



**27** Years in Support of  
Small-scale Fishworkers

# Yemaya

ICSF'S NEWSLETTER ON GENDER AND FISHERIES

## From the Editor

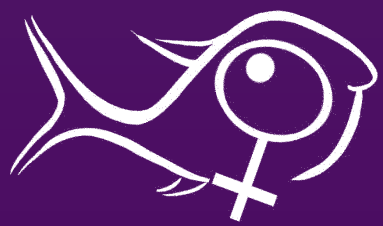
Whether in South Africa, Chile, Uganda or India, as this issue of *Yemaya* shows, women in the small-scale and artisanal fisheries are confronting growing challenges in their daily lives. Caught between bureaucratic governments and exploitative markets, on the one hand, and male-dominated fisheries associations and violent neighbourhoods and homes, on the other, for most women in the sector, life can be a hellish struggle. While women usually cope by drawing upon inner strength or turning to one another for help, if in the sector as a whole, women are to ever gain justice and their rightful place in society, much more is needed.

Everywhere, women in the fisheries are demanding the right to work and livelihood; for an end to the invisibility of their labour; for just wages; for access to credit and to basic services and facilities; for communities and homes where no woman is raped or beaten and no child too poor to go to school; for a proper voice in the governance of the sector and the societies they live in. They are aware that no community can progress or become truly democratic unless, within it, women can participate as equal citizens.

However, when women do get together with their demands, often they report coming up against a wall of opposition. They find that their systems of local governance are based on the exclusion of women; that local land ownership and resource control is vested with men; men dominate fisheries associations and unions and are unwilling to relinquish their stranglehold over power; when women are allowed to become leaders, they find that the real reins of power are often in the grip of male hands; they even discover that projects for the empowerment of women can get away, for a length of time, by recruiting male fishers instead.

From violent homes to hidebound structures of patriarchal decision-making, there is thus no place that offers real sanctuary or justice to women in the fisheries sector. As the pages of *Yemaya* testify, meetings and conferences, therefore, become spaces for women to gain relief through the sharing of experiences. While such sharing is important and welcome, even more necessary is perhaps having an analytical framework to help make sense of these experiences so that women no longer see them as normal occurrences that are part of the natural order of being female but for what they in fact are: daily violations of their rights. Feminism provides such a framework.

Despite the denigration of feminism, in the popular media and in the jokes casually traded by men, feminism is the “radical notion that women are people”, and so, have equal rights. When women embrace such a belief, they embrace their own humanity and build a bridge of solidarity with other women based on the common set of experiences that gender imposes. The challenge for women in the fisheries is, therefore, to occupy feminism, to refuse to let it be trivialized and taken over by those who benefit from the unjust and unequal distribution of power, to advance a feminist analysis of fisheries and to fill it with the colour and substance of their own lives! **✶**



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# Shifting livelihoods

**As the fisheries in South Africa and Mozambique go through rapid changes, communities adapt to coastal resource use in distinctly gendered ways**

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Rural coastal communities in South Africa and Mozambique have, for long, harvested resources such as fish, and forest and agricultural products, to support themselves and their families. Although communities in both countries are culturally diverse, they share histories of colonialism, with manifest inequalities and vulnerabilities arising from the apartheid era in South Africa and civil war in Mozambique influencing the nature of livelihoods pursued by these communities. Research conducted by a colleague, Mayra Pereira, and me in these two countries, highlights the distinctive gendered nature of these livelihoods, and how in a dynamic coastal and fisheries context, women and men's choices, options and adaptive responses differ.

In both countries, livelihood options for women are limited. Most of their livelihood activities are at the household consumption level with little money being earned. In areas such as Josina Machel, Conguiana and Gala in Inhambane and Maputo provinces of Mozambique, fisheries and tourism are male dominated. These sectors have a strong relationship as tourism provides most of the monetary benefits to local fishers. Women engage mainly in post-harvest activities

(processing, selling, marketing of marine resources) resulting in some empowerment. Agriculture, vegetable and fruit cultivation are supplementary activities that feed the household and bring in some money.

In contrast, in South Africa, where the tourism-fisheries relationship is not strong, women predominate in rural coastal areas and are deeply involved in harvesting of resources. Yet the livelihood scenario for women in communities such as Sokhulu and Mbonambi in the KwaZulu-Natal Province, on the east coast, is bleak. The women harvest brown mussels whose sale is banned in most of the region. Mussel harvesting occurs only once a month and permit holders are allowed 25 kg per harvest, which women harvesters argue is insufficient for food security. These women want alternative income opportunities like craft markets where locally-made products such as straw mats, baskets, ornaments and jewellery can be sold. In several communities in KwaZulu-Natal, women have entered into mussel co-management arrangements with the provincial conservation authority, empowering a few who are employed to monitor the harvesting. This also creates a limited number of alternative livelihood options.

In the former Transkei region of the Eastern Cape of South Africa, in addition to harvesting brown mussels for household consumption, women harvest oysters and crayfish, which are sold to industry and the tourism market as well as contributing to household needs. The meagre money earned from such activities is used to clothe and educate their children.

