

Yemaya

IGSF'S NEWSLETTER ON GENDER AND FISHERIES



32 Years in Support of Small-scale Fishworkers

From the Editor

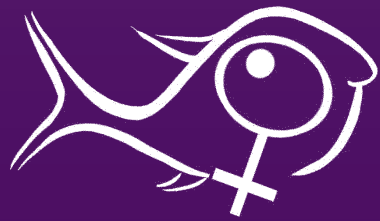
Sixty-eight-year-old Maria Elena is a fisherwoman, catching fish for a living in Mexico's Lake Chapala. Earlier, in order to earn enough to meet family needs, in addition to fishing Maria Elena also filleted fish but her deteriorating health no longer permits this. Despite having fished for over 50 years, she is not a member of the fishers' cooperative in the region and therefore cannot directly access any government benefits. To make matters worse, some time ago, polluted river waters entered the local lake, resulting in a substantial decline in fish availability.

Maria Elena's life typifies the issues faced by women in the sector. They are forced to work in multiple capacities to earn money for the family, and then bear primary responsibility for domestic chores. They are forced into retirement by ill health, often brought about by the pressures of excess work. Declining fish catch and the pollution of fish sources also push them out of traditional occupations. At the end of their working lives, many of them do not have any legal identity and recognition accruing from their occupations, and are therefore excluded from benefits to workers in the sector. At the end of a hard working life, the benefit of even a meagre old age pension requires the proof of identity.

As articles in this issue show, the pressures of competition and declining fish catch on traditional fishing impacts women in fishing communities in different parts of the world, whether among fish vendors in India or fish processors and vendors in Kenya. In India, the competition from modern and mechanized fishing is leading to greater centralisation of fish landings, with women having to travel longer distances to buy fish from ports and transport the fish over greater distances to markets. They face increased competition from men, who have greater access to money and are freer to travel longer distances. In Kenya, with fish stock levels rapidly going down in Lake Victoria, women are forced to engage in *jaboya* or sex-fo-fish to be able to access fish to sustain themselves and their families.

In the context of declining traditional fisheries, women are entering new roles along the fish value chain, including seeking waged employment in fish processing. However, here they face the gender based discrimination which is endemic in the fishing and fish processing industries. A study in 2017 by the International Organisation for Women in the Seafood Industry (WSI) found widespread discrimination against women in the sector (See 'Gender inequalities and the path forward'). It recommended that the issue needed to be addressed seriously by all industry stakeholders, including NGOs and trade unions.

The Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (the SSF Guidelines) call for implementing gender mainstreaming throughout the fisheries sector. This call, echoed in the experiences of women fishers across the globe, is reiterated in all the articles in this issue of Yemaya. Unless their needs are brought to the forefront with governments and the industry, increasing numbers of women working in the sector will continue to face ever-growing levels of marginalisation. ❏



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Street vendors, fish markets and food security

While women in fisheries cope with the challenges of changing market systems, persistent gender inequities threaten to impact livelihoods and food security.

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New research in southern India, conducted by the Fish4Food Project, reveals that small-scale traders play an important role in ensuring access to fish by the urban poor. By providing low income consumers with small pelagic fish, in particular, small-scale traders support food security as well as contribute to the livelihoods of their own households. Many of the small-scale traders serving the urban poor in southern India are women street vendors who travel on foot from door to door or sit on street corners or in roadside markets. Street vendors are ubiquitous in Asian cityscapes. Yet despite the important role they play in local economies, delivering food and other items to consumers, they enjoy few rights and legal protections, and often face harassment from police and municipal authorities. For women fish traders, these challenges are compounded by other gender-based vulnerabilities and

discrimination. Although women fish traders are not a homogenous group – their businesses operate differently based on different capital endowments, where they buy and sell fish, and volume of sales – they nevertheless face a number of common challenges. Women fish traders struggle to acquire affordable credit; they are often denied access to public transport and, in popular culture, ‘fish market’ and ‘fisherwoman’ are frequently employed derogatively as metaphors for noisy, raucous, and undesirable behaviour.

