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**Evolving a feminist perspective in fisheries
And
The history of the Women in Fisheries Programme
(1993-2014)
Of
The International Collective in Support of Fishworkers
(ICSF)**



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The International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF) is a collective of individuals ('supporters') committed to the interests of small scale fisheries, in existence since 1986.

ICSF's 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".



History International Collective of Fishworkers



ICSF draws its mandate from the historic **International Conference of Fishworkers and their Supporters (ICFWS)**, held in Rome in 1984, parallel to the 1st World Conference on Fisheries Management and Development organized by the FAO

A number of fishworker organizations and 'supporters' (concerned academics, practitioners, community workers and social activists) felt that the FAO conference overemphasized the commercial, industrial, scientific and fishery resource aspects, at the expense of the fishing communities

The term “**fishworker**” was used explicitly with the intension to include all , men and women, whose life and livelihood is dependent on (small scale) fisheries,

The ICFWS was attended by over 100 fishworkers and supporters from 34 countries.

In follow up of the ICFWS, the **International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF)** was established in 1986 on demand of fish workers organisations (FWO's). At the time there were no global organisations representing small scale fisheries/ fishworkers.



‘Women in Fisheries’ and ICSF

Since its inception, ICSF has tried to make visible the substantial role that women play in the family, community, and the wider society, thereby sustaining the SSF.

At the ICFWS (1984) the role of women in fisher communities was summarized in the conclusions as follows:

"We stress the essential role of women in fishing communities, considering their sensitivity to the deteriorating quality of life. We support them in getting organized to :

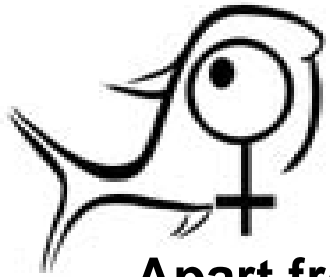
- Protect their activities in the production process,**
- Improve their working conditions,**
- Alleviate the burden of their work,**
- Actively reduce pollution and protect the environment,**

We call for a collective effort in changing attitudes and values towards women in order to get their full participation in decision making at all levels." (Rome 1984)."



In the decade after the ICFWS conference a significant development had taken place in the growth of fishworker organisations in many countries. This resulted in a wider concern for small scale fisheries the world over. Concern however did not imply support, because fish worker' organisations reported SSF being consistently marginalised by the impact of overfishing, pollution, development projects, tourism and militarism.

ICSF, felt the importance of evolving a feminist perspective in fisheries that connects with the larger feminist critique of development. It critiques development models that are 'patriarchal' and exploitative, that benefit the few at the expense of the majority (particularly poor women); increase the vulnerability of local communities and destroy their means of livelihood; and undervalue and overexploit natural resources.



Apart from highlighting women's marginalization, the feminist perspective also stresses **that production of life -- usually called reproduction -- should be valued**, as it provides the base for production of commodities and cannot be separated from it.

The feminist perspective **questions mainstream thinking on what is valuable and what not**. Mainstream discourse regards the production of life as something "natural" and relegates it to the private sphere. It remains invisible, taken for granted and is considered to have no real cost.

Redefining what is valuable will also mean **redefining the power relations that exist in the society**. A feminist perspective seeks to reshape or transform gender relations and other unequal power relations, such as class and ethnicity by questioning the dominant discourse and those who set its terms.



This cristalized in the following perspective of the ICSF:

"Sustainability of development requires that we move from exploitative to nurturing relationships with nature. Nurture and sustenance have always been the role of women in fishing communities. This role has often resulted in them being marginalised in their own communities. Only their active participation in the economy and a recognition of its centrality, will ensure that such new relationships with nature emerge." (ICSF Conference, Bangkok 1990).

Such perspective would lead to valorization of the work and roles of women in fishing communities and increase their participation in decision making, within the context of strengthening the capacity of fishing communities and fish worker organisations to counter adverse forms of development and work towards a development where values of respect, sharing and nurture are central.

Such a perspective is important in the quest for sustainable, equitable and gender-just fisheries.



ICSF's 'Women in Fisheries' (WIF) programme

Since ICSF's inception there had been a conscious effort *in particular by women's members, who were both involved with FWO's and the women's movement*, to involve women of fishing communities and women fish workers in ICSF's activities and discuss gender issues and a feminist perspective at conferences, seminars and workshops.

The Women in Fisheries (WIF) programme of ICSF, however, took shape only after the ICSF conference at Bangkok in 1990, when it became evident that

- None of the FWO's that were partner of ICSF really saw the seriousness of protecting women's spaces in fisheries and were not really open to discussing a feminist perspective.
- Women of fishing communities, in particular from the global North where women's spaces had shrunk most, were themselves not always aware about the value of their contribution, often seeing themselves as "just housewives" and therewith accepted their subordinated position and marginalisation of their role.