Gender inequalities continue though women in both countries have varied livelihood activities. Patriarchal and patrilineal systems govern coastal resource use, living conditions, and opportunities for benefiting from the coastal sectors. For instance, land and associated natural resources are largely vested with men; few women own land.

However, a recent study by Leila Emdon suggests that in some areas of the former Transkei region, gender roles are shifting; women are adapting to changing circumstances. The establishment of the Hluleka Nature Reserve/Hluleka Marine Protected Area (MPA), and the consequent demarcation of a no-take terrestrial and marine protected area has resulted in increased food insecurity and livelihood vulnerability for the Hluleka community. Agriculture resources have dwindled outside the protected area due

MAYRA PEREIRA




Women in the Conguiana community, Inhambane province, Mozambique engage in post-harvest fisheries activities

to increased poverty and environmental changes like rainfall vulnerability, causing greater reliance on fisheries resources. Among the Hluleka, historically men have been the breadwinner but the government's introduction of social grants (like child support and pension) to those earning below R38,400 (US\$3728) per annum, has meant women are the ones who qualify. This has changed the equation. In fact, government support grants have become the primary monthly household income source to many households. One may think that the child-support grants amount to very little, but it is amazing how access to this small grant has shifted gender roles, expanding women's livelihood options to activities such as dwelling construction, craft products, trading resources with each other. The men

rely solely on fishing, which is now increasingly constrained due to the no-take MPA. Some women report that they now do not feel the need to marry because the government grants makes them independent.

In Mozambique, in the absence of such government support, women's access to income is increasingly dependent on fishing and tourism. However, a 2011 study by Mayra Pereira shows that increased tourism is competing with the availability of fisheries resources to local people, causing fisheries resources to decline. As a result, inflation in the prices of local fisheries resources, is reducing the incentive for tourists to buy from local people. Tourism pressure on local fisheries resources will, in turn, impact women's abilities to pursue livelihood security. ❏

**Patriarchal and patrilineal systems govern coastal resource use, living conditions, and opportunities for benefiting from the coastal sectors.**



**M**aritza Mena is a 51-year old fisherwoman from Costa Rica. She was selected by her community to be their representative at the International Congress of Women in Artisanal Fisheries held in Chile in June this year (see page 5).

Maritza was born in La Pita de Tarcoles, Puntaarenas in Costa Rica, into a fishing family. As a young girl, she yearned to go out to sea but the family was too poor to afford a boat for her. Her fortunes changed one day when her brothers enquired if she wanted to go fishing. "But how am I going to get there?" she asked, pointing to the horizon. They told

joyful Maritza came home with money in her pockets.

Maritza has travelled a long way from those early days. Today she owns a launch with an outboard motor and is dreaming of a bigger boat for her 16-year old son, also a fisher. Fishing is more than just work for her: "When you are out fishing, all is forgotten and when you get back home you feel renewed, yearning to get back again." Deeply committed to protecting the environment, Maritza is a strong supporter of the "closed season". She explains that her community has succeeded in getting INCOPECA, the national fisheries authorities in Costa Rica, to recognize a zone within the eight-fathom line. This zone, which extends out to almost one nautical mile in some places, is forbidden to shrimp trawlers.

On the eve of departure, the prospect of travelling by air to Chile for the Congress kept Maritza awake all night. But she convinced herself that being a fisherwoman, if she didn't get seasick, then she wouldn't get airsick either! The Congress was a great learning experience for Maritza, a dream come true. Though saddened by the experiences of machismo and sexism in the artisanal fisheries that women shared, she was greatly inspired by the stories she heard of women gaining strength through organizing. Although the women fish very differently in Chile, for seaweed and shellfish, they all experience the same challenges to earn their livelihoods and manage their resources. Maritza is happy that she too was also able to share the fishing experiences from her community with women and men who had come from many countries. ❏

## PROFILE

# Maritza Mena

**Born to Fish, Selected to Travel: How dreams came true for Maritza Mena, fisherwoman from Costa Rica**

By **Vivienne Solis Rivera** (vsolis@coopesolidar.org), Member, ICSF and translated by Brian O' Riordan (briano@scarlet.be)

her she would soon find out. Maritza still recalls with delight the skiff with oars that her brothers built, which she almost instantly launched. The boat, however, was fragile and could not stand up to the strong sea winds. Her brothers then built her a stronger boat. "Then" says Maritza, "I could really and truly start fishing!"

Catching fish proved to be easier than selling it. "There being so few people where we live, there was nobody to sell my fish to!" says Maritza. Undeterred, she made bundles of her first little catch and set off barefoot to town, spending the day going from house to house in search of buyers. That day, a tired but

# Strengthening livelihoods

**A fisheries livelihoods programme is helping improve women's roles and participation in decisionmaking in the Vietnamese fisheries**

By **Angela Lentisco** (Angela.Lentisco@fao.org), RFLP, Thailand and **Hoang Thi Phuong Thao** (hthao2005@gmail.com), RFLP, Vietnam

The Regional Fisheries Livelihoods Programme (RFLP), in collaboration with other fisheries institutions, has been trying to improve women's representation in decisionmaking as part of its goal to improve the livelihoods of fishing communities and the management of fisheries resources in six countries.