Within fish market systems, women traders often face a number of disadvantages because of the way such systems are structured and operate. Research on markets and street vendors around the world reveals that market systems and processes are deeply embedded in—and, indeed, governed by—social factors. Apart from economic considerations such as capital, assets, and scale of operation, social factors such as gender, ethnicity, caste and religious identity underlie power relations and marketplace hierarchies, and, thereby, differentially structure different traders’

HOLLY M. HAPKE



Women fish traders divide jointly purchased fish at Pangode fish market in India. Bulk landings and centralized landing sites, transportation, ice and refrigeration technologies have, in turn, generated a new geography of fish marketing


relationships to the market. For example, who is an insider and who is an outsider determines who has access to fish and who is allowed to sell fish in a particular marketplace. In India, men from trading communities have historically dominated city marketplaces, and women from fishing communities have had to fight for space in which to sell their fish.

Furthermore, gender norms and ideologies define women's work and their mobility in particular ways that impact how they are able to work, and what opportunities and constraints they face as economic development unfolds. Responsibility for unpaid household chores, childcare and other reproductive tasks limits the amount of time at their disposal for engagement in remunerative work, and gendered ideas about women's presence in, and movement through, public spaces limits their mobility. Because market processes are not socially neutral, if new production technology demands shifts in where and when fish is landed, and prevailing gender norms do not support women travelling to distant harbours at night, women may be shut off from sources of cheap fish. Or, if economic transactions become more commercialized, and women traders do not have access to credit because of the way they are socially situated in market hierarchies, they will be negatively impacted as will their households.

Market structures become significant when development interventions are introduced because they inform who benefits and who 'loses' from economic transformations – often in unanticipated ways. For example, if dramatic increases in production favour large-scale merchants buying in bulk over small-scale traders, the latter will be negatively impacted by economic development. In her 1981 book, *Transitional Trade and Rural Development*, Barbara Harriss-White observed: "If Development depends not only on the generation of marketed surplus [increased production] but also on its transfer and redistribution; then ... the way this surplus is utilized and redistributed is essential." Thus, the role of fish traders in development becomes a relevant question as does the analysis of the political economy of commerce in a region.

To date, fisheries science and fisheries development policy have suffered from two biases. First is the disproportionate attention to fish production, or harvesting, activities and the relative neglect of fish processing and distribution. Second is a gender bias that has overlooked or minimized women's roles in fish economies. Post-harvest activities have received

less attention than fish harvesting in fisheries development initiatives, but these activities are integrally linked to fish production. What happens in one arena dramatically impacts the other. Sixty years of planned development in India has dramatically transformed fish production systems, which, in turn, has transformed systems for the distribution and sale of fish. Planned development in India's fisheries has focused primarily on the introduction of mechanized and motorized production technology, ice and refrigeration technologies, and the construction of modern harbours. Collectively, these technologies have had two impacts. First is an increased size of individual landings. Second is a geographical shift in fish harvesting from decentralised landing sites spread out along the coast to centrally located harbours in a few key sites that can accommodate mechanized boats. Bulk landings and centralised landing sites, ice and refrigeration, along, with improved transportation technologies have, in turn, generated a new geography of fish marketing characterised by increasingly complex commodity chains, linking fish producers in local landing sites to increasingly distant markets and fish traders to new sources of fish supply. In effect, India now has a national fish market in which fish travels all over the country and is available to consumers at an affordable price virtually year-round. While this development has expanded consumer access to fish, for women small-scale fish traders, the impacts are mixed. On the one hand, they have enjoyed increased supply of fish and year-round availability, which has had a stabilising effect over what was, previously, a highly seasonal economy. On the other hand, increasingly commercialised exchange relations and stratified market systems have emerged in which large-scale merchants and commission agents dominate – to the potential detriment of small-scale traders. Although women fish traders have demonstrated creative and entrepreneurial acumen in forging strategies to cope with the challenges of changing market systems, the neglect of post-harvest activities and the exclusion of women from fisheries research priorities and policy have created gender inequities, which could over the long run adversely impact the food security of the urban poor who depend on women small-scale traders to deliver affordable fish.

To read more about the Fish4Food project, see: <https://www.nwo.nl/en/research-and-results/research-projects/i/24/26624.html> and <http://knowledge4food.net/research-project/gcp3-fish4food-india-ghana/> 

Gender norms and ideologies define women's work and their mobility in particular ways that impact how, they are able to work and what opportunities and constraints they face as economic development unfolds

Transformed mindsets

As fish in Kenya's Lake Victoria region becomes increasingly scarce, women fish traders in the region turn to fish farming to boost incomes and find a way out of the pernicious practice of *jaboya*

By **Irene Ojuok** (Irene_Ojuok@wvi.org), World Vision, Kenya and **Phillemon K. Bwanawoy** (phillemon_bwanawoy@wvi.org), World Vision, Kenya

Over the years, fishing has been a major income source around Kenya's Lake region. In Nyanza, and more specifically, around the shores of Lake Victoria, most families depend primarily on fishing for their livelihood. Small-scale or subsistence fishing, however, hardly meets the financial needs of families, who then often opt to send only the boy child to school while girls are married off early for the dowry.

