



37 Years in Support of  
Small-scale Fishworkers



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# Yemaya

ICSF'S NEWSLETTER ON GENDER AND FISHERIES

## From the Editor

The 8th Global Conference on Gender in Aquaculture and Fisheries held in India in November 2022 raised several important issues for gender-just and sustainable fisheries and aquaculture. A running theme in the discussions was the importance of both strengthening the capacity of women fish workers to organize, and developing new models of organizing to meet the economic and environmental challenges confronting the Small-scale and artisanal fisheries. The discussions harkened back to the networking among strong fishworker organisations in the past, often facilitated by the ICSF, that resulted in the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (the SSF Guidelines). The discussions reiterated the continuing need for strong organising efforts and alliances to respond to the dynamic and shifting patterns in modern fisheries. Also stressed was the need for formal recognition of women's role in the fisheries sector, and the urgent requirement to formalise customary rights to prevent their erosion due to competitive challenges.

The impact of Covid-19 has been substantial on the Small-scale fisheries sector, and, in particular, on women fishers. A major contribution to the debate on post-pandemic reconstruction was the position paper brought out by over 70 group members of the Women's Major Group, titled "Building back better from COVID-19 while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development". Significantly, the paper reported that out of the various social protection and labour rights measures enacted by governments across the globe, only 13 percent catered to women, and only 11 percent recognised and took into account rising unpaid care demands. Given the lack of formal recognition of women's work, and the increasing burden of care responsibilities after COVID, this paints a grim picture for women in artisanal fisheries across the globe.

The importance of organisation is brought out clearly in all the articles in this issue of Yemaya. The National Workshop on SSF Guidelines and Women in Fisheries, India, held in Chennai in April 2022 addressed just this issue. It brought together two groups of women fishworkers – vendors and gleaners – resulting in the launch of a new forum – the National Platform for Women in Small Scale Fisheries (NPWSSF), to collectively work towards strengthening the position of women in fisheries across India.

Adding to the challenges that women in fisheries in a post-pandemic world face are a host of new disasters, whether climate-induced variabilities in weather, shortages triggered by war or escalating environmental pollution. Often, as the article on marine litter suggests, the gendered impacts of these catastrophic events are not assessed or factored into mitigation efforts. However, along with challenges, these events also offer new opportunities for organizing; for instance, with migration, the exposure and experience levels of women increase their leadership and networking capacities. As Kyoko Kusakabe discusses in her article, the two most important challenges ahead of women in the sector are strengthening organization among women and working for greater formalization of women's work in the fisheries. On the occasion of March 8, the International Women's Day, let us resolve to strengthen women's economic participation, autonomy and agency in the fisheries sector.

Note: Due to unavoidable circumstances, we regret that this issue of Yemaya does not carry the Yemaya Mama cartoon strip. ❏

# Recognizing women's work

## Reflections on women, gender concerns and the fisheries from a workshop held in Bangkok as part of the International Year of Artisanal Fisheries and Aquaculture

By **Kyoko Kusakabe** (kyoko.kusa@gmail.com), Professor, Gender and Development Studies, Asian Institute of Technology, Bangkok, Thailand

The International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF) in partnership with Sustainable Development Foundation (SDF) organized a workshop titled 'Asia Workshop: IYAFA 2022-Celebrating Sustainable and Equitable Small-scale Fisheries' from 5 to 8 May 2022 at Bangkok, Thailand. This was the first of four regional workshops planned by ICSF to mark 2022, proclaimed as the International Year of Artisanal Fisheries and Aquaculture (IYAFA) by the United Nations. The workshop focused on the implementation and monitoring of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (the SSF Guidelines), with emphasis on tenure rights, social development, and gender in fisheries. The third day of the workshop was devoted to Women and Gender in Small-Scale Fisheries.

Women contribute a great deal to fisheries activities all over Asia. As Arlene Nietes Satapornvaint noted in her presentation, women make up 18 per cent of the workers in primary production nodes, while in other nodes, women outnumber men by as much as three or four times. It was reported that in Bangladesh, 60 per cent of people in inland fisheries are women. Women play a large part of the pre- and post-fishing activities. They prepare gear and carry out fish vending and processing activities. Women, unlike men, often fish without boats, and using their hands or simple tools, they glean aquatic and marine species that are vital contributions towards household food security.

However, women in fisheries face a number of problems including lack of access to finance, information, technology and training. Women have difficulty securing spaces for processing

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Women participants at Asia workshop. Fishers in general have less access to insurance, but women are excluded more than men since they are not even considered to be fishers and thus not entitled to fisheries-related insurance and other government support

activities – storing, cleaning and drying fish as well as selling fish. They face restrictions in access to transportation, which makes it hard for them to reach markets. Poor women find it difficult to source fish for selling or for processing since they are dependent on men for fish supplies. Declining fish resources and loss of mangrove cover affect women more as they depend on mangrove forests for income and food.

Fatima Majeed from Pakistan stated: ‘There is no longer any space for women’. Her talk demonstrated that due to low levels of water in the Indus delta, fish and crab catches are on the decline, resulting in women losing their livelihood in these areas. Low water levels have also led to drinking water shortages. Further, women who used to make their living making fishing nets have lost out to factory-made nets imported from China or Taiwan.

Jyoti Maher representing National Fishworkers’ Forum, India said that most women fish vendors are forced to sell fish on the roadside and are thus vulnerable to eviction by the government or the police. Salma Sabiha from Bangladesh reported a case in a remote island where fisherwomen collect fish and shrimps at dawn because of obstacles encountered during the day. They have no access to market and face wage discrimination as fish processors, she added. In both India and Bangladesh, it was reported that women in the fisheries sector do not have access to health or sanitation facilities, to reproductive health services or to breast feeding support and spaces. Women fishers suffer occupational health issues such as skin problems and back pain, but these problems are not addressed or paid any attention.

Fishers in general have less access to insurance, but women are excluded more than men since they are not even considered to be fishers and thus not entitled to fisheries-related insurance and other government support. A representative from Cambodia reported that COVID-19 cash support did not reach fishers, especially women fishers, because they lack awareness and access to information. Representatives from Indonesia and India noted that even though there exist insurance policies for fishers, women fishers are not able to access these, since they are not recognized or issued any identification as fishers by the government – in Indonesia, this would be a fisher ID and in India, cooperative membership. To recognize women’s roles and contributions in fisheries, gender disaggregated data is a critical necessity.

Increasing women’s voices in fisheries decision making is also vital.

It is often the case that the unrecognized or underrecognized nature of women’s role in fisheries is not even problematized. Government officers often fail to realize that they are discriminating against women because they do not understand the gendered barriers that women face. They fail to grasp that the gender implications of policies and programs are different for women and men because of gender differences in roles and access to resources and therefore, gender-blind policies/ programs can be unconsciously discriminatory. Government officers need to be trained to recognize the gender-differentiated effects of interventions. A delegate from the Philippines reported a case where token recognition led to unexpected outcomes. In a certain area, pump wells were introduced as part of a solution for water shortage. But because the wells were designed for use by men not women, the project failed, and the wells were soon abandoned. This case demonstrates the importance of including women in project planning.

There was discussion around the question of what exactly it means to ‘recognize’ women in fisheries. Edlyn Rosales of the Philippines pointed out that recognition alone is insufficient. She said, ‘If the recognition is genuine, efforts taken by the government in securing coastal areas and protecting rights for women engaged in their livelihood and families must be visible’. The workshop went on to identify two main ways to ‘recognize’ women in fisheries, namely organizing women and formalizing women’s work.

