

# **ICSF Gender Policy**

## **(ICSF Gender and Women in Fisheries perspective and strategy in policy and practice)**

### **1. Preface**

Since its inception in 1986, the ICSF has focused strongly on 'women in fisheries' and undertaken research, information dissemination, training and policy advocacy to promote the rights of women in the context of the struggle for a development that is based on respect for nature, human rights and social justice for women and men, girls and boys.

Approaches to 'women in fisheries' have shifted over the decades since the ICSF was established. Different trends in the discourse on women's oppression and their struggles for the elimination of discrimination on grounds of gender are widely apparent. The global discourse on development has influenced the approach of civil society and donors towards women's rights and gender relations, giving emphasis to different approaches and aspects at various times.

This document outlines ICSF's perspective, strategy and practice in working to change the persistent discrimination and oppression of women in fisheries. Though this document is being referred to as a 'Gender Policy', in reality it encompasses our perspective and strategies, attempting to capture the complexity of social relations which shape women and men's experiences in fisheries. We therefore prefer using the title "*ICSF Gender and Women in Fisheries perspective and strategy in policy and practice*"

ICSF has documented its perspective and strategy on addressing gender relations in a slightly different form than that adopted by many organisations. Our intention has been to enable ICSF's social and civil society partners to engage with ICSF's perspective, strategy and practice more readily. Towards this end ICSF is committed to reflecting on and adapting its approach towards gender relations and women in fisheries as it learns and interacts with other social partners and refines its perspective in response to changing circumstances.

### **2. ICSF's gender perspective**

From its beginning, the ICSF has been conscious of the role that women play in the family, community, and the wider society and the fact that this substantial contribution is largely unrecognized and unrewarded. While there may be slight variations in this role, there are broad similarities across regions and cultures. Drawing on its international membership, ICSF began collating information on the experiences of women in fisheries in the 1990s. This information pointed to the patriarchal values shaping relations between men and women, the roles that both played in their households, communities and fisheries as well as the ways in which unequal class, ethnicity and other social relations shaped gender relations in different local and regional contexts. Common to the experiences of women around the world was the exploitative approach to nature and development that was related to the growing capitalist, patriarchal, global political economy of fisheries.

It is this knowledge that has helped us in the ICSF develop what we have called a feminist perspective in fisheries, a perspective which is anti-patriarchal and focuses on respect for life and livelihood, simultaneously contributing to the sustainable use of natural resources. Such a perspective is based on care the natural resource and the well being of the people that depend on these resources for their life and livelihood. This is what we call a nurture approach in fisheries. Such fisheries development gives importance to the work of **both** men and women depending on the sexual division of labour that has evolved in each community. In many contexts, where men and

women work together – often complementary to each other - the returns to the household are both in cash and kind – leading to nutrition, food security and social development. Modern fisheries development, which is based on the model of commoditisation, industrialisation and privatisation, threatens to irreparably deplete the natural resources but also affect the life and livelihood of the communities that depend there upon.

We developed this concept of the ‘nurture approach in fisheries’ in the early 1990s through our work on the impact of globalisation and development on women and men in fishing communities. More recently we have integrated this ‘nurture approach to fisheries’ with our understanding of a ‘transformative’ and ‘human rights-based’ approach to fisheries. Foundational to this perspective and approach is a vision that all human beings have the right to dignity and respect and that nature should be respected. All human beings have the right to life and livelihoods. A feminist approach to fisheries seeks to understand how unequal social and economic relations undermine women’s and men’s lives and livelihoods and impact nature in destructive, unsustainable ways. It seeks to understand how unequal relations on the basis of gender, class, and ethnicity define approaches to nature and to human development as a whole. It seeks to change and transform not only the social relations that lead to women being oppressed on the basis of their gender, but also the unequal social relations that lead to the unsustainable exploitation of nature, to poverty, food insecurity and social inequality.

The terms used to implement to ICSF’s perspective have differed from country to country as in some regions the term feminist is regarded as a western imposition. However, the common element in the approach to all ICSF-related work has been the highlighting of patriarchal practices that structure the relations between men and women.