Participants of the ICSF WIF programme



- ❑ Women of fishing communities, women fish workers
- ❑ Members, both men and women, of fish worker organisations
- ❑ Women organizers (community organizers, NGO's workers)
- ❑ Members of ICSF
- ❑ Like minded resources persons (individuals) in particular from academia, policy makers, NGO workers and women's rights activists

Focus on countries where ICSF members were based and had direct relations with local communities and fish worker organisations: **Asia:** India, Thailand, Philippines, **Africa:** West Africa, Tanzania, South Africa, **Europe:** France, Spain, EU, **South America:** Brazil, Central America (Costa Rica), Chili, **North America:** Canada

The WIF programme was animated (coordinated) by ICSF's Women in Fisheries group (members)

First coordinators Nalini Nayak and Cornelie Quist with advisers , 1993





Aims of the ICSF WIF-Programme

- ❑ Developing ways and means by which its feminist perspective can be adequately understood.**
- ❑ Support women's local initiatives to retain their own spaces in fisheries and that enhance the creative potentials of women for their own advancement and that of the community.**
- ❑ Strengthen the role of women in fish worker organisations at all levels, particularly at the decision making level.**
- ❑ Work towards (inter)national instruments and legislation in support of women's space and work in fisheries**



Approach and strategies of the WIF programme

identified as effective



- ❑ **Visibilizing women's role and concerns** by documenting women's experiences, views and aspirations, using a participatory and interactive approach.

Field studies, workshops, publications like Yemaya.

- ❑ **Supporting collective activities/actions/struggles** of women that would enhance women's role in fisheries and obtain women's rights, and document the experiences.

artisanal fish trading, artisanal fish processing technology, resource management, food security, struggle for formal status and other supportive legislation.

- ❑ **Creating a nursery for women leaders in fish worker organisations** through leadership training and exchange.

At national, regional and international level.

- ❑ **Encouraging solidarity linkages and networking**

- ✓ among women in fisheries (organisations), including North-South linkages,
- ✓ between men with women within fish worker organisations,
- ✓ with broader social transformative movements

Bringing together and sharing experiences, promoting mutual understanding, supporting networking.



Approach and strategies of the WIF programme identified as effective



❑ **Inform on women's (changing) role in fisheries (sexual division of labour), with particular focus on the impact of (global) development on their role and its relation to their well being and that of the communities and the natural resources**

- *Workshops, presentations at national, regional and international forums, publications, WIF bibliography, audio visuals.*
- WIF website: wif.icsf.net
- Online WIF bibliography: wif.icsf.net/en/bibliography.html

❑ **Further the discourse of a feminist analysis in fisheries by bringing together Women in fisheries, FWO-leaders, ICSF members and like-minded partners and resource persons, to interact, reflect and arrive to a common understanding of a feminist perspective in fisheries.**

- *ICSF' global workshops (Philippines 1994, Senegal 1996, India 2010 Shared Gender Agenda) with position papers, review of literature, reports of WIF organisations,*
- *Contributions to global conferences of others (a.o. Gender, and Globalisation and Fisheries 2000 , AKTEA Women in Fisheries and Aquaculture 2004)*

1st international ICSF-WIF workshop at Cebu Philippines 1994





**SHARED GENDER AGENDA
FOR SUSTAINING LIFE AND LIVELIHOODS IN FISHING COMMUNITIES
Mahabalipuram, India. July 2010**





SHARED GENDER AGENDA FOR SUSTAINING LIFE AND LIVELIHOODS IN FISHING COMMUNITIES

Mahabalipuram, India. July 2010

- **39 participants from 18 countries**, including women fish workers and representatives of fishworker organizations, NGOs and researchers
- Followed on prior preparatory workshops in India, Thailand, the Philippines, South Africa, Brazil, Europe (EU) and Canada. Also input of experiences from Guinea Conakry, Chile and Tanzania.
- **Women shared their issues and experiences** that highlighted the threat to their livelihoods and communities, as well as strategies being adopted by them to assert their rights and defend their interests.
- **A review of literature analysing the major shifts in the discourse on women in fisheries** over the last three decades was presented.
- **International instruments of relevance to women in fisheries (and its lack of implementation)** were discussed.



At the international workshop a **Shared Gender Agenda for sustaining life and livelihood in fishing communities** was defined, which spells out a detailed action agenda addressing different sections of the society:
wifworkshop.icsf.net/images/stories/recasting/1279686472111-Shared-agenda-final.pdf

Common understanding

The existing model of fisheries development is based on unsustainable extraction of natural resources and eroding the basis of lives and livelihoods of inland and coastal fishing communities, incl. indigenous communities, while increasing women's displacement and unremunerated work. It is women's labour, unpaid and poorly paid, which sustains the existing model.