Organizing women is one of the most effective ways to make women’s needs visible and voices heard. Chandrani Gamage of Sri Lanka reported as an example of a success story, the case of Sri Lanka’s National Women Fishers Federation. Various income generation programs and livelihood assistance have been provided through this Federation. Women were engaged through the Federation to develop a draft National Fisheries Policy. They were involved in health services and education. In another example, Mai Huong of Vietnam reported that in Vietnam, women participate in cooperatives; in her Huong Thanh Commune Fishery and Tourism Service Cooperative, 15 out of 22 cooperative members are women. Having women champion these organizing efforts is an effective way to make women’s needs visible. Chatjaporn Loyplew from Thailand added that women’s groups and fishers’ groups are able

**Organizing women and supporting women champions continue to be the most important and effective way to empower women in the fisheries**





Thailand participants at the Asia workshop. No matter how much women may want to do more things, it may not be physically possible unless responsibilities are shared at the grassroots level

to dialogue with the government and develop solutions together.

Although in general, organizing women is important, some concerns and cautionary points were also raised. Women's groups and organizations need to be well-linked with other organizations, cooperatives and networks. Collective action is effective because there is strength in numbers. If women's organizations/groups are isolated, they will not be visible. It is important therefore that they join hands with mainstream cooperatives and networks.

It was pointed out, in this context, that there is a risk in working with male-dominated cooperatives. In such cooperatives, women's voices can be sidelined, and they may be further marginalized. Suryani Pacong of Indonesia shared a case of a struggle by a women's group against port development. Women were the ones who initiated the protest. However, when the movement became strong, men took over and the women were marginalized on the grounds that they were making the protest difficult. The probable reason men did not want to include women in the protest was because they did not want to share the compensation amount that would be paid out. In the end,

compensation was awarded to fishers, but as women are not recognized as fishers, they did not receive anything. May Hnin Wai of Myanmar shared that women try to overcome challenges through women's organizations in Myanmar but these are often sabotaged by political interests. The importance of including women should be grasped by both women and men in the community and in organizations.

Organizing women is necessary but women are often unable to participate in such efforts because of the time restrictions they face. Women need to take care of household work before they can turn to group activities. Sadeas Loah from Cambodia shared a case study that showed how women cannot take part in collective action because of household work burdens. Since women are often dependent on men socially and economically, without the husband's approval, most women cannot participate.

Another way to recognize women's work in fisheries is through the formalization of their work. Having better gender disaggregated data is one way to achieve this. Women's contributions to the fisheries is kept informal and invisible as these are often done either

at home or seasonally/part time without the use of gear. It is therefore very important that women's work be included in the statistics. However, it is necessary to keep in mind that while formalization is necessary, it should not become a route for additional tax burdens on the poor.

Apart from including women's work in the statistics, full membership in fisheries cooperatives is another way to formalize women's work in fisheries. Currently cooperatives or fishing groups extend membership only to those who have boats. Women who fish without using boats are not included. Women are often part time fishers, handling household work as well as other income generating work to supplement the often-volatile family income from fishing. The part-time nature of their work is usually the reason for their exclusion from cooperative membership. In Indonesia, the Fisher ID card is mandatory for access to government incentives and support. However, even a woman engaged in fishing might be denied this card if her status in the national ID card is indicated as 'housewife'. For Fisher ID eligibility, she would need to first change her national ID card status to 'fisher'.

Organizing women and formalizing women's work in the Fisheries sector are crucially necessary efforts but more needs to be done to ensure the full recognition of women's role in fisheries. Women play a large role in supporting fisheries through their non-fisheries work. Fisheries organizations would have difficulty in recognizing the need for multiple sources of income of the fisher households. Women have various needs that are different from men since they are often responsible for household financial management. A representative from Cambodia brought up the case of fisherwomen requesting for non-fisheries skills training to enable income diversification. Recognizing women in fisheries thus involves widening the scope of fisheries to consider the livelihood of fishers as a whole. An important part of women's work that is often omitted is their unpaid care work responsibilities. The social protection report of the International Labour Organization (ILO) noted that Covid-19 support often did not cover the needs of women, including childcare and other household care work. Fisheries organizations too tend to ignore women's needs and do not take into consideration women's unpaid care work.

As Sebastian Mathew of ICSF pointed out, the key point is to be clear about the kind

of inclusion needed. The donors might like to see women forming groups. That might not be what women want. Consultation and participation are key for inclusion.

The takeaways from the session may be summarized as follows:

Organizing women and supporting women champions continue to be the most important and effective way to empower women in the fisheries. Dani Setiawan of Indonesia pointed out that community organizing used to be a standard approach to development in the past, but nowadays NGOs and grassroots groups do not have any budget for training and community organization. Investing in community leaders and women champions is important to strengthen the movement as a whole and women in particular.

Women fishers need to be involved in fisheries and other formal organizations, such as organizations in landing sites and in government departments; women should be formally registered as fishers.

Capacity building for women on planning, program design and implementation is important, so that they are able to participate better and articulate their needs and problems effectively in communities and organizations.

Creating linkages and networks between women's groups and mainstream cooperatives, between women and men within the cooperatives, as well as between women fishers and government officers are needed. Women need to be integrated into the system so that they have the information they need and the space to voice their concerns.

Capacity building of government officers are important so that they can identify gender issues. Many times, government officers are not able to see that there is gender discrimination in fisheries.

Gender-responsive fisheries require not only changes in fisheries practices but also changes in the daily practices of the community and households. Responsibilities in the household need to be shared, so that women's time can be freed to take part in organizational activities. As the participants from Thailand noted 'No matter how much women may want to do more things, it may not be physically possible unless responsibilities are shared at the grassroots level'.

More researchers on gender and fisheries are needed on the ground. We need to gather evidence and facilitate dialogue across genders, across organizations, and with government and other stakeholders. ■



# Building solidarity

**Proceedings of a workshop held in Chennai, India, aimed at understanding challenges, finding solutions, and building solidarity among women in fisheries**

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**W**omen constitute 56 percent of the fisher population in India and yet they are often voiceless. To address the invisibility and underrepresentation of women in fisheries, a workshop was held in Chennai, India, from 8 to 10 April 2022. Titled 'The National workshop on SSF Guidelines and Women in Fisheries, India', the workshop was part of a process of collective action that had, just before the COVID 19 lockdown period, witnessed the creation of a Women in Fisheries Platform.

The workshop participants were mainly fish vendors but also in attendance were women from the harvesting sector, who are among the most marginalised sections in the fisheries. Women in harvesting were represented by shellfish gatherers from Palghar, Maharashtra; the 'tiger

widows' of Sundarbans, West Bengal; active woman fishers from West Bengal and seaweed collectors from Ramanathapuram, Tamil Nadu. The workshop was an attempt to build alliances between the two groups of women in fisheries – harvesters and vendors.

The workshop commenced with participants sharing their experiences on the impact of the pandemic. Two aspects were highlighted: first, the difficulties that women experienced in trying to reach markets despite possessing fish to sell, and in Kerala, the entry of men who had lost their jobs during the lockdown into fish vending spaces. Second, the reappearance of varieties of fish not seen for a long time, as mechanised fishing was put on hold during the lockdown. In addition, participants also talked about the adverse impact of the pandemic on

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Participants of women in fisheries workshop Chennai, India. Despite their enormous economic contributions to the harvest and postharvest sector, women's participation in decision making at the local, state, and national levels is still nascent

children's education; the problems caused by coastal erosion; and the loss of coastal lands and habitation spaces due to climate impacts and harbour development.