### **3. Developing our perspective and strategy for women in fisheries and gender relations**

Every four years ICSF members together with the Secretariat have engaged in extensive internal reflection, which then informed ICSF’s programme planning for the following four years. In addition, the ICSF had regularly engaged external consultants for support in evaluating its work. In 1998, ICSF engaged an external consultant to support the organisation in evaluating its Women in Fisheries programmes and again in 2005 the organisation reflected on its approach to working with ‘women in fisheries’. There were several workshops during the decade. In 2010, ICSF held an international workshop with women fishworkers and their supporters, including academics, FWOs, and international agencies. The title of the workshop was “Recasting the net: defining a gender agenda for sustaining life and livelihoods in fishing communities”, As part of the preparation of this international workshop, ICSF organized regional studies and workshops with women of fishing communities. It also commissioned a review of the position of ‘women in fisheries’ globally. This position paper was shared with participants and debated extensively before finalisation. It highlighted the significant shifts and trends in approaches to women and gender issues in general within the field of fisheries development. Most notably, it critiqued the dominant approaches of Women in Development (WID), Gender and Development (GAD), and Gender Mainstreaming for their failure to adequately analyse and understand the way in which gender relations intersect with other exploitative social and economic relations, and to develop a strategy that tackled the whole. ‘Gender mainstreaming’ has become part of the neoliberal development agenda, failing to adequately transform the conditions that underpin global social inequities. The ICSF had arrived at this conclusion already in the 1990s. Drawing on the insights from the various regional studies and workshops, the 2010 position paper, and the extensive discussions that took place at the international workshop, the participants developed a ‘shared gender agenda’ (<http://wifworkshop.icsf.net/en/page/623-Shared%20Gender%20Agenda.html>).

The shared gender agenda of 2010 presented an integrated, multi-pronged perspective underpinned

by an understanding of the social relations that intersect in complex ways, at different levels and in different social spaces. It argued that women are an integral part of small-scale fisheries and fishing communities, and yet that their work largely continues to be invisible. Discrimination was held to cut across manifold aspects of women's lives - their labour, their sexuality and their fertility - undermining their dignity and sense of self worth. Central to this was an understanding that women's labour sustains the existing model of development, which is based on the unsustainable extraction of natural resources. The agenda recognised the need to ensure that all work of women should be valued equally to men, throughout the value chain, including reproductive work. Towards this end the shared gender agenda committed to working at the level of households and communities, fishworker organisations, civil society organisations, research organisations, government and international organisations, in order to target the strategic needs of women as well as challenge the existing model of development. It committed to integrating "an understanding of gender relations that shape fisheries policies at various levels towards sustaining life and livelihoods in fishing."

The ICSF and the participants at the workshop committed to taking this shared gender agenda forward and to ensure that this agenda was widely disseminated and implemented at all levels. In particular, the ICSF committed to ensuring that this perspective was included in an international instrument on small-scale fisheries. This instrument, entitled the 'Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication' (SSF Guidelines) was endorsed by the 31<sup>st</sup> session of the Committee on Fisheries (COFI) in Rome in June 2014.

This shared gender agenda, developed in partnership with ICSF's international civil society partners such as WFFP, WFF and other fishworker organisations, thus confirmed the organisation's earlier approach and strategy towards women in fisheries: the ICSF is committed to an integrated approach that seeks to promote social justice for small-scale fishing communities, women and men living in these communities, and thereby to eliminate all forms of social oppression and inequities that are based on unequal social relations. To this end ICSF's work with women in fisheries is anti-patriarchal, it aims to raise awareness of and advocate for the elimination of unequal gender relations that are exploitative of women, men and nature and that undermine rights to life, to respect and to dignity. It therefore extends beyond an approach of 'gender mainstreaming' and 'gender policy'.

The ICSF members and the Secretariat drew on this approach at the ICSF General Body meeting that followed in 2010, and that developed the organisation's overall mission. In addition, members agreed to continue to integrate the understanding of gender relations as a cross-cutting theme in all programme work, whilst also continuing with a specific 'women in fisheries' programme. The strategy was therefore two pronged: mainstreaming understanding of gender relations and working with men and women for social transformation throughout all ICSF's programmes, and also undertaking specific programmes that focused on women's empowerment. In this way ICSF chose to highlight the fact that 'gender' and 'women' are not synonymous, but underscored an understanding that transforming gender relations requires a multi-pronged strategy.

