



34 Years in Support of
Small-scale Fishworkers

Yemaya

ICSF'S NEWSLETTER ON GENDER AND FISHERIES

From the Editor

The 60th issue of Yemaya, being brought out after a gap of a year, coincides with a time of global crisis, when nations and communities across the world are battling the effects of the COVID 19 pandemic. It is a time for sombre thought and reflection.

This pandemic has also locked down coastal fishing communities and seriously impacted livelihoods. The case study from Maharashtra, India, in this issue of Yemaya, details the impact on women fishers. Earnings have dropped because of lack of fish, market access, traditional credit sources and clear government policy enabling relief. In India, the government's move to keep the fishing sector open during lockdown helped to vindicate the importance of the sector but the curfew-like conditions of the prevailing lockdown prevented women fishers from availing the benefits of the move. Clearly, the challenges before women fishers and fishworkers have multiplied.

To mark this special issue of Yemaya, a set of experts were asked to respond to a common set of questions on the opportunities and challenges before women in the sector. All agreed that the small-scale fisheries are marked by the devaluation of women's roles and contributions. In their view, this devaluation significantly challenges the sustainability of the sector. Discourse on gender mainstreaming may have increased as a result of efforts of women's organisations, they felt, not so the implementation of policy. And all agreed on the importance of women fishers and organising fishworkers. This is particularly critical now with environmental disasters wreaking havoc on fisheries livelihoods, and a rightward shift in politics leading to the unchecked exploitation of natural resources, including the oceans and rivers.

Women fishers across fishing communities are responding to the challenge. Associations like SEWA in India, AKTEA in Europe, CAOPA, which represents fisherwomen's organisations in 24 African countries, and the National Articulation of Women in Fisheries in Brazil (ANP) have made significant steps forward in advancing the cause of women fishers and fishworkers. They have also advocated strongly for the implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines). However, as Meryl Williams from Australia argues, until the specialised agencies of the UN like FAO's Committee on Fisheries (COFI) firmly back the issues of artisanal women fishers and fishworkers, their lack of recognition will continue in global and national policy debates.

As COVID 19 rages globally, we need to reflect anew on the sustainability of fisheries, and in particular, artisanal small-scale fisheries. Will the sector be able to sustain itself in the face of environmental degradation and pandemic outbreaks? Without concerted policy support what does the future hold? The article by Sarah Harper reveals that women contribute 11 per cent of the total small-scale fisheries catch globally. Thus, although their contribution to sustainability and food security for their communities is enormous, new threats and challenges are likely to add to the existing problems that women in fisheries face. Today, like never before, policy support and action are critical to protect the lives and livelihood of women in the sector.

Finally, in these difficult times, we remember the late Loretta Farina, a nurse from Italy who came in 1962 to India to live for 20 years among the fishing communities of Kerala. Her dictum for sustainable organisation was simple—always involve the people in decision making about interventions that affect their lives. These words ring as true today as they did half a century ago! 📌



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