Lila Vasant Karbhari, a shellfish gatherer from Palghar district of Maharashtra described the challenges faced by her community. These include climate change-induced unseasonal rainfall that often washes away their shellfish harvest and the difficulty finding fish to meet even home consumption needs. There are 57 villages in Palghar district and a lot of women who gather shellfish are not registered as fishers. As a result, their activities are undocumented; their work is unrecognized; and they are unable to seek compensation for losses incurred.

Purnima Meher, also from Palghar, who is a member of the organization Maharashtra Macchimar Kruti Samitee (MMKS) spoke about the government's apathy towards women fishers. During a recent cyclone, the Maharashtra government provided financial assistance to boat-owning fishermen. However, women fishers, vendors or collectors received not even a mention. After women began protesting, and when Jyoti Meher, secretary of the National Fishworkers Forum (NFF) and member of MMKS, forwarded their concerns to the central government, financial assistance for women was sanctioned. However, the scheme had conditionalities attached to it – for example, only women with licenses could access it; therefore, it excluded the majority of women vendors and all of the women who work in harvest and postharvest fisheries.

Gita Mridha, who hails from the Sundarbans in West Bengal, spoke about how her husband who collected fish, crab and honey in the Sundarbans forests was killed by a tiger, forcing her into the ranks of those known as 'tiger widows' – women who have lost their spouses in tiger attacks. Although women whose husbands have been killed in tiger/crocodile attacks are awarded Rs. 2 lakh (USD 2,544) as compensation, Gita could not avail the amount because she did not have a proper death certificate. Describing the current situation in the Sundarbans, Gita said that the core zone of the sanctuary, where fish and crabs are found, is a prohibited area. Fishers travel illegally to these core areas using dinghy boats. On the days that she manages to reach the core area, she said she may harvest up to two kilos of crab and fish. Gita has played a leadership role in the community and helped to establish the Tiger Widow Mahila Samiti in Gosaba block, which has 15 women members. The organization travels out to other blocks to bring other 'tiger widows' (over 3000 in number) into its fold. They plan to reach out to the government in order to secure better compensation.

Hailing from the Southern Province of Tamil Nadu, Meenachi, a seaweed collector from Ramanathapuram, was around eleven years old when she began collecting seaweed. She was married by the time she was 16. Since her husband did not provide for the family and there were children to bring up, Meenachi—one of many such women—would go to sea, earn Rs. 100-150 (USD 1-2) a day and somehow manage to run the household. There would be six or seven women in a boat as well as one man. In those days, there were no regulations on seaweed collection. She would leave her children with her mother for four or five days and go to the nearby islands to collect seaweed. She was always keen to educate her children with her earnings. Today her daughter is pursuing a master's degree. She said that the last two years were hard. She couldn't go out to work during the lockdowns, and there was no income to support the household. Just like fishers, seaweed collectors also could not work during the ban period. Unlike fishers though, they did not receive support. Meenachi felt that there should be some provision made to enable seaweed collectors like herself who have no other means of income to access alternate livelihoods and opportunities during ban periods.

The workshop also addressed the needs and challenges of the women in fisheries post-harvest. 75 per cent of fish marketing and 90 per cent of all processing is done by women. However, their basic needs and rights have fallen on deaf ears for decades.

Women across provinces said that they lack access to dedicated market areas. They are being pushed out of formal spaces and forced into street vending. In places like Mumbai, 'redevelopment' is used as an excuse to displace women from their vending spaces in traditional markets. Amutha, a fish vendor from Chennai in Tamil Nadu recounted that the market space that women fish vendors like her used, was demolished to widen a road. They were promised an alternative dedicated market space, which is however yet to materialize. Another speaker was Ujwala Patil, an organizer from Maharashtra, who is trying to bring together women whose markets have been displaced. Her organization has also been training women to distribute fish directly to customers using scooters. Despite concerted attempts to gain social security for women fish vendors, they have met with little success. Most fish markets have poor facilities and are in dire need of renovation. They lack clean and hygienic bathrooms, potable water, and lighting. Dedicated market spaces with basic infrastructure are urgently needed.

The workshop also brought to light the biases and hardships that women face when they try to avail compensation for losses incurred due to cyclones, floods, and other disasters.

**'The workshop attempted to ... build alliances and foster solidarity among women fishworkers for a more resilient tomorrow.'**





Women's panel discussion. The workshop also brought to light the biases and hardships that women face when they try to avail compensation for losses incurred due to cyclones, floods, and other disasters

Women vendors and harvesters demanded that, just like men, they too should be compensated during lean periods and for injuries caused by fisheries-related activities. The demand was echoed by the other groups present at the workshop, including the 'tiger widows' from the Sundarbans and the seaweed gatherers of Ramanathapuram.

During the course of the workshop, the women in fisheries group put forward several interesting suggestions and action points. First, they suggested that all women fish harvesters must be recognized and documented. Their economic contribution to fish harvesting also needs to be recognized. In order to improve the livelihoods of women in fisheries, women-specific fisher collectives are needed that prioritize and directly benefit fisherwomen. Women fish vendors' rights to market spaces must be protected and market redevelopment undertaken only in consultation with their representatives. They also demanded that spaces for women street fish vendors be made secure and that the Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihoods and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014 be strictly implemented. In Kerala, the women have demanded that market committees and harbour management committees should have women representatives from fishing communities.

All the input sessions and discussions led to developing a workshop statement and

building the Women in Fisheries Platform. The workshop provided information that will no doubt enable women fishers to intervene more effectively at community-level meetings. The process of sharing information, good practices, and experiences through forums such as the Women's Platform led to strengthening the collective voice of the participants. The workshop statement concisely put forth the needs of the fishing community at large and of women in fisheries in particular. It called for developing national guidelines for Small-scale fisheries and a national policy for women in fisheries, with wider consultation and participation of fishers and fishworkers at various levels. The Women in Fisheries platform would function as a joint forum of different groups with similar needs. It was unanimously decided that the platform would be called 'National Platform for Women in Small Scale Fisheries', NPWSSF in short, and that it would work towards strengthening the position of women in fisheries.

Gender equality is still a distant dream in the fisheries. Despite their enormous economic contributions to the harvest and postharvest sector, women's participation in decision making at the local, state, and national levels is still nascent. The workshop attempted to set right this imbalance and to build alliances and foster solidarity among women fishworkers for a more resilient tomorrow. ■



# Gender and marine plastic pollution

**Marine plastic pollution is a serious problem, with deeply gendered impacts that are yet to be adequately understood and addressed**

By **Veena N** (Veena.N.PhD@gmail.com), Researcher, Bengaluru, India and **Kyoko Kusakabe** (Kyokok@ait.asia), Professor, Gender and Development Studies, Asian Institute of Technology, Bangkok, Thailand

It is estimated that more than 8 million tons of plastic enter the oceans each year. Islands of plastic are now being reported by the oceans, while disintegrated micro plastics are permeating our food, our water and even our own bodies. Marine debris cost the economies of countries in the region US\$10.8 billion in 2015, of which the fishing and aquaculture industry lost US\$1.47 billion. The top six countries responsible for marine waste are in East Asia.

It is now a well-acknowledged fact that marine plastic is a cause for serious concern. Micro plastic in sea food, losses to world fisheries trade due to reduced catch and plastic in fishing nets, damage to boats, and damage to marine life have all been highlighted by researchers in the past couple of decades. The impact of marine plastic on fisheries has been highlighted by shocking images of turtles dying after being trapped in ghost nets or whales/dugongs dying due to plastics filling their stomach as they forage for food. Abandoned, lost, or otherwise discarded fishing gear, also called ghost nets, have been identified as a major problem, although most marine plastic originates from the land. While 90 percent of marine plastic originates from land, it is the fisheries and fishing communities that are devastated by its impact. In other words, only 10 percent of marine plastic come from fisheries-related activities; however, 100 percent of the damage caused by marine plastic is borne by coastal communities who are greatly affected both directly and indirectly by marine plastic debris and yet receive little or no attention in terms of compensation or redress. Further, there has been little research on the gendered impact of marine plastic on fishing communities.