The ICSF subsequently undertook a range of activities towards implementing the shared gender agenda, most notably, advocating actively for the SSF Guidelines to include a human rights-based approach that addressed all social inequality including women's rights.. Towards this end, ICSF established an internal Women in Fisheries (WIF) Working Group, which undertook detailed analyses of the proposals emanating from fishworker organisations. The (WIF Working Group developed a submission for the CSO group, which has been used extensively to inform the submissions from all the international fishworker groups. The ICSF also contracted the expertise of a member of the WIF Working Group to undertake an analysis of the draft text of the SSF

Guidelines and to assist in the negotiations for a final text. Central to this process was the recognition that much of the language in the draft text was infused with neoliberalist thought, and hence whilst many participants professed a commitment to a human rights-based' approach, the understanding thereof differed amongst organisations. The ICSF played a leading role in helping the CSO platform to lobby for the integration of references to address gender inequality throughout the text as well as in the section specifically devoted to the topic(though ICSF had actually lobbied against a separate chapter on gender equality, because gender would be seen as a separate and not an integrated concern). The ICSF then undertook an analysis of the final text in order to inform its own internal planning processes.

In July 2014, the ICSF hosted an international workshop entitled "*Towards an equitable and sustainable small-scale fisheries in the context of poverty eradication and food security*". This workshop was attended by key international organisations such as WFP, WFF, as well as FAO and IPC, as well as other partners with whom ICSF works at local, regional and international levels. A key aim of the workshop was to develop a shared understanding amongst civil society partners of what a human rights-based agenda in SSF really means in practice. Using gender relations as one key example of these social relations, an ICSF member with expertise on this issue presented an understanding of a transformative, human rights-based approach to the international SSF Guidelines. In their deliberations on how the SSF Guidelines should be implemented, participants confirmed this human rights-based approach, emphasising the need to ensure that it started at the local level.

ICSF recognises the need to transform gender relations within the fishing community, which will contribute to freedom of choice for women. Freedom for women therefore might include the right to education and to be able to make informed choices, for example, of whether to stay in the fishing community or not. The community will evolve more quickly if that freedom exists. The implementation of the SSF Guidelines can therefore be a good instrument for liberation and equality, especially in countries where gender disparities are large. In societies in transition towards democracy, transformative gender relationships are believed to have a greater chance of evolving.

In the ICSF General Body meeting that followed the July 2014 workshop, the members decided that ICSF programme work for period 2015-2019 should be informed by this transformative human rights-based approach. Underpinning this perspective, is an understanding of the interconnected nature of social relations and the current neo-liberal model of development. The perspective of the organisation as stated in 2010 was affirmed with minor adjustments in the 2014 General Body meeting as mentioned in the box below:

ICSF's Vision is of "A future in which small-scale fishing communities and fishworkers lead a life of dignity, realizing their right to life, livelihood and food security".

Its mission is "To support fishing communities and fishworker organizations, and empower them to participate in fisheries from a perspective of decent work, equity, gender-justice, self-reliance and sustainability.

The General Body affirmed a human rights-based perspective and the need to continue to address unequal social relations, in particular unequal gender relations as cross-cutting issues as well as to prioritise empowerment of women in fisheries from this perspective. It was agreed that all programmes and activities would integrate the gender perspective and human rights-based perspective.

## 5. ICSF's work on gender

- **At the programme level**

The ICSF members and the ICSF Secretariat have given expression to the gender perspective in a variety of programmes and projects over the years. The ICSF has supported research and documentation of women's experiences, stories and research on gender relations in fisheries. Training events have supported women fishworkers and their supporters in analysing the social relations that shape the condition of their fisheries and the gender distribution of benefits. Several of the ICSF members work closely with fishing communities to support the creation of local cooperatives, in order that families receive the largest share of the consumer price – doing away with merchants and moneylenders. Several of the ICSF members work with communities on resource management issues so that the use of destructive fishing gear are reduced. Other members have engaged with communities in conservation and the re-greening of the coastal habitat. A large research project was undertaken by one member to review the literature on gender and the position of women in community-based natural resource management. Considerable work has also been done with women in the post-harvest sector, supporting them in advocating for fair and adequate working conditions. ICSF has also specifically worked with youth, and continues to strengthen networks of young fishers to reflect on the SSF Guidelines, maintain cultural identity and transform gender relationships.