Central concerns

- The need of recognition and validation of women's work (production-reproduction) and recognition of the role and contribution of SSF to providing livelihood, sustenance of natural resources, and food security.
- The end of all forms of discrimination and oppression that cut across all aspects of women's lives – their labour, sexuality and their fertility-undermining their dignity, sense of self-worth and self confidence.



Approach and strategies of the WIF programme
Identified as effective



- **International and national advocacy to ensure that Gender Agenda is promoted and issues of importance to women in fisheries are reflected in (inter)national instruments and legislation, In alliance with global Fishworker' movement (WFF (1997) and WFFP (2000)) and broader social movement**

- **FAO VG Small Scale Fisheries (2014) integration of a Gender perspective in the realization and implementation of the VG SSF**
 - *Leading role of ICSF in Advocacy (since 1980's) and CSO' consultations, drafting of the guidelines (since 2009)*
ICSF coordinated the participatory making of the FAO Handbook Towards Gender-equitable Small-scale fisheries Governance and Development.

- **ILO- International Labour Standards for the Fishing Sector**
Leading role of ICSF in Advocacy for including SSF and a broader definition of "fisher" to include shore-based workers in fisheries (often women's work)

- **CSO advocacy processes for other international instruments to which ICSF contributed to include concerns of SSF and promote the Gender Agenda: the FAO VGGT (2012), the CEDAW General recommendation on the Rights of Rural Women (2016), Position papers of the Women's Major Group (self-organized women's and feminist organizations and networks and their allies that promote human rights-based sustainable development in UN-related processes) for SDGs and 2030 Agenda and the Biodiversity Convention meetings.**



Concepts for feminist analysis – very simply put

Used in the ICSF WIF Programme



Gender is a social construct

- It is rooted in an unequal power relation between men and women – one being superior to the other.
- This power relation between the genders is constructed in an historical process and changes over time and at different places.
- It is intertwined with other unequal power relations such as class and ethnicity.



Patriarchy

- The assumption of superiority/dominance in gender relations is called patriarchy.
- The binaries of production/reproduction, paid/unpaid labour, private/public, living/non-living spheres are in reality patriarchal constructs where as in actuality they should be dynamic and complementary spheres.



How does patriarchy operate?

- **On the one hand it sanctions the exploitation of woman's sexuality, fertility and labour:** the woman is nurtured to believe she is at the service of the man, her sexuality is controlled by him. So is her fertility – she has to be at his disposal, her labour is a necessity to keep the fishing and the household going – though she is invisible.
- **on the other it legitimises domination, control, centralization:** It legitimises centralisation of the production system – there is a greater centralization of power, money and in today's world – even democracy is becoming outdated.



It legitimises violence on life and livelihood

- **Violence on life** – be it in the environment itself, or in the form of state mechanisms that displace and dispossess people, or create wars where life has no importance, is another form of patriarchy
- **Technologies get more aggressive** – devouring material resources and impacting on life cycles and regeneration
- Even the human body gets more commercialised and biological processes more medicalised
- War and taking of life and livelihood is also a money spinner



**To explain how this
plays out in fisheries –
in tabular format**

| Fisheries | Production sphere | Reproduction sphere |
|---|--|---|
| <p>Sexual division of labour: Control of women's labour</p> <p>Term fisherman</p> | <p>Visibility /recognition of work of men in fisheries. Man's access to resources is promoted (capital, technology, market, fishing rights, representation).</p> <p>Man's space in fisheries is expanded.</p> <p>If paid, man's work receives higher pay than woman's work.</p> <p>Men catch the fish – earlier only data on fishermen were available and only industrial fisheries catch production data were available.</p> <p>In SSF, even if women's role in production is complementary, women's access to fish is not given priority.</p> | <p>Woman's work in the fishery is largely invisible and her access to resources restricted/excluded from access to resources.</p> <p>Woman's space in fisheries is narrowing/closing down</p> <p>Woman's work is to keep the family going and to assist the husband in fish related activity and is invisible and unrecognized and unpaid</p> <p>Very little data on SSF and women's role in fisheries are available.</p> <p>.</p> |

Focus of production

Production for the market- maximum price, compromise on quality, juveniles going into fish feed.

Production for export and rich consumers. Vertical control of fish value chain by small groups of global corporate companies.

High level of (foreign) capital investment.

Large use of cheap (migrant) labour.

Focus of consumption

Wide gap between (poor) producer and (rich urban or foreign) consumer. Consumer primarily interested in low price and not in by whom and how fish is produced and the impact.

Nurture and nature are not accounted for, do not enter the costs of production.

Production for life: fish as nutritious food, accessible to the poor, compromise on quality is considered detrimental to health. Communities earlier ate the best that they caught. But as the fishery commercialises, they eat the poor quality fish

Debt-dependency of (poor) producers

In- and out-migration in fishing communities contributes to social and environmental disruption in local fisheries.