Fishing communities incur four kinds of costs due to marine plastic: (i) repair and replacement of fishing gear damaged by marine litter; (ii) reduction in harvest and subsequently in income due to fishing gear and fishing grounds damaged by marine litter; (iii) welfare costs, including health impacts of dirty environment, lack of nutrition, and so on; and (iv) costs incurred due to loss of ecosystem services such as recreation and aesthetics. While there has been some estimation of the loss to fishing gear and loss of income, currently there is no way to quantify the welfare costs and costs due to loss of ecosystem services. Further, these effects of marine plastic on fisheries are deeply gendered.

This article aims to flag some key issues that need further research and analysis to understand the gendered impact of marine plastic on fishing

communities in three different dimensions: their fishing activities, post-harvest activities, and within the relations in the households.

Fishing communities across southeast Asia tend to practice gender-based division of labor in fisheries. Men go fishing in the ocean/sea, while women engage in gleaning, part-time fishing, and post-harvest activities. Men have exclusive access to high-value species whereas nearshore & shallow ecosystems are controlled by both women and men. Women contribute significantly to postharvest processing, and marketing.

Men face reduced incomes due to depletion of fish catch when marine plastic waste, especially near the shore, increases. This generates pressure on women to increase their contribution to the family income through other forms of livelihood. At the same time, women's income from gleaning in nearshore habitats including beaches, mangroves, estuaries, and intertidal zones, is also reduced due to nearshore plastic litter. The litter not only causes loss of income but also compromises the health and wellbeing of women gleaners.

When there is a fall in fish catch, women's work in postharvest activities also drops, reducing their incomes. Women's roles in postharvest however are seen as support roles; women are not considered as fishers and are not included in community decision-making. This excludes them from membership in fisher organizations, access to insurance, and loans and grants due to loss of fisheries resources, which are all aimed at men. Lack of recognition of women as fishers has led to the invisibility of women's involvement in fishing activities at the local, national and international levels, especially in policy making. Similarly, while men's losses in fisheries are accounted for, women's losses are not and there is little effort to compensate women for losses due to marine plastic, reduction in catch and other such disasters. Thus, we see that the impact of marine plastic on women's work in fisheries is not acknowledged since women themselves are not acknowledged as fishers and lack access to resources that are available to fishers.

Further, since women are not recognized as fishers, any marine plastic management project targeting fishers would tend to exclude women. This is a waste of opportunity, since women are highly aware of the damage caused by marine plastic and would be able to play a large role in the management of plastic as well as plastic debris. Women's knowledge is thus marginalized and forgotten.

It is critically important to ensure the involvement of affected women in marine plastic-related and fisheries-related policy making

The gender-based division of labor is also noted at the household level in fishing communities, which has an impact on women's workload, women's responsibilities, as well as women's health. Women in fishing households are responsible for the bulk of the reproductive or care work, including ensuring that the family is fed, irrespective of how much or little income the men bring in. Therefore, the burden of earning or borrowing money to feed the family falls on women. Men are not considered primary caregivers in the household, whether they are involved in fishing or in other income-generating activities.

Plastic debris near the shores and around fishing villages supports the growth of different pathogens which are harmful to human and marine life. People working or living in habitats polluted by marine litter face health problems, which in turn increases women's workload as they are the primary caregivers in the household. Additionally, women from fisheries communities who are working in polluted areas also face increased risk to their own health due to environmental pollution caused by marine debris. Further, loss of men's income tends to increase violence against women within the household and in the community, which causes additional physical and emotional burden for women. Women's care work in the household as well as women's work in fisheries are both undervalued at the household and community levels. Therefore, it may be concluded that the impact of marine plastic on women in fishing

communities is exacerbated due to rigid gender roles and social norms.

Due to the gender-based division of labor in fisheries and in the household and community, marine plastic debris has a differential impact on women and men in fishing communities. There is an urgent need to conduct field research on the specific impacts of marine plastic on every demographic within fishing communities across southeast Asia. Although there is considerable research on marine plastic and plastic pollution, significant gaps remain that limit evidence-based decision making.

Inclusion of women from fishing communities in decision-making processes and inclusion of women's voices and concerns in decision-making is critical for both women and for the environment. Given the low status of women in fishing communities, their gendered knowledge of marine resource management as well as environmental conservation is being lost. Marginalization of women leads to a loss of women's contribution to fisheries, conservation and mitigation efforts. It is critically important to ensure the involvement of affected women in marine plastic-related and fisheries-related policy making at the local, regional, national and international levels. Due to their physical location, social status and their economic status, women in fishing communities are not directly involved in policy making and hence policies do not address their concerns. There is a need to move policymaking from the capital to the village, from the centre to the margins. ■

## PROFILE

### Charmaine Daniels: Coping with the challenges of a fishing life

By Tracey Lee Dennis  
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Based in Ocean View, South Africa, Charmaine Daniels was introduced to fishing in the late 1980s by her then boyfriend, who is now her husband. She started off as a recreational fisher, but by the year 2000, Charmaine became a full-time fisher with an interim permit for west-coast rock lobster and snoek. At the same time, she also became involved in activism for Small-scale fishing rights and through, the non-governmental organization, the

after she filed an appeal, that she received the permit. In the next round, in 2013, however, only she obtained the right and not her husband. For Charmaine, this was a very challenging period because it meant providing for the family and supporting her husband with his appeal process.

The fisheries are a male dominated arena in which fisherwomen face many challenges on account of physical vulnerabilities. Charmaine, despite being a fisher for 35 years, still struggles to be taken seriously by her male peers who continue to see her value only in terms of the social reproductive activities that she contributes to her family and community.

Currently Charmaine is battling several challenges. In 2022, she lost her line fishing rights after failing to catch the full 18 tonne quota that was allocated to her. Having invested so much in terms of time and gear and other resources into her career, Charmaine is angry and worried about her family and disappointed that Government policies are depriving fisher women of their dignity and ability to provide for their families as fishers. ■

Masifundise Trust, she became involved in the 2006 Equality Court initiative for the establishment of a fishing rights policy.

From early on in her fishing career, Charmaine noticed the gender differentiation in the fishing industry. In 2005, both she and her husband appealed for fishing permits. Her application was rejected, and it was only



# Building solidarities

**A panel discussion during the 8th Global Symposium on Gender in Aquaculture and Fisheries on women's shared experiences in the fisheries highlighted key issues facing women in the sector today**

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The 8th Global Symposium on Gender in Aquaculture and Fisheries (GAF 8) was organized from 21<sup>st</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2022 by the Society of Fisheries Technologists (SOFTI) and the ICAR-Central Institute of Fisheries Technology (ICAR-CIFT) in the city of Kochi in the southern state of Kerala in India.

In the morning of the third day of the symposium, Wednesday, 23<sup>rd</sup> November, N. Venugopalan, Programme Manager, International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF) moderated a panel discussion titled 'Women in Fisheries: Shared Experiences'.

The session began with the screening of a documentary, Shescapes: Women in Small-scale Fisheries compiled by ICSF (<https://www.icsf.net/resources/shescapes-women-in-small-scale-fisheries/>) on the roles and experiences of women in fisheries in countries around the world. The film clearly illustrated that across

the globe, despite differences in society, culture, politics and economics, women's involvement in the fisheries follows a similar arc.

