtags, videos and templates for making beautiful posters, banners and outdoor promotions and much more.

Communication products are all available in the IYAFA 2022 Asset Bank: <https://digital-assets.fao.org/home/action/browseItems?categoryId=135848&categoryType=2>

#### #IYAFA2022 on social media

Inform, educate and engage audiences with real facts. Join the #IYAFA2022 campaign by sharing through digital channels and visit the Trello Board for list of official hashtags and other promotional materials

#### Use the IYAFA2022 visual identity

To increase the impact of IYAFA 2022 celebrations, we ask you and all IYAFA partners to use the visual identity as much as possible in all your activities and events, also on digital platforms!

Do you need the visual identity in other languages? We can also work with you to create different language versions of the visual identity. Send requests to IYAFA@fao.org. For more information, visit: <https://www.fao.org/artisanal-fisheries-aquaculture-2022/home/en/> 📄

#### What's New, Webby?



By Joe Zelasney (joseph.zelasney@fao.org), Fishery Officer, Fisheries and Aquaculture Division, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Rome, Italy

## YEMAYA MAMA



## Mama has the last laugh!



## FILMS / ANIMATIONS / STORIES

### Vital ocean voices

**An online anthology produced by Greenpeace consisting of writing, films, animation and poems that document efforts of ocean protection**

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**B**e it the seven year-old Kylian who helped stop the spread of an oil spill in Mauritius, or Madame Kokoly, an artisanal fisher who relies on the ocean for survival or Aurelie, a scientist whose father is a Mauritian fisherman - *Vital Ocean Voices* gives voice to the many stories of ocean protection and human courage among coastal communities.

A Greenpeace project that aims to support and amplify local communities in sharing their stories of ocean protection, *Vital Ocean Voices* brings to life these stories in many forms - as videos, poems, animations, and writings, the voices in the film capturing the transformation of livelihoods over the years.

It explores the intimate relationship that the land and we humans share with the ocean. It also paints a grim picture of the disastrous impacts that destructive fishing vessels have had on the coastlines of Mauritius, Seychelles, and Madagascar.

These impacts are not just limited to the destruction of ocean and marine resources. How they will affect the lives and livelihoods of coastal dwellers and the food security of millions is a question yet to be answered.

By cutting his curls (which he was extremely fond of!) and urging people to act via his YouTube


channel, little Kylian, at the tender age of seven, is already playing a unique and special role in highlighting the devastating impact of an oil spill in the ocean. His appeal has motivated the setting up of barriers to absorb oil spillages. His is an act that may appear to be small yet it carries such vital significance that it demonstrates that no one or no step is too little or unimportant in this cause.

Another inspiring story is that of Aurelie, a conservation biologist, who has emerged as a beacon of hope for the future of the environment in her country - Mauritius. Through her many roles, she has been able to protect the island, monitoring the health of plants and animals while, at the same time, trying to restore the island to its natural state. She played a major role in cleaning the coastal areas of marine debris which was destroying her community's life support systems, a visible reminder of the destructive capacities of callous human actions. Now with a fellowship to help raise awareness in Mauritius, she is on a dedicated journey towards the protection of marine and terrestrial life.

*Vital Ocean Voices* also showcases the story of Madam Kokoly, sometimes referred to as the Iron lady of Madagascar, who has a towering presence in her community. As the Greenpeace website explains, Madame Kokoly is a member of the Vezo community, a semi-nomadic seafaring people whose way of life depends on the ocean - 'vezo' loosely translates as "to live with the sea". Through her work, Madame Kokoly shines a spotlight on the issues affecting small-scale fisheries across the tropics and demonstrates the urgent need to address the extreme poverty that her people face.

The narratives, videos, animations that make up *Vital Ocean Voices* amplify the voices of marginalised individuals living on the frontlines of climate and ecological breakdown and describe what it is like to be on the forefront of ocean destruction.

Please visit the project homepage for links to all the films described here, and for other resources:

<https://www.greenpeace.org/international/story/48662/vital-ocean-voices/> 



PUBLISHED BY  
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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.  
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receiving regular write-ups for the  
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