Direct connection between local producer and local consumer. Consumers pay a fair price and mutual respect.

Efforts to ensure fish production is sustained

Marine capture - Resource management generally in terms of privatized fishing rights, intensification of capture, non-seasonal, harbour based and thus centralised, market and profit oriented (“blue economy”)

Aquaculture – privatization of water bodies, intensive to maximise profits, genetic manipulation thereby changing the relation between the fish and the environment in which it grows, resulting in contaminating water bodies, market and export oriented High conversion of energy into food.

Collusion between the fish/aquaculture industry and the local political elites and police forces at the service of the industry.

Small scale fisheries is traditionally focused on fish for food, is community- and family based, more equitable as relations of production are on a sharing basis, dependent on open access, use of selective gears, and traditional management systems that are nurturing the environment which regenerates the resource.

More extensive aquaculture, basically for food and local exchange, collection of fingerlings from the wild, no artificial feeding.

Local communities face corruption, displacement, police violence

**Technology –
men control the
tools of
production**

Capture - harbour based, non-renewable energy, non-selective gear, exploitative and destructive to the environment and the fish stocks, capital intensive, leads to greater centralization.

Investments only in technology focused on role of men. Marginalisation of women's productive work.

Displaces the small, selective gear, beach landing craft which make fish accessible to local population, to fish vendors, fish is fresh and seasonal

**Capital – men
control**

Credit and investment in fisheries activities of men and industrial fisheries .

Privatisation of fishing rights, legal protection of man's properties.

Lack of access of SSF, and women in particular, to credit, land, fishing rights.

Commons are disappearing. Share economy is marginalised.

With diminishing resources, fisheries gets more competitive and aggressive. Need for more capital and cheaper (unpaid) labour. Increased violence in the sea and on the land,

Control of women's sexuality fertility and labour

Leads to demand for dowry as capital necessary for fishing, increasing violence on women- dowry deaths, female foeticide , alcoholism, 'fish for sex', HIV. Increased work load of women, women sustain man's fishing activity.

Freedom of voice and movement for women is curtailed.

Women are designated to men's 'common', a natural resource of wealth and services to be freely appropriated by them as the capitalists have appropriated the wealth of nature.

Socialisation/education

Focus on role of males. Emphasis on strong masculine values. Men are socialised to exploit fish resources, compete with each other and be from home for long time (fishing, migration). Women are absent in fishery schools.

Nurture role of men is ignored.

All reproduction work fall on shoulder of women.

Women are considered “housewives’ , primarily suitable for low-tech and low paid /unpaid work.

Taboes/social restrictions for women in fisheries. Self esteem women in fisheries is low.

Governance model

Focus on individual (male) producer/business – based fisheries.

Rights (individual, private) approach.

MSY is also calculated only on catch, but not in relation to the destruction of the ecosystem in which it is reproduced

Focused on management issues of industrial fisheries. Quota systems, license systems, MPA's.

Sector representation, decision making , policy making controlled by men and big industry.

Household- and Community-based/rooted fisheries is not recognized and valued.

Community rights disregarded and commons are privatised

SSF has to adjust to rules and regulations of industrial fisheries. Inappropriate for diversity and complexity of SSF.

Traditional knowledge of SSF, and in particular women, is ignored.

**SSF's Exclusion/Lack of voice
SSF and women in particular.**



Reflection and Discussion



- What do you see happening in the development of fisheries in your country/region/community which is taking a toll on women's life in general, on the role of men and women in fishing communities , on women's access to fish, on violence on women and on nature?
- Why do we need a feminist perspective of fisheries? Is there a difference between a feminist perspective of fisheries and a gender perspective of fisheries?
- What will a reconstruction of fisheries from a feminist perspective look like and how can this be achieved. Examples? What are the pitfalls?



Recommended Readings

- **ICSF (2010): “A Shared Agenda.” ICSF international workshop “Recasting the Net: Defining a Gender Agenda for Sustainable Life and Livelihoods in Fishing Communities.” ICSF, Chennai, India**
wifworkshop.icsf.net/images/stories/recasting/1279686472111-Shared-agenda-final.pdf
- **Kumar, H. and Prakash, S. (2010): “Gender Agenda. Developments in Fisheries have had a great impact on the lives and livelihoods of women in Fishing communities.”, report of ICSF international workshop “Recasting the Net: Defining a Gender Agenda for Sustainable Life and Livelihoods in Fishing Communities.” In Samudra No 56, 2010 , ICSF, Chennai, India.**
wif.icsf.net/images/samudra/pdf/english/issue_56/3481_art_sam56_art01.pdf
- **Biswas, Nilanjana (2011): “Turning the Tide: Women’s Lives in Fisheries and the Assault of Capital.”, Economic & Political Weekly, Vol XLVI No 51, December 17, Mumbai,India.**
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Thank you

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