Since September 2009, RFLP has been working on five main components: co-management, safety at sea, post-harvest, livelihoods and microfinance. A strategic and cross-cutting component running through the main components is gender mainstreaming, implemented through the inclusion of gender equality considerations in the various stages of programme intervention.

One of the six countries implementing the RFLP is Vietnam, where the project has been rolled out in three central provinces: Quang Nam, Quang Tri and Thua Thien Hue. A baseline survey carried out at the beginning of the programme indicated that there was a division of labour among fisher households of different fishing groups. In marine fishing households, only the men went to sea to fish, while in lagoon fishing households, both the men and the women used boats to fish. While most women of offshore fishing households were less likely

to work outside the home, women from inshore fishing households often engaged in selling fish or in other income-generation activities such as services, vending and fish processing, in addition to household work.

Women from lagoon fishing households worked long hours, fishing daily with their husbands for about 12 hours, bringing fish products to the market, and additionally doing the housework. In the afternoons, they helped their husbands repair fishing gear. They thus appeared to have very little free time for relaxation or entertainment. Further, the children in lagoon fishing households also joined their parents in fishing, in contrast to marine fishing households where women and children did not usually perform any such income-generation activities.

The baseline survey also noted a generational change in the livelihoods of fishing communities: fishing no longer appeared to be the choice of many young people. The lagoon and inshore fishers, in particular, did not want their children to be fishers, and many young people were moving into big cities to earn money. Despite the presence of a network of fisheries associations in the province, the survey also revealed a low level of awareness among both fishers and government staff of the concept of co-management. Women knew even less about co-management than men.

One objective of RFLP is to improve co-management. In Vietnam this translated into providing support to set up Fisheries Associations (FAs). Although at the start of the project, FAs began by recruiting only male fishers. Later, appropriate measures were taken to ensure that the FAs promoted membership among women.

Incentives to promote women's membership in FAs included promoting household membership, with both husband and wife together having to pay only a single membership fee; and financial support only for those livelihoods projects where women were FA members. As a result, the numbers of women in FAs increased considerably. The participation increased from 12 women out of a total 1196 members in 2011 to 471 women out of 2081 members in 2013.

Consultations held in Vietnam with RFLP's 14 communities in the three provinces during April and May 2012 revealed an increasing interest in a wide range of non-fisheries income-generating activities. The participants in the consultations were both women and men. The activities included land-based agricultural

THUA THIEN HUE / PMU



Women in Phong Hai commune, Thua Thien Hue province, with the ice boxes provided by RFLP, Vietnam

activities such as raising pigs, chicken and rabbits as well as peanut cultivation. Other small business-related options included small-scale production for shoe and garment factories. Improving existing activities such as fish-sauce making and strengthening marketing links was also discussed.

The greater involvement of women in livelihood activities would further increase their workload, as women still had to attend

to household work. However, it was reported that due to declining catches and RFLP supporting livelihoods activities involving women, male fishers were willing to spend more time helping with traditional “women’s activities”, like pig- and chicken-raising. Men were also reported to have started contributing to household chores, so that women could dedicate more time to income-generating activities. **M**

...male fishers were willing to spend more time helping with traditional “women’s activities”, like pig- and chicken-raising.

## Gains and challenges

**The International Congress of Women in Artisanal Fisheries held in Valparaíso, Chile, highlighted both the gains made by women in the sector and the many difficulties that still lie in their path**

By **Natalia Tavares de Azevedo**

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**T**he National Confederation of Artisanal Fishermen of Chile (CONAPACH) organized the International Congress of Women in Artisanal Fisheries in Valparaíso, Chile, from 5-7 June 2013. It was attended by about 150 women of the Chilean artisanal fisheries, numerous male leaders of CONAPACH, government officials, and about 30 others, including fishers as well as technical experts from Brazil, Argentina, Peru, Bolivia, Colombia, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Panama, Honduras, Nicaragua and Kenya. ICSF supported the participation of fisherwomen from Costa Rica and Brazil and other representatives.

The central theme of the meeting was “integration for sustainable development”, and its two focus areas of discussion—“contribution of artisanal fisheries to food security” and “recognition of the rights of use of fishing resources”—ordered the presentations in the plenary session during the mornings of 5 and 6 June. Working groups met during the afternoons and addressed the following issues: productive experiences of fishing; organizational experiences of artisanal fisheries; effectiveness of the development of the rural sector; environmental and social conflicts in artisanal fishing communities; the new fisheries law in Chile through the experiences of women who participated in the parliamentary process; and the empowerment of fisherwomen.

On 5 June, initial speeches by the Chilean government authorities and CONAPACH leaders were followed by several presentations:

Alejandro Flores of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) talked about the ongoing process related to the drafting of the small-scale fisheries (SSF) Guidelines; Alejandro Barrios of IBON International (an international organization that focuses on capacity building of social movements for human rights and democracy), talked about the consequences of globalization for the fishing sector; and Cairo Laguna, representing the Nicaraguan Federation of Fishing and the World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fishworkers (WFF) discussed the reorganization of the WFF and its focus on the participation of women, as well as the experiences of fishworkers of Central America participating in the negotiations on FAO’s SSF Guidelines. Barbara Figueroa, president of the Central Unit of Workers of Chile (CUT), pointed out the need to align the organization with fisherworkers’ issues. She was critical of the commoditized form of the present pension system and emphasized the need to fight for public policies of salaries and gender equity.