Following the screening, a panel discussion took place, chaired by N. Venugopalan. The panellists were Ms. Kyoko Kusakabe, Kyoko of Gender and Development Studies, Asian Institute of Technology, Thailand; Ms. Carmen Pedroza-Gutiérrez, National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), Mexico; Ms. Cecile Brugere, Independent Consultant, Aquaculture/Fisheries Economics, Gender and Sustainable Development, Soulfish Research & Consultancy, York, United Kingdom; Ms. Natalie Makhoul, Gender and Human Rights Specialist, Pacific-European Union Marine Partnership (PEUMP) Programme, Pacific Community, SPC, Fiji; Ms. Neha W. Qureshi, Senior Scientist, FEES Division, ICAR-CIFE, Mumbai, India and Ms. Tara Nair, Director (Research), Centre for Migration and Labour Solutions, Bengaluru, India.



Panel discussion. The way forward is to combine new capabilities with existing challenges, and create newer strategies, alliances, and solidarities

The discussion focussed on the following questions:

1. Does the discourse on women in fisheries explicitly recognize women's human rights, labour rights (including occupational safety and health), environmental rights (participation in resource management, climate change coping mechanisms, differential impact of disasters on women), and social impacts (including the role played by the community in ownership rights in near shore fisheries)?

2. Are women organized better now? Are organizations more attentive at the national and international levels to gender and women's issues?

3. What are the effects of increasing mobility and participation in multiple activities by women as fishers, traders, wage labourers in the processing industry; as farmers in aqua farms; as migrant workers; and as caregivers, among others?

4. What are the major changes in coping mechanisms for women?

5. What is the legislative and policy support for women at the national and international level? Is there data available about women's employment and participation in fisheries?

6. Empowerment and agency of women is important for community development. What is the nature of progress made in this regard? What is the nature of resistance to these changes?

Natalie Makhoul, representing the Pacific-European Union Marine Partnership programme, in her opening remarks stated that her work centred around gender and human rights, was undergirded by a human rights-based approach. The attempt, she said, is to understand how Fisheries Acts as well as coastal fisheries- and aquaculture-related policies and legislation have included the issues of gender and human rights. The research on this is helping to shift the discourse on human rights into the gender space and to look at gender equality from a human rights lens. She stated that there is substantial progress to be made in the quest to unite gender and human rights and they should not be regarded as separate concepts. She added that international debates around the SSF Guidelines have been helpful in carrying forward the debate.

The next speaker, Kyoko Kusakabe, in her opening remarks raised four points in relation to gender and fisheries. The first, she stated, is that women are excluded from the definition of fisheries.

The second point she made was that while undertaking gender analysis of work in the fisheries, we need to include not only post-harvest but also household work and

non-fishing activities. Women often have to undertake non-fishing activities such as being hired out as manual labour or doing factory work to supplement the volatile nature of fisheries income. Women's work in fisheries, for instance, fish processing, could be done in factories or at home. Factory work is regulated by labour laws, while home based work in fisheries is often a community activity and allows greater flexibility in division of labour, in turn allowing the fishers to adjust to risks better. She pointed out that for instance, in Thailand, in households where men and women are not restricted to only fishing, but are flexible, families are better able to adjust to risks and shocks, which is why it is very important that the division of labour in the house be taken into consideration.

Kyoko Kusakabe's third point was about the large and persistent gender wage gap in the sector, which is usually defended on the grounds that women's work is different from that of men, who do the hard work. This explanation, Kyoko Kusakabe pointed out, implicitly ignores women's skills. Their work is seen as merely extension of household work and is therefore low paid. There has to be a demand for Minimum Wage, and improved working conditions in the post-harvest work of women in fisheries. Further, it is important to both recognise women's skills and reskill them, training them to be able to stay on in the sector more securely.

Her final point was about women's leadership and its linkage with migration. In communities in South-east Asia, returning migrant women have much greater levels of knowledge, confidence, and articulation, and consequently, the potential to be good women leaders at work and in the community.

The next speaker, Cecile Brugere, chose to focus on the questions on women's rights and organisation. She began by mentioning that there is a statue of Emmeline Pankhurst, who led the suffragette movement in the second half of the 1800s, in the city centre in Manchester. The last time she saw that statue, said Cecile Brugere, someone had placed in its hand a leaflet supporting the women of Iran in their current struggle. Nearly a hundred and fifty years separated the suffragette movement in the UK and the protests in Iran; however, she pointed out, even today civil disobedience is needed in many parts of the world for women to claim their basic rights and freedoms. Connecting the dots, she asked if civil disobedience might be required in the fisheries and aquaculture sector today for women's rights to be respected. Women's rights are hardly fulfilled in these sectors – the right to decent work is rarely available whether among fish vendors of India; on the factory floors in processing factories in Chile; or in seaweed plots in Zanzibar. Advances in women's



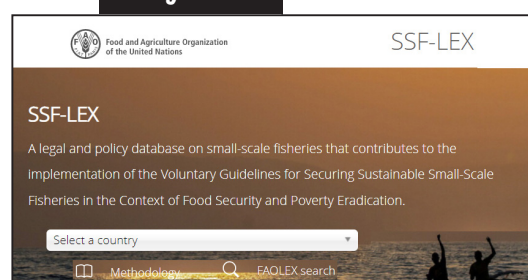
empowerment are mostly at an individual personal level. Human rights are however much larger than the rights of individuals alone.

According to Cecile Brugere, another factor contributing to the lack of respect of human and women's rights, in particular, in fisheries and aquaculture, is systemic and structural bias against the fulfilment of women's rights, which makes it difficult to change stereotypes and false constructs about women. To change this state of affairs, equality and equity between men and women need to be mainstreamed in policies, in tenures, and in modes of access to resources. Greater organisation of women, greater voice, agency, and the recognition of women as agents of change can also help.

Elaborating on the question of women organizing for change, Cecile Brugere stated that organisations can take various forms and shapes. They can be formal or informal, depending on the purpose and the shared objective of the members. They can range from unions to self-help groups. She shared inspiring examples of women organizing in Africa, where there are strong local-level, professional organisations of fishers that are well connected with powerful regional organisations representing the interests

of Small-scale fishers and women, which, in turn, are linked to national-level organisations. Such organisations, for example the Confédération Africaine des Organisations de Pêche (CAOPA) in West Africa, CAOPA in West Africa, and ICSF at the global level, were very influential in the drafting of the SSF Guidelines, as a result of which, the SSF Guidelines are very strong on gender equality and equity issues. She pointed out that regional organisations like Fishnet, the African women fish processors and traders' network, are gradually becoming more and more influential. They have established chapters in several countries. In Tanzania, the Tanzania Women Fishworkers association (TWoFA), established in 2019, recently gained recognition at the policy level with the government. These, said Cecile Brugere, represent the power of organisations but organisations are also not a panacea. Group dynamics are difficult and creating those units at ground level can be tricky. She mentioned the new FAO guide on mapping women's organisations which she felt was an excellent practical tool to better understand how networks of organisations work, what their dynamics are, and how they can influence power.

### What's New, Webby?




By **Ahana Lakshmi**  
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## SSF-LEX

Most countries are signatory to a host of international Conventions, and committed to various programmes and protocols at the national, regional and global level. Trying to extract relevant country-level information related to policy and legislation in the context of fisheries, especially the Small-scale sector, can be quite an effort as volumes of scattered material have to be sifted through. For example, did you know that currently only 18 countries have national policies/legislation mentioning the SSF Guidelines?