Most communities in Kenya consider fish a delicacy. This is especially true of those living in Homabay County, along Lake Victoria in western Kenya. No family here would go without a meal of fish and ugali, a pounded mixture made from maize, sorghum or cassava flour. However, fish is no longer easily available for vulnerable rural households who have little or no money. Most people in the region surrounding the lake live on less than a dollar a day, yet fish may often cost between two to three dollars apiece. This difficulty in accessing fish has led to the practice of fishermen and women fish sellers transacting involved in a transaction in which sex, not money, is traded. This practice is known colloquially as 'sex for fish' and in the local Luo language, as *jaboya*. The 'sex for

fish' is also a nickname for fishermen who are customers of sex. The most vulnerable victims of this practice are economically disadvantaged women, including divorced women, widows, single mothers and even school going girls living along the beaches where fishing activities take place.

Fish catch in Lake Victoria has been declining over the years. Most vulnerable households and unemployed youth earn less than a dollar a day. This is much less than the cost of a table size fish that sells at slightly over two to three US dollars. Thus, for the poor, fish becomes a rare and often unattainable delicacy. With the decline in fishing, poverty has become rampant in the region, depriving the financially disadvantaged, particularly orphaned girls, adolescent mothers, widows, and single women of a chance to live a life of dignity. Walking the streets barefoot, in tattered clothes, with unkempt hair, and going to bed on an empty stomach – all this drives the victims into a state of desperation, where *jaboya* becomes an act of survival.

Jaboya is highly prevalent among fishmongers, who are forced to indulge in unethical survival tricks in order to get fish. The increasing involvement of fishmongers and fishermen in illicit sexual behavior has contributed to a breakdown of the moral and social fabric in fishing communities in the region, increasingly leading to family disintegration, divorce, and even early deaths. Sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS results in dropouts among schoolgoing girls. Young boys are also victims, and often resort to drugs and alcoholism. Child labour along the shores of Lake Victoria is common.

STEFFEN KUGLER



Harvesting of fish in ponds in Kenya. Over 300 vulnerable families in Homabay County are currently engaged in operating fish ponds

HIV/AIDS has killed many caregivers and breadwinners leaving behind helpless orphans and widows.

Perez Rowa, 40, formerly a woman fish seller is now a fish farmer supported by World Vision Kenya. She packs harvested fish from her fish pond, in a cooler ice box, ready for the market. She had no option in the days before adopting fish farming, but to practise *jaboya* for fish on days when she had no cash. Perez Rowa says, “I used to do fish trade – some days silver cyprinid and other days tilapia. The business was difficult and tiresome but I did not have any option as I had to provide food for my children. Sometimes I did not have enough money to buy the fish at a wholesale price, so I had to meet the fisherman privately and ‘negotiate’ for fish.”

Perez has seen many of her former female and male fishmongers succumb to HIV and AIDS as a result of being forced into *jaboya*. World Vision Kenya, has transformed the lives of many women and youth in the region with the support of World Vision Germany and the German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) which funded the Integrated Fish Farming and Horticulture Project. Along with fish farming, the project promotes the adoption

of improved native poultry and horticultural farming, mainly vegetables and fruits. Women and youth are now able to access good quality fruit tree seedlings from tree nurseries, owned and managed by farmers, supported by the Integrated Climate Protection and Resource Conservation (ICPRC) project, also funded by BMZ, in collaboration with the Homabay County Government.

Perez says, “This [*jaboya*] was dirty business, done out of ignorance; it even led to HIV/AIDS. But thanks to World Vision, I am now able to engage in aquaculture. I have three fish ponds, each with a carrying capacity of 1000 fish that earn me an average income of 112,800 shillings (1100 USD) from one standard fish pond of 300 square meters. Now my children have every reason to smile as they have access to nutritious food on the table. I have also been able to support some orphan children acquire education.”

“Say no to ‘sex for fish’ practice,” is John Oyare’s slogan. Oyare is an ex-fisherman, turned fish