Stephan Gelcich, professor at the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile, in his presentation titled “Gender and fisheries: challenges in the first mile”, addressed the role of women in Chilean fisheries, especially in the Management and Exploitation Areas for Benthic Resources—marine areas restricted to fisherfolk organizations through the regularization process. An important aspect has been the growth of organizations formed exclusively by women, which, according to Stephan, had an increase of 1200 per cent between 2004 and 2012, emphasizing that women have been actively seeking out the concessions provided for these areas. Among the many issues highlighted in the presentation were the possibilities for income generation for women through adding value to the product and the possibilities of enhancing biodiversity conservation through these initiatives.



There were 150 women members from CONAPACH at the International Congress of Women in Artisanal Fisheries held in Valparaiso, Chile from 5-7 June 2013

The presentation titled “Seafood diet, vulnerability and challenges of the human brain”, made by Victor Gutierrez of the University of Santiago, expounded upon the importance of fish in the human diet for brain development, particularly during pregnancy.

During the afternoon sessions, working groups across different countries met to discuss the productive experiences of artisanal fisheries (Chile, Peru and Guatemala) and the organizational experiences of fishworkers (Costa Rica, Chile and Argentina). This was followed by debates as well as a presentation on the effectiveness of rural sector development.

The plenary session of the morning of 6 June was marked by a long discussion on the new Chilean fisheries law, passed in 2012, which, critics claim, has granted monopolistic privileges to industrial fishing companies, facilitated the transnationalization of fishery resources, established greater control of artisanal fisheries and excluded the indigenous peoples’ access to them. On the one hand, members of the government talked about the main changes introduced by the law in general, and for the benthic sector in particular, since most of the women’s activities are focused on benthic resources. On the other hand, CONAPACH leaders addressed their organization’s priority areas during the discussion of the law, highlighting the access regime of the artisanal sector, the records of the fishermen, the exclusive access for artisanal fisheries in the five-mile zone and the rules of the management areas, in particular those referring to the development of small-scale aquaculture.

Scheduled for the afternoon of 6 June were two presentations on the social organization and political role of fisherwomen, one

representing Ecuador and the other, Brazil, as well as a presentation by the Peoples Coalition for Food Sovereignty (PCFS). Unfortunately, the presentation of Ecuador did not take place. The case of Brazil was presented by Maria Eliene Pereira do Vale (Maninha), leader of the National Articulation of Fisherwomen (ANP), along with Natalia Tavares, who reported on the experiences of the fisherwomen’s organization nationwide, including the advances in their demands, their integration with the Movement of Fishermen and Fisherwomen of Brazil (MPP), and the current struggle of these movements for the regularization of fishing territories. Finally, Pedro Guzmán made a presentation on behalf of PCFS, a network of peasants’ organizations, family farmers and fishermen, which originated in Asia and Africa and is now seeking to establish itself in Latin America, with the aim of guiding the discussion on food sovereignty from the perspective of the Southern countries and food producers’ communities.

In the few days that it met, the International Congress of Women in Artisanal Fisheries spent considerable time addressing issues of fishing in general, such as legislation and regulatory measures of management, labour and social security, credit and grants policies, as well as environmental problems faced by fishing communities, such as the impact of thermoelectric plants and mining. Unfortunately however, in our opinion, not enough time and focus was devoted to the condition of women in the fishing sector. While it is true that many of the issues in fisheries are, in fact, common to men and women, the form that they take and their impacts are often different and women often pay a greater price.

Discussions on the role of women took place mainly outside the plenary sessions, in the working groups, which discussed the social organization of women linked to production practices, or, in other words, how women have organized themselves for the production and processing of fish, and the difficulties and limitations they face both in general, as well as in relation to men.

The most discussed case regarding women was that of Chile, where it was claimed that men do not let women participate in the meetings of the unions, reporting expulsions and expressing derision during their speeches and in reaction to their demands. Chilean fisherwomen particularly denounced the discrimination they face in gaining access to the Management and Exploitation Areas for Benthic Resources, the main resources they

exploit. For instance, Sara Garrido from the Union of Fisherwomen and Seaweed Gatherers of Caleta Coliumo reported the struggle of her union to obtain such a Management Area. The struggle began in 2002 and materialized only in 2008—the delay being due to the prevailing machismo. Such attitudes were seen as an obstacle to women’s participation in organizations and the process of gaining approval. Chilean women thus favour an integrated agenda with men and demand the right to participation, inclusion and equal access in fisherfolk organizations.

A striking point in the discussion was that the fisherwomen from Chile were keen to assert that they are not feminists, suggesting thus that feminism was something negative with which they do not want to be identified. This casting of feminism as reverse sexism, as an idea of “paying back with the same coin” or as putting women in a position of superiority and domination over men is, in our opinion, an unfortunate and common misconception, stemming from the lack of awareness of what feminism really is—the struggle for equal rights and for the end of unequal power relations between the sexes.

