

Women in Small-scale Fisheries

Africa Regional Workshop
IYAFA: Celebrating Sustainable and Equitable Small-Scale Fisheries
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Key narratives

- Tenure regimes (types of institutions - privatised)
- Rights allocation systems (private, -collective, -communal)
- User rights (TURF -privatised)
- Policy – reforms, governance
- Social relations, social realities, social reproduction
- Politics of poverty, inequality, livelihoods,
- Informal, illegal, and crime link to livelihoods
- Food system – marketisation and commodification
- Social justice, Blue Justice

Why focus on women?

- Most marginalized group within already marginalized small-scale fishing communities
- Carried with them layers and layers of hardship, resistance, protest and resilience, becoming change-makers within communities
- The social reproductive roles of women
 - Roles as mothers of fishing families
 - Roles as caretakers of communities
 - Roles as activists
 - Roles as business-women and entrepreneurs

Bearing in mind shifts and tensions

- Protests moved from anti-apartheid to anti-privatization (resource grabbing, commodification of fish, marketization of fish)
- Struggles and litigation for access to fishing rights and markets
- The sea as centre of life, identity and well-being vs the sea as a force of death and source of hardship
- Fishing rights as access to food and livelihoods, vs fishing rights as new mechanism of discrimination and exclusion
- Fish as source of income vs fishing becoming too expensive to make a living
- Litigation as key to transformation vs litigation as a new frustration
- Constitutional rights since 1994 vs continued stigmatization of fishers





The experience of women (2022)

- Of the sea
- Of fish
- Of their new-found freedom in Democracy and Interim Measures
- Their identity as fisherwomen (in the context of fishing families)
- Their community
- Activism
- Transformation
- Fishing regulations and the government



Women and the sea

- A place of joy, freedom, self-realization
- A place known intimately (wind, weather, tides, sound, feeling)
- A source of life; a source of death
- A force to respect
- A place where our loved ones have died
- A place where our loved ones have been buried, never to be found
- The sea is much more than merely a resource



Women and fish

- Fishing is a birthright; Fish is life
- Fish is food, and nourishment for the family
- Income to afford schooling for children, homes, fishing equipment
- A source of joy, inspiration and love
 - Every women enthusiastically talked about her favourite fish, part of a fish, recipe, preparation, sharing of the dish
- We see fish is getting fewer; the fish changes
- Fishing becoming more and more expensive with rising costs
- Fish is much more than a mere commodity

Women and their new-found freedom

- Utter excitement (release of Mandela; dawn of Democracy)
- We discovered that we had rights, and could exercise them
- Feelings of empowerment and power
- New opportunities opening up
- Disillusion when men in the fishing industry excluded them, exploited them, actively opposed and undermined them as fisherwomen
- Women felt left alone to fend for themselves

Fisherwomen and their fishing families

- A fisherman and a fisherwoman is born in a fishing family
- When you open your eyes, you are with the sea
- Learn about the sea from grandfathers, uncles, fathers
- It is in your blood; it is part of your identity
- When you go out on the sea you do it for your family, and your community
- There is a living tradition of fishing



Women and their communities

- Many women told us how they took care of the broader community
- Many women called out the hardships of their communities
 - Forcibly removed under apartheid laws to new locations
 - Disrupted families
 - Youth unemployment; general unemployment
 - Drug abuse and crime
- Many women told us how their struggle was for the dignity of their communities and the future of their children
- Many women said that they will never stop with this struggle
- And also said that this struggle must stop

Fishing Regulations and The Government

- Regulations, licenses, reporting – a double edged sort
 - Enabled access to fish
 - Constrained fishing with bag limitations, exclusion zones
 - Turned fishing for food into poaching
- Formal procedures and conservation measures experienced as distant and far-away; something imposed, not owned and struggled for
- Regulations are changed on short notice without consultation: became new sources of exclusion (by allocation or retraction of rights)
- Government is distant and far away; not talking to people
- We can't keep on engaging government by litigation

Women and activism

- “I became an activist because my father was a fisherman”
- We were forced into the role of activists
- It is part of who we are
- We supported men to organize meetings, protests
- We joined large gatherings
- Some said: It was never about us; always for the community

Women as entrepreneurs

- Many directly linked activism with entrepreneurship
- Starting a co-operative
- Producing local and indigenous products – dishes, drinks, jams, breads
- Marketing through conventional fishing factories
- Marketing through Abalobi (reaching top restaurants and delis)
 - Marketing platform
 - Infrastructure
 - Orders for specific species of fish (e.g. 15 kilos of Cape Bream; 25 kilos of ...)

Women issues in the community

- Alcoholism and drug abuse
- Abuse – of women and girls
- Poaching
- Losing husbands at an early stage
- Raising children alone
- Leadership
- Jealousy and stigmatisation
- I came back from Covid, from death, to help pick up broken women

Women and Transformation

- Many things have changed, but somehow things have stayed the same
- We are activists and entrepreneurs
- We are directors of companies and represent communities
- But we still fight for our dignity, recognition, rights, and that of our communities
- At the end of the day, we have nothing to show, or very little, for all the “transformation” that has taken place

SSF and aquaculture

- Aquaculture: part of Operation Phakisa (Blue Economy)
- A source of concern for SSF
 - They were not consulted
 - Driven by outsiders who export their products
 - Nothing of products is shared with community
 - Community members not participating as owners or labourers
 - Everything is business oriented
- They only speak to the big people; not to the little people

And yet, the struggle continues

- Against tourism and recreational activities interfering with fishing
- Against Karpowership that will park floating electricity generators near harbours, with seismic effects on fish
- Against seismic exploration for oil and gas; east and west coast
- Against Blue economy initiatives based on poor knowledge of sea
- Again: litigation (in the name of Blue Justice) on the basis of
 - Recognition
 - Right to livelihoods
 - Right to food
- From 2002 to 2022 the circle closes, as if nothing changed



Reflection

- Women's role is disappearing, nothing stays behind.
- Local organization is weak
- Charismatic leaders (mainly men, and few women)
- Litigation cannot be the first resort
- Strengthening the base at local level to engage with local authorities is crucial
- What do you want? Private rights, quotas, market internationally?