It is precisely this context that makes the legal and policy database on Small-scale fisheries, SSF-LEX, an important contribution to the implementation of the SSF Guidelines. It contains information distilled from the FAOLEX database with a menu specially customised for the SSF Guidelines. The Home Page contains links not only to the SSF Guidelines but also to two very useful guides and a five-lesson e-learning course on legal and policy considerations.

The database has country-wise information on international and regional commitments, constitutional provisions, institutional arrangements, definitions of Small-scale fisheries and related terms, national legislations and policies, and national regulatory frameworks. Clicking on the national regulatory framework for a specific country expands a drop-down list containing the headings of the six chapters of the SSF Guidelines, each linked to the country-specific policies and legislations pertaining to that chapter. Although the information is limited to what is available on the FAOLEX database, it is still very useful. Clicking the 'Download Profile' link against a country generates a pdf document with all the country-specific information organized under different heads with live links leading to FAOLEX.

A useful feature is the option to compare up to three countries at a time based on selected parameters. Currently this is available only for five African countries but when this feature is expanded to include all countries, it would be of great value especially for the purpose of advocacy and lobbying. For more information: SSF-LEX: <https://ssflex.fao.org/> 

The next speaker, Neha Qureshi, in her opening remarks focused on common property resources. She pointed out that in India, there is a huge potential for water resources, across the aqua climatic zones – an inland sector, a marine sector, and a huge coastline. However, issues of common property resources have not been adequately analysed from a gender perspective. There are multi-institutional and multi-community conflicts around water resources, and fisherwomen are often the worst hit in these conflicts.

Neha Qureshi also brought up the example of Maharashtra, where in areas like Uran, Thane and Raigad, there are inter-sectional conflicts between tribal women and traditional fishermen. Tribal women face several access restrictions since they are not considered traditional fishers. This means that they have to detour and travel longer distances to access markets and sell their fish, which is their only source of livelihood. Further, in the case of lakes, said Neha Qureshi who hails from the Kashmir, the lake-rich, northernmost state of India, and has worked on issues related to the Himalayan lakes, there are multiple and diverse economic interests: fishers, vegetable growers, tourism and many others, each with a vested interest in a particular water body or set of water bodies. In this competition for resource access, fishers, primarily women fishers, get affected.

Neha Qureshi also brought up the need to formalize customary rights. She cited the example of women fish vendors in coastal

communities, whose right to vend fish in streets and other public spaces, constitutes a grey area of legality, making them vulnerable to exploitation by policemen and others in the community. She pointed out that there have been hardly any concerted efforts to formalize the customary rights of fishers and that it should be possible to use Geographical Information Systems (GIS)-based technologies to map fishing hamlets and coastal processing sites traditionally used by women in order to formalise the customary rights of fishing communities. Neha Qureshi noted, in this context, that formalizing customary rights in the case of the inland fisheries sector represents a challenge, due to the diversity and heterogeneity of communities and use patterns. However, she concluded by pointing out that many inland fisheries were organized into cooperatives, and that the Department of Fisheries could play an important role by strengthening these cooperatives and creating awareness to enable the empowerment of women fishers.

The next speaker, Tara Nair, whose work is focused on issues of migration and labour, started by pointing out the need to locate enquiries around gender within the larger development discourse, whether in India or elsewhere in the world. The emerging global debate is concerned with what exactly development means for those engaged primary activities like fisheries or farming. There are derived regional debates that look at local development trajectories and local moral codes and schemes. All these, said

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The film, *Shescapes: Women in Small-scale Fisheries* is available at: <https://www.icsf.net/resources/unseen-faces-unheard-voices-women-and-aquaculture-purba-medinipur-west-bengal/> The film clearly illustrated that across the globe, despite differences in society, culture, politics and economics, women's involvement in the fisheries follows a similar arc



Tara Nair, impact the position of women. She pointed out that because we are focused on issues of women within the sector, in particular, on gender discrimination within the sector, our approach tends to become sectoral. However, it is important that these issues be examined within the larger national and global perspective. The State, said Tara Nair, associates development with modernization, which means mechanised and export-oriented fisheries and not artisanal and Small-scale fisheries. That creates the locus of large sets of vulnerabilities. We need to examine, she said, the whole question of blue revolution or port-led industrialisation and infrastructure development, and as feminist scholars, to develop a larger critique.

The second issue that Tara Nair talked about concerned the informal nature of production processes – an area where gross neglect of labour laws occurs. ‘Whether fisheries or the garments sector in Bangladesh, the story is not going to be very different,’ said Tara Nair, adding that this suggested the possibility of alliances of women workers across sectors. She also pointed out the need to historically locate women’s struggles in a time trajectory. The eighties, she said, were focused on trying to get women’s rights recognised through street protests and civil rights movements. The nineties involved organising, mobilizing, and trying out various models of organization: cooperatives; self-help groups; mutually aided cooperatives. The 2000s witnessed the onslaught of a new development paradigm. Such dynamics demand that old models and solutions be modified and redefined. Tara Nair talked about the contradictions building up within cooperatives in India, which worked quite well in an earlier time but are facing the growing pressure of commercialization today.

Tara Nair concluded by pointing out that change is not one directional. Young women are increasingly making inroads into male-dominated business domains because they are more educated, more aware, and more business- and technology-savvy today. The way forward is to combine new capabilities with existing challenges and create newer strategies, alliances, and solidarities.

The last speaker, Carmen Pedroza, agreed with many of the points raised by previous panellists. She pointed out that one of the problems is that women in fisheries and many other economic activities are regarded as the newcomers. ‘This insight comes from my work with fishing communities,’ said Carmen Pedroza, ‘The question we are asked is what are we women doing in these males dominated activities?’

She pointed out that since Small-scale fisheries in many parts of the world are in the

informal sector, women are impacted in various ways by informality and poverty. So, the lens required to examine these issues is not only one of gender and power but also of development and economic structure.

Many problems that women have, said Carmen Pedroza, are linked to access to scarce resources, markets, and prices. These problems are not static. In Mexico, she pointed out, women in sea cucumber fishery started with abundant resources, till it became a high value species, and the nature of the problem changed. With high incomes came competition from men and also resource scarcity because the sea cucumber fishery was overexploited. Given the rapidly changing scenario, said Carmen Pedroza, women have to invent different coping strategies to reorganise the fishery and deal with the shift from abundance to scarcity because, at the end of the day, they are the ones who have to feed the family.

Drawing attention to the problems of inland fisheries, Carmen Pedroza, pointed out that most of the research and attention is focused on discussing the marine fisheries sector. However, women in inland fisheries are worse off because they deal with lower value species; therefore, they earn lower incomes, have greater levels of poverty, and poor access to water, to resources, and to market structures. The informality and associated problems are even worse in inland fisheries than in marine fisheries, she concluded.

After the panellists made their opening remarks, questions were invited from the audience.

The first question was about whether at some future date, women might overcome social taboos to own boats and engage in fishing.

Natalie Makhoul responded by stating that while binary gender stereotypes such as ‘Men fish and women are in post-harvest,’ prevail, the GAF 8 symposium itself demonstrated that this is not always the case. She pointed out a case of a woman participant from the Cook Islands who engages in spear fishing – a type of fishing that is male dominated and tabooed for women in the cultural context in Polynesia. Gender, said Natalie Makhoul, is a social construct. It is a concept that is being challenged daily and more so due to out-migration. Demographic changes have put women into positions especially in the rural areas where they have to go out on boats, which was not always the case, and sometimes considered culturally inappropriate.