In conclusion, while this Congress was, undoubtedly, a valuable initiative of

CONAPACH and presented a welcome opportunity for prominent persons, fisherwomen and technicians from other countries to meet and share experiences and knowledge, its chief limitation of inadequate time and energy spent on the question of women perhaps points to the need for more specific and autonomous organization of fisherwomen. For women in the artisanal fisheries, the Congress perhaps reaffirmed the understanding that to defend their rights is to fight against the domination of men in every space and instance: families, communities, class organizations, governmental institutions and other spheres of society. The Congress, in our opinion, also demonstrated that women in the sector need more information and a better understanding about contemporary women’s struggles so as to perceive their own fight (contrary to the view that many fisherwomen currently hold) as truly and genuinely feminist, thus enabling them to learn from the invaluable experiences of others and to integrate their struggles with broader societal struggles. The multiple limits that sexism imposes on fisherwomen weaken both the artisanal fisheries and fishing communities. To overcome this is essential for their defence. ❏

Discussions on the role of women took place mainly outside the plenary sessions...



## Milestones

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### UN agrees on ground-breaking gender indicators

Data collection on social and economic development has come a long way, particularly since the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Yet much remains to be done in the area of gender statistics. For example, only 41 per cent of States regularly measure violence against women. Very little of this data can be compared between countries because of differences in measurement.

This situation is set to change with the development of new gender indicators agreed by the UN Statistical Commission as a guide for national and international data compilation. They include a new set of nine indicators specifically designed to measure physical, sexual, psychological and economic violence against women, plus a separate minimum set of 52 gender indicators developed by the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Gender Statistics.

The minimum set covers economic structures, participation in productive activities and access to resources, education, health and related services, public life and decisionmaking, and human rights of women and girls—all highlighted in the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action. They will measure economic factors such as gender gap in wages, access to credit, average hours spent on unpaid domestic work, and ownership of productive assets. Other

measures include enrollment rates in education, the maternal mortality ratio, adolescent fertility rates and child marriage.

The impetus to develop a specific set of indicators to measure violence against women dates back to a 2006 resolution of the UN General Assembly. It is one of five key outcomes of the Secretary-General’s UNITE to End Violence against Women Campaign, launched in 2008. The conclusions of the 57th Commission on the Status of Women in March 2013 also called for improved statistics.

The gender indicators are a testimony to the increased recognition of the importance of gender statistics in policymaking. As the MDGs have shown, adequate statistics are critical for monitoring international agreements. With the MDGs’ 2015 deadline approaching, it has become pressing to get adequate indicators and baselines for future monitoring.

This was echoed by the global inequality consultations—conducted in 2012-13 and co-hosted by UN Women and UNICEF—which concluded that a new Post-2015 Development Agenda should “include not only a universal goal for gender equality...but also ensure that gender and other dominant inequalities are mainstreamed through disaggregated targets and indicators.” ❏

# Making change possible

**A comprehensive development approach has multiplied the livelihood options for women in Uganda's Lake Victoria region, leading to a sense of empowerment and hope**

By **Margaret Nakato** (mnakato@worldfisherforum.org) and **Vaal B. Namugga** (vaalbn@katosi.org), Katosi Women Development Trust, Uganda

**K**atosi, a fisher community north of Lake Victoria in Uganda, has undergone transformation that has changed the lifestyle of its members. Earlier, fishers from Katosi went out to fish every day; but now many go fishing to islands far away from Katosi, where they spend months before returning to their community. There are, therefore, only a few women left in the fish-smoking business in a community where once the majority of the women used to be employed in smoking and drying fish.

For the fishing communities, the growth in export-oriented fishing is part of the problem. Further, these communities continue to attract people seeking self-employment. This has increased the population depending on fisheries resources, thus exacerbating the pollution of the lake ecosystem and leading to overutilization of the wetlands and forests.

There is a decline in the quality of life in many fisher families, with the household population comprising mainly women and children. In a community where infrastructure, health and access to basic services are limited, this leads to hardship in day-to-day existence.

The Katosi Women Development Trust (KWDT) was started in 1996, organizing

women to enter the male-dominated fishing sector. It adopted a comprehensive development approach to be able to address the challenges women faced in fisher communities. This approach was premised on the belief that "You can't tell a poor person to conserve the environment; your approach must meet the basic needs of the people in the fisher community". Diversification of fisherfolk livelihoods to reduce dependency on fisheries resource is the key objective for KWDT, coupled with ensuring that all activities contribute to the conservation of Lake Victoria's fisheries resources and ecosystem, and the empowerment of women.

Supporting women to enter diversified economic activities helped create alternatives to employment lost in smoking and drying fish due to export of fish fillets. Most women could not afford to purchase fish, whose price had increased because of exports that made processed fish unaffordable for many rural families. The Lake Victoria basin is a rich but very fragile ecosystem, susceptible to overexploitation of resources. Animal rearing, fish farming, beekeeping, mushroom farming and fruit-tree planting are complementary activities established to create employment for women in fishing communities, and help sustain the ecosystem.