One of the most consistent programmes in the ICSF since 1990 has been the 'women in fisheries' programme through which it has tried to work with fishworker organizations to evolve a gender perspective in their own work. In addition, the ICSF has engaged with women in fisheries directly to help them secure their spaces within the fishery and within fishworker organisations. This strategy has borne dividends: in some cases women have succeeded to access leadership in fishworker organizations. This is a reason why WFFP and WFF decided that there would be 50% of men and women in the leadership. ICSF also played an important role in international networking of women's organisations in fisheries and their supporters, including activists and academics. Now the ICSF makes inputs in the work of these organisations through its broader programmes where the gender perspective is focused. Women in fisheries networks have also grown in several parts of the world, and ICSF's women in fisheries work has been cited extensively.

More specifically ICSF has undertaken the following activities:

1. Supported women fishworkers to attend our programmes and share their experiences and ideas.
2. Communicated information and perspectives on gender issues in fisheries to the global level for our members and allies. This has been done through providing materials and training to promote as much as possible the inclusion of a gender perspective in all relevant global discussions .
3. Recognized the role of women in all our documentation and research, being critical at all times of the traditional patriarchal perspective in fisheries.
4. Promoted and strengthened our women members' participation at all levels.
5. Prepared and published materials through a range of multi-media to bring the gender issue into focus. This has included the publication of Yemaya, pamphlets, monographs, training materials and films.
6. Integrated our feminist and human rights perspective in our advocacy at international level, such as ILO, FAO, CDB, MDG, etc)

- **At the organisational level**

The ICSF has tried to build up an organisational structure and system that is not patriarchal – a collective – where there is a large amount of voluntary work by both men and women, where responsibility is shared, and where decisions are transparent. Gender-wise, there has been equal participation of women and men at all levels. On the whole, the ICSF is characterized by a fairly flat structure, with a rotation of roles, both in the Animation Team – the equivalent of what is now

(2017) called the Board - and in the Secretariat, where the position of the executive secretary has also rotated.

The ICSF endeavours to develop the anti-patriarchal, human rights-based perspective both within the organization and in the work thereby trying to work towards greater gender equality/equity. The organisation endeavours to ensure that its staff work within and from this perspective, and that this informs the organisation's human resource policies. Recruitment and selection of staff aims to ensure gender equity in the ratio of women to men, staff salaries are based on competencies for the nature of the job and the job description, eliminating gender discrimination .

The ICSF has established an Internal Complaints Committee which is mandated by Indian Law and is meant to deal with sexual harassment at the workplace. The organisation also has a Code of Conduct which served as the ethical road map for ICSF employees and those associated with the ICSF.. This serves to highlight and reinforce already existing practices in ICSF.

## **6. Goals and objectives**

In keeping with its vision and perspective, the ICSF would like to see a future in which small-scale fisheries support a transformative social relations agenda that recognises, protects and promotes the rights of women and the enjoyment of human rights and social justice for all; by eliminating all forms of social and gender discrimination and violence and promoting socially, culturally, economically and ecologically sustainable lives and livelihoods for men and women, boys and girls.

The ICSF would like to achieve the following objectives:

- The agenda for action for different sections of society, as developed at the 2010 workshop, is followed in order to realise the 'dreams' about fisheries that would sustain life and livelihoods in fishing communities;
- Women are empowered and participate equally in the governance and management of marine, coastal and inland resources and adjacent lands, which they depend on for their lives and livelihoods;
- Discriminatory gendered values, practices, policies and legislation at both the programme and organizational level are recognized and eliminated;
- The strategic development needs of women living in SSF communities are addressed within a human-rights based and transformative approach to fisheries.

## **7. Accountability mechanism**

The Board of the ICSF, on behalf of the General Assembly of Members, will ensure that the gender policy is reflected in the work and functioning of the organization. Open and transparent communication between members and the ICSF Secretariat will also ensure that ICSF's core values and gender perspective are upheld in its programme, as well as in its organisational structure .

## **8. Time frame**

This policy will be effective for the period 2015 to 2019. ICSF will ensure that its annual

operational plans and their implementation reflect this gender policy and perspective.