Kyoko Kusakabe added that in Thailand, there are no taboos regarding women owning boats – women do own boats and often hire people to run them. Regarding the gender division of labour, she pointed out that the solution did not lie in swapping roles, that is, in women starting to fish and men doing fish

processing: 'What we should really be looking at is that if fishing is a dangerous occupation, we should improve the safety. Similarly, in processing if the wages are so low, how can we improve wages? Then more men would also be interested to join, and women would also enjoy better status.'

The next question was about alternative forms of organizing for women's empowerment and social change.

Terming this 'an unfinished agenda', Tara Nair pointed out that the experience of cooperatives in India shows that it is not enough to create only a structure or a form; what is needed is continuing institutional support and enabling conditions in terms of loans, capital, and other resources so that the structure can develop and become viable.

Another question was about the role of culture and tradition: If gender barriers are rooted in culture and tradition, what alternatives are possible? In response, several reflections and suggestions were offered including the need for women in fisheries to move from informalisation to formalisation and the need for education as well as capacity and leadership skills building.

N. Venugopalan concluded the session by thanking the panellists and audience. He thanked the staff of ICAR-CIFT for their support, and also thanked certain individuals, particularly Jain and Parimal, for shooting the proceedings and Vibhav for excellent sound support. He finally thanked the organizers of GAF8 for organizing the symposium and making the panel discussion possible. ■



## Milestones

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### COP15 – A win for women

The CBD COP15 (Fifteenth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity) offers a historic win for women all across the globe with a stand alone target on gender equality, a Gender Plan of Action supporting the gender responsive implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) and a monitoring framework for the GBF with indicators assessing gender responsiveness in implementation.

Considering the fact that the disproportional brunt of biodiversity loss is felt by women because of gender disparities and differentiated gender needs and roles, the CBD Women's Caucus, Civil Society organizations, women's organizations and the Indigenous people fought hard during the two-week long negotiations to integrate a gender agenda to the forefront of the COP15. The results of these negotiations are quite transformative. The target 23 of the GBF, *'Ensure gender equality in the implementation of the framework through a gender-responsive approach where all women and girls have equal opportunity and capacity to contribute to the three objectives of the Convention, including by recognizing their equal rights and access to land and natural resources and their full, equitable, meaningful and informed participation and leadership at all levels of action, engagement, policy and decision-*

*making related to biodiversity'* incorporates aspects of access, opportunity and participation and can be treated as a significant step towards equity, equality and justice.

Likewise, the Gender Plan of Action with action-oriented objectives and implementation timelines and the monitoring framework for GBF with gender specific indicators is expected to play a key role in informing gender responsive policies at the national level. The gender specific outputs of the COP15 are anticipated to strengthen CBD contributions to global gender equality goals; however, the aspirational nature of these instruments raises concern over their translation to concrete actions. Moreover, although the Gender Plan of Action has reference to resource allocations for gender initiatives and gender responsive budgeting, the GBF is silent about resource allocation towards gender responsive initiatives. Lack of resources has been pointed as a major barricade towards the implementation of the GBF constantly at the COP15, and the prioritization of gender specific initiatives in such a context of financial constrain is dubious. In addition to that the dissent of parties to adopt the language on 'women in all their diversity and sexual orientation' took back the negotiations by decades in time and has to be viewed as a lost opportunity towards a milestone. ■

# Building back better

## Building back better from COVID-19 while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

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The Women's Major Group released the 2022 High Level Political Forum Position Paper titled 'Building back better from COVID-19 while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development' with inputs from over 70 Women's Major group members. Including intersectional analysis by feminists and gender equality activists worldwide, the position paper reviews the available data, highlights systemic barriers and presents recommendations for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and building a just recovery and feminist response to the pandemic.

The end of Decade of Action for the Sustainable Development Goals is used as a moment to reflect on the process of rebuilding from COVID-19 by abandoning austerity, competition, and extractivist, exploitative, and patriarchal systems, and replacing them with feminist decolonial ethics of care, equality and abundance. The report includes recommendations for each of the Sustainable

Development Goals as well as cross-cutting recommendations based on a vision of a just and equitable world.

The report recommends a human rights-based and gender transformative approach to the implementation of all aspects of the 2030 Agenda and the response to the COVID-19 pandemic and its related crises. Some SDGs relevant to fisheries are summarised below.

*Sustainable Development Goal 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere*

An additional 75 - 95 million people will be living in poverty as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and additional crises caused by inflation and the conflict in Ukraine. In all, 388 million women and girls will live in poverty in 2022, but the number could be as high as 446 million in a 'high damage' scenario. Only 13 percent of the social protection and labor market measures enacted by governments during COVID crisis targeted women's economic security and only 11 percent provided support for rising unpaid care demands.

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The position paper reviews the available data, highlights systemic barriers and presents recommendations for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and building a just recovery and feminist response to the pandemic



Recommendations include adequate finance to create comprehensive, gender-transformative social protection systems targeted to the most vulnerable, especially for services needed by women, girls, and gender-diverse people. Remove discrimination against gender-diverse, gender non-conforming, and non-binary people in the design and accessibility of social protection programs.

*Sustainable Development Goal 2: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture*

Women are responsible for half of the world's food production but own less than 20 percent of land worldwide. Women are more likely to report food insecurity than men. COVID-19 has exacerbated the global gender gap in food insecurity from 6 percent in 2019 to 10 percent in 2020.

Though access to nutritious food is a basic human right with significant age, gender, race, caste, and class dimensions, the corporate capture of the food systems and global trade agreements strengthen structural factors such as climate change, inequality, land degradation and land grabbing, and militarism and conflict, to weaken food sovereignty, access to cultural and traditional crops and farming practices, land rights, and, ultimately, increase hunger and malnutrition.

Recommendations on nutrition, agricultural and food systems and land rights have been documented. Establishing and funding gender and age-responsive policies for agroecology, as well as fishery in the coastal regions, including ensuring biodiversity of seeds and plants, and control and ownership of land, water, and other resources.

*Sustainable Development Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls*

Women's land rights do not have protection through legal frameworks in 46 percent of the countries reporting on the issue. Women make up the majority of workers in the informal sector, where they face exploitation in terms of wages and job security, workplace safety, social protection, gender-based harassment and violence. Globally, women do three times as much unpaid care and domestic work as men while adolescent girls perform significantly more domestic work than boys.

Structural barriers to progress in SDG 5 and gendered dimensions include gender-based violence, harmful cultural practices, lack of sexual and reproductive rights and lack of access to resources. The pandemic has exacerbated existing inequalities that women and girls face due to increased sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), lack of mobility, disruption of social and protective measures, and reduced access to services.

Recommendations include measures to eliminate GBV and harmful practices at the national and sub-national level, including support services for women facing GBV and training for medical, law enforcement and judicial officials. Further, recommendations were also included for sexual and reproductive rights, financing for gender equality, countering anti-gender backlash and access to services and resources which could ensure economic justice for women, including their right to control, own, pass on, and inherit property.

Recommendations also look at remedying women's increased unpaid work load due to the COVID crisis and suggests that governments recognize the critical role of unpaid care and domestic work in sustaining families, communities, and the economy, and highlights the need to make carework a collective responsibility supported by adequate social protection for all unpaid caregivers, in particular parents. The paper also demands that unpaid care and domestic work be reduced through the development of accessible and affordable public infrastructure and services (like water and sanitation, energy, healthcare, transportation, care, etc.). The paper recommends the promotion of redistribution of unpaid care and domestic work between women and men, between families, and the rest of society. Finally, the paper recommends that governments create working conditions in the formal and informal economy that guarantee equal pay and social security, workplace safety, and job security. Ratify and implement ILO Fundamental Conventions, as well as ILO Conventions C177, C189, and C190.