With declining fish stocks, there is less fish available for the fisher communities who cannot afford the investment in improved fishing gear. Many desperately resort to use of undersized nets that catch immature fish, thus exacerbating the problem. The trade in juvenile fish, though illegal, is flourishing in many rural fisher communities. However, if they are caught, women lose all their investment as the fish is confiscated and destroyed. Despite the risks, the activity still lures many who want to make quick money, especially when they face economic needs like paying tuition fees for children. KWDT supports women to shift from the trade in illegal juveniles and enter legal economic activities through access to credit and awareness campaigns.

KWDT has been instrumental in changing the economic situation of many women in Katosi. Working with 405 women organized in 16 groups, KWDT has been able to divert their dependence on the lake, and move to other livelihood options. KWDT members undertook removal of water hyacinth from the lake, an activity that was later taken on regularly and systematically by the Beach Management Units (BMUs). According to

KATOSI WOMEN DEVELOPMENT TRUST / UGANDA



Community dialogues enable KWDT to engage communities in decisionmaking on the access and use of their fisheries resources



Nalongo Joyce, a member of the Katosi Women Fishing and Development Association, “They used to call us whenever hyacinth spread across the lake, to please come and remove it, but now they have a schedule to manage manual removal of the invasive weeds”.

Access to water and sanitation was a challenge in Katosi, particularly with the increase in population. The situation was more acute because of the high HIV/AIDS prevalence in the community: 20-30 per cent as compared to the national prevalence rate of seven per cent. KWDT supported women to increase their access to clean safe water and adequate sanitation, and has made steady strides with over 250 households benefiting from the support.

With economic empowerment and access to basic facilities like water tanks and toilets, many women feel capable to participate in decisionmaking in their communities and at the local government; to take up leadership and political positions; to participate in economic development activities; and to exercise the right of access to property. KWDT provides the training needed for the women to effectively play these new roles.

Community dialogues, where KWDT groups mobilize their communities and engage them to discuss important issues that affect their livelihoods, have been key in bridging the gap between the leaders and the community. Having been successful in water and sanitation management, KWDT is also exploring the platform to engage communities in decisionmaking on the access and use of

their fishery resources. Women who have been trained in advocacy formed Women Advocacy Clubs (WACs) that are now ably utilizing their skills in lobbying and advocating for improved service delivery across the sectors that are relevant to their livelihoods. This has created transparency, accountability and inclusion of the rural women in decisionmaking. Women are engaged in community budget-making exercises, and this has bridged the gap of communication and information between the leaders and local people. However, illiteracy is high in fishing communities, and female illiteracy hampers progress towards empowerment of women.

Isolation of fisher communities is an impediment to the women being part of debates around their problems and development alternatives. KWDT sought to join an international network of small-scale fisher organizations, the World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fishworkers, to engage in the formulation of policies that are vital to fisherfolk livelihoods. In 2011, KWDT led the civil society consultation towards the development of international guidelines for securing rights of small-scale fisheries and fishermen. Today KWDT is recognized by fisherfolk as an important resource for advice on issues of fishing communities and their livelihoods. With land near the water attracting real-estate development and many other development projects that threaten livelihoods of fishers, the focus for KWDT is to ensure that the women not only know, but can also defend, their rights to access and use of land and fishery resources. ■

**“You can’t tell a poor person to conserve the environment; your approach must meet the basic needs of the people in the fisher community”.**

## Gender Community Blog—UN Solution Exchange India

The Gender Community blog of the United Nations Solution Exchange India (<http://se-gen-cop.blogspot.in/>) is a platform for practitioners to collaborate and share innovations, knowledge, skills, and best practices on gender equality, women’s empowerment, child rights and protection, gender mainstreaming and rights-based approaches to development.

Solution Exchange is an initiative sponsored by the UN with support from some of its partners that offers development practitioners a forum to benefit from each other’s knowledge and experience. In keeping with this spirit, the Gender Community blog was set up in 2005 to promote gender equality and women’s empowerment in India, focusing on increasing development effectiveness to improve the gender and girl child

situation, promote a rights-based approach to development, and ensure gender mainstreaming.

The key focus areas of this blog are: gender-based violence, including prenatal sex selection, human trafficking, domestic violence; issues of tribal, dalit and marginalized women; child rights and protection; issues of sexual minorities; social-security issues (including the elderly, women-headed households); engendering policies, programmes and institutions (e.g. gender budgeting, sexual harassment at the workplace, gender mainstreaming); gender equality and empowerment of women (e.g. economic, political) and gender gaps and disparity (e.g. education, health, governance, access to resources). ■

**What’s New, Webby?**



By **Ramya Rajagopalan**  
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# A cry from the heart

A play depicting fisherwomen's lives is evoking widespread appreciation in both fishing villages and cities throughout India

By **Renu Ramanath**  
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The fish seller's cry echoes throughout the world. It cuts across man-made barriers of language, region, religion and country. It is a cry of livelihood and sustenance, a cry of the marginalized as they are ousted out of existence by the hands that seize power.

The woes of the fishing community have been the subject of many a creative work throughout history, all over the world—in literature, films and theatre, in various forms and genres. In India, the state of Kerala is home to both the celebrated novel, *Chemmeen* of Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai, and its celluloid version which created clichéd images of fisherfolk that continue to be reflected in many later films.

However, the lives of the children of the sea have not found much representation in Kerala's theatre, historically a powerful tool of social emancipation and spreading awareness in the State. The history of using theatre in Kerala as a tool for creating awareness on social maladies and spreading positive messages goes back to the early decades of the 20th century. During those days of radical transformation of the social and political fabric, theatre lent itself easily to the hands of social reformers and political activists as

waves of nationalism and anti-colonial sentiment swept throughout the country.

*Matsyagandhi* ("The One Who Smells of Fish"), is a one-act solo play on the travails of women from fishing communities. Penned and performed by Sajitha Madathil, a well-known theatre personality from Kerala, the play was the outcome of an international collaborative theatre project, the Theatre for Africa project, that Sajitha was invited to participate in. This was a part of the Earth Summit 2002 held in South Africa and focused on sustainable development in fishing communities. Six actors, including Sajitha, from six continents were invited to be a part of the project. During the nearly six-month duration of the project, the actors first performed for a month the solo performances that each had developed, in the towns of Johannesburg, Pretoria and Cape Town.

After that, the six actors knitted together their solo performances into another play "Guardians of the Deep", which was again performed continuously for three months. "Altogether, it was a very exciting and rewarding theatre project that helped me immensely as an actor," recalls Sajitha, who is currently the Deputy Secretary of the Sangeet Natak Akademi (National Academy of Music, Dance and Drama), New Delhi.

Sajitha herself has performed *Matsyagandhi* only five times in India—thrice in Delhi and twice in Kerala. Interestingly, although the play won a lot of appreciation abroad, it did not make many headlines in Kerala when it was first performed.

Recently, however, the script has witnessed a revival, with at least two versions staged in Kerala during the past one year. Last year, Shylaja P Ambu, a Thiruvananthapuram-based performer, presented a series of performances of *Matsyagandhi* in the fishing villages of Kerala's Thiruvananthapuram and Kollam districts, drawing wide appreciation, especially from women who were seeing their own lives being represented on stage for the first time. Shylaja recalls how women would come to her after the performance and tell her that they felt the play mirrored their own experiences down to the last detail, including the lack of toilet facilities that put them through untold miseries during their daily grind.

*Matsyagandhi* is replete with images related to the sea, culled from the everyday lives of fisherfolk. Small wonder since Sajitha evolved the script through a series of conversations

RADHAKRISHNAN



Sajitha Madathil during the performance of *Matsyagandhi*, (The One Who Smells of Fish), a one-act solo play on the travails of women from fishing communities

with women from the fishing community. The stench of fish is another recurring image that connects the text to the myth of *Matsyagandhi*, also known as Satyavati, the fishing woman in India's great mythological narrative, the Mahabharata, who was gifted the fragrance of *kasturi* (musk) by the sage who lusted after her.

In fact, Sajitha connects the myth of *Matsyagandhi* with a real-life incident which had acted as the major inspiration for the script—the rape of a woman in a fish market in broad daylight. “When I heard about this incident, I knew I wanted to do a play about her,” recalls Sajitha.

The text touches upon, and brings out, the pathos of the fishing community, being smothered by the growing tentacles of corporate bodies slowly swallowing up our shores for commercial exploitation. The protagonist, a middle-aged woman fishmonger, talks of how the slower and quieter life of days gone by had more grace and abundance despite the poverty and the ever-present threat of losing fishermen to the raging sea. But today it is no longer the sea that swallows up the fisherman; rather, it is the mechanized trawler, laments the woman who lost her own husband to a speeding trawler.

The taut and smooth-flowing narrative touches upon almost all the issues that the community faces in contemporary times. The stench of fish is a recurring motif of the play until the very end when the actress, in the final scene, walks into the audience with a lamp and a vessel of fish, rebuking the viewers for their aversion to the smell of fish even as they eagerly await their fish curry.

The play also shows how the lives of fishers are being decimated by sea-walls and boundaries that cut them off from the sea, which they regard as their mother and is their primary source of livelihood.

No wonder the play has found an echo far and wide. After Shylaja P Ambu's performance that toured India's coastal districts and was featured at the International Theatre Festival of Kerala, there was another production in the city of Kochi, directed by Ajayan and performed by Mary Grace.

The play has also been performed in other Indian languages too: Hindi, Marathi and Bengali. Often, Sajitha is not even informed about a performance although some directors do seek her prior permission. “I came to hear that a production of *Matsyagandhi* was performed in Chennai but I don't know in what language!” says Sajitha. The play has been included as part of the course curriculum for undergraduate English course in MG University, Kerala. It has also been included in a collection of contemporary Malayalam language plays. ❏

## Interview of 51 year-old Usha Tamore, Mumbai District Womens' Fish Vending Co-operative, India

By **Shuddhawati Peke** (icsf@icsf.net), Programme Associate, ICSF

### How long have you been in fish vending?

I've been a fish vendor for the past 30 years. I learnt the trade from my mother, also a vendor. My day would start at 6.30 in the morning: First to Crawford Market to buy fish from the wholesale dealers; then to Mahim Station Market to sell fish until noon; then to school; and after school I would help my mother with housework. I dropped out of school to become a full-time fish vendor when my family could no longer support my education. After marriage, we settled down in Mahim where my livelihood was.