*Sustainable Development Goal 8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all*

It was noted that partnered women living with children were the most likely to lose their jobs as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and saw the largest drop in paid working hours. This reveals the structural barriers are reinforced and strengthened during the COVID crisis and highlighted the need for a more sustainable economy that works for both people and the planet. Trade policies, dispute settlement provisions, unfair tax agreements, as well as tax flight restrict governments' fiscal capacities and reduce the possibility of pro-poor policies that could benefit their populations, especially women and girls. Further, women's unpaid care and domestic work limits their time to pursue education, economic, or leisure opportunities, and impacts on their physical and mental health and well-being. Though domestic workers' reproductive care enables economies to function smoothly, they mostly work without benefits or access to social protection programs. ILO

Convention 189 guarantees domestic workers' rights to minimum wage, rest, and to choose their own residence. However, the Convention is insufficiently ratified and incorporated into domestic law to protect domestic workers.

Recommendations for this SDG include ratification and implementation of ILO Conventions C177, 189 and 190 on Home Work, Domestic Work, and Violence and Harassment in the World of Work at national and sub-national levels. They also recommend that governments incorporate care work as formal work, and expand social protection coverage to care workers.

*Sustainable Development Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development*

The document has noted that fisheries and aquaculture work is largely informal and workers, especially women, lack access to social protection programs. A 100-150 percent rise in acidity by the end of this century has been projected which will affect half of all marine life. Structural barriers such as high degrees of informal work and high dependence on natural resources enhanced the vulnerability of people engaged in fisheries and aquaculture at all levels (in both pre- and post-harvest fish supply chain) to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Lockdowns of all kinds, travel restrictions and the resultant isolation severely impacted migrant workers, who were therefore unable to work and/or unable to return home, and were hence at high risk of falling into debt, and seeking unsafe means of travel. Though small farmers and artisanal fishers, many of whom are women, employ more sustainable practices, it is the large corporates which follow unsustainable practices that receive favor from government policies in the form of subsidies, tax breaks and so on. Women in fisheries also lack recognition for the paid and unpaid labor they are involved in towards sustaining the fisheries and fishing communities, and hence, they have to demand the right to participate in decision making and access to resources. Women fishers in the Pacific have demanded increased access to financing, capacity building, and technical assistance for women in Small-scale fishing communities, including participation and leadership in the management of Small-scale and artisanal fisheries based on recognition and protection of access rights to marine resources. Finally, within the context of sustainable fisheries management, they have demanded increased access to sustainable and fair-trade markets to improve the socio-economic situation of fishers and fish workers.

The recommendations are aimed at governments at the national and sub-national levels and may be divided into two categories: climate change and participation and leadership.


#### Recommendations on Climate change

- ❖ Address and reduce all maritime sources of Green House Gases (GHG), end fossil fuel subsidies in maritime transport and fisheries that contribute to overfishing, destructive fishing and Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing, end bottom trawling and other activities disturbing carbon and methane stored in the seafloor, no energy and traffic turn in the north at the expense of marine biodiversity and food security in the south. Stop seabed mining!
- ❖ Exhaust all means available to help fragile marine systems and vulnerable coastal communities to adapt to irreversible climate change.
- ❖ Recognize and compensate for loss of coral reefs and marine biodiversity and the foregone goods and services to associated coastal communities.
- ❖ Raise ambition to keep the global temperature rise this century well below 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, slow down the rate of change, and become carbon negative well before 2050 in order to save coral reefs, promote biodiversity integrity and protect and enhance marine sinks and reservoirs.
- ❖ Urgently develop and support actions oriented toward adaptation actions and strategies specifically directed to fisher women and the girls and women whose livelihoods are impacted by climate change and the health of the oceans.
- ❖ Highlight the importance of ecosystem adaptation especially focusing on marine and coastal ecosystems and their importance for livelihoods.

#### Recommendations on Participation and leadership

- ❖ Promote sustainable management of coastal and marine resources and women and girls' participation in the blue economy, climate adaptation, and mitigation strategies.
- ❖ Promote the recognition of local community inputs in all ocean conservation actions and ensure the full and meaningful participation of women and girls in all their diversity.
- ❖ Recognize the specific risks, knowledge, commitment and rights of women, Indigenous Peoples, Small-scale fishers and associated poor communities from coastal areas, especially in tropical and Arctic regions at the frontline of the ocean-climate-biodiversity emergency.

Visit the following link to read and download the full position paper:

<https://womensmajorgroup.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/WMG-HLPF-2021-Sectoral-Position-Paper-Full-1.pdf> 

## FILM

### The Unseen Faces, Unheard Voices: Women and Aquaculture (English and Bengali with English subtitles; 21mins 37 secs)

A film by the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF) Trust

By **Sokha Eng** (Sokha. Eng001@umb.edu),  
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‘We Bengalis like rice and fish the most as a meal. We can’t live without fish and rice. It is only after eating them that we feel satisfied’. Fish and rice are a vital part of the daily diet of Bengali communities. The documentary ‘The Unseen Face, Unheard Voice: Women and Aquaculture’ shows the impacts of aquacultural practices on the well-being of women in rural communities in West Bengal, India. The film highlights women’s reliance on fresh water in their backyard ponds for their household uses (such as washing, cleaning, and watering vegetables), on the small fish in these ponds as a source of nutrition, and on locally grown rice and vegetables in their diet. However, the growing

practice of fish culture has limited women’s access to these resources. Small sized fish is less available as the farming of larger fish, which is often cooked and served to men first in the family, is becoming the norm.

In order to meet the demand for fish and shrimp, the government of West Bengal encouraged aquaculture practices through different initiatives. The local communities started to convert their agricultural lands to freshwater fishponds. The practice changed land use and reduced employment opportunities for women in agriculture. The film highlights the inequality of access to employment in aquaculture between men and women. While the practice of fish culture has created more jobs in the fishponds, the employment typically benefits men, not women. The pond owners employ men

to fix nets, feed and administer fish medicine. A woman cannot work with a group of men. The gender division of labor and restrictive social norms prevent women from accessing the benefits of the Government’s aquacultural initiatives.

Small farmer women with limited resources and lands take far longer to raise fish as compared to big farmers with large ponds. When there are floods, small farmers, many of whom have taken loans or leased their lands to invest in aquaculture, fall into a debt trap. The entry of shrimp processing plants into areas close to communities has opened up jobs for many women; however, they have had to contend with workplace abuse and harassment rampant in these jobs.

As more and more land previously used to grow rice and vegetables is now dedicated to shrimp and spawn ponds, the quality of land is deteriorating. The use of modern fertilizers damages both land and water. Land available for agriculture is shrinking; together with the degradation of land quality, this has resulted in rice shortages, and consequently, the price of rice, now imported from outside the state, has been steadily rising. Moreover, there is less fresh water available for household use and women have to travel long distances to fetch water.

The film also highlights a government initiative which supports women’s self-help groups by providing training on how to manage ponds, including cleaning, checking water quality, and harvesting fish. The film highlights the success stories of women entrepreneurs in fish culture. However, all farm owners tend to employ male workers and the success of women entrepreneurs does not necessarily translate to employment benefits for other women.

The documentary brings out the complex reality of women’s lives and the impact of government’s initiatives on their well-being. It serves to remind policymakers and relevant stakeholders how important it is to keep gender and inequality perspectives at the heart of policy making to ensure the well-being of local communities.

To view the documentary, please visit:

<https://www.icsf.net/resources/unseen-faces-unheard-voices-women-and-aquaculture-purba-medinipur-west-bengal/>



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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  
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