### How did you get involved in the issues of the market?

In 1975, women fish vendors of Mahim Station Market were displaced overnight by the administration for the building of Pickle Hospital. We went on to the streets in protest. The Municipal Corporation built another market but this was too small, so we had to start selling in the streets. Today we have about 100 women who sell fish in the street adjoining the hospital, while the crowded market building is falling to pieces. And that's not all. The Municipal Corporation then wanted to convert the Station Market into a wholesale fish market, which would mean the end of our fish-vending business. In protest, a group of us went to meet the local politician and, although I was a novice in leadership, I asked many questions. After that, the decision to displace us was overturned. I gained the respect of the women here and became more involved.

### What other issues have you taken up?

In 2004, we took up another issue. Fish vending in markets was being badly threatened by the entry of male vendors who bought fish as a group and sold it door-to-door at cheap rates. Through this issue, we could organize women vendors across Mumbai and it got us plenty of recognition. Following a suggestion that we would benefit from a formal structure, on 5 August 2005, the Mumbai District Womens' Fish Vending Co-operative was formed. While this gave me exposure to some training and leadership, the real leadership is still in male hands and we have not achieved as much as we should.

### What next?

What we need is a strong women's union to address our issues effectively in the male-dominated fisheries. Women fish vendors are mostly illiterate, vulnerable to fraud, and need State benefits like pension, insurance, savings-cum-relief schemes, transportation, cold-storage facilities and access to credit. A sound organizational base will address these issues. ❏

## YEMAYA MAMA

...roots for feminism!



DOCUMENTARIES

# Net gains

## YouTube is a sea of resources for documentaries on women in fisheries

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**Y**ouTube is an online resource that allows people to discover, watch and share originally-created videos. YouTube allows for the easy creation of theme-based channels, a facility that is increasingly being used by organizations to upload video content on specific issues. There are several interesting international channels on fisheries on YouTube. This column covers a few of the major ones.

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) Channel ([www.youtube.com/user/FAOoftheUN/videos?live\\_view=500&flow=list&sort=dd&view=0](http://www.youtube.com/user/FAOoftheUN/videos?live_view=500&flow=list&sort=dd&view=0)) carries an informative introductory video to the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security. Besides this, there is a video featuring interviews with governments, regional organizations, civil society organizations and academia on the upcoming international small-scale fisheries (SSF) guidelines ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=w0ryLppJ3iM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w0ryLppJ3iM)).

The documentary “Lifting the Veil”, covering Tunisia’s clam fisheries, shows how FAO and its partners are actively strengthening the role of women in the beach clam fisheries subsector.

The channel of the FAO’s regional office in Asia-Pacific has a five-minute presentation on the invisible role of women in the small-scale fisheries as part of an Asia news flash ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=Aa8llGee-Dk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Aa8llGee-Dk)). FAO regional offices have also uploaded other interesting documentaries, such as one on women in fisheries in Cambodia ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=XLxkAMnEDyQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XLxkAMnEDyQ)) and a seven-minute interview with a local chief of Community Fisheries in Cambodia, Nuor Chhai, which highlights the important issues that her community faces and how the Regional Fisheries Livelihood Project has helped improve community livelihoods.

Another interesting channel is that of the United Nations University (UNU). This has a few informative documentaries about *satoumi*—coastal areas in Japan where the sea and human beings coexist intimately. One documentary features *satoumi* in Hokkaido ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=yRlB6fwW98U&list=PL8QnLThpVncXJKx9285vQmyiTmo90s\\_2y](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yRlB6fwW98U&list=PL8QnLThpVncXJKx9285vQmyiTmo90s_2y)), which shows the various ways in which the coastal community preserves a uniquely balanced interaction between the terrestrial and marine ecosystems. A more detailed documentary on *satoumi* in this channel ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=KkgHbrXoXes](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KkgHbrXoXes)) shows how the practice is linked to livelihood maintenance.

The UNU channel also has a documentary on the Ama women divers of Japan who have been practising sustainable fishing for hundreds of years (Where the Sea Whistle Echoes: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=sTlf2vA-\\_JQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sTlf2vA-_JQ)). Another splendid view is a documentary that follows the experience of a number of large and small fishing communities in Miyagi and Iwate Prefectures. Key individuals from these communities explain the impact on their lives of the 2011 tsunami (Standing Strong Again: Rebuilding the Fishing Community of Kesennuma—[www.youtube.com/watch?v=miGwjQa0txo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=miGwjQa0txo)). **M**



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Writers and potential contributors to YEMAYA, please note that write-ups should be brief, about 500 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 the writer. Please do send us comments and suggestions to make the newsletter more relevant. We look forward to hearing from you and to receiving regular write-ups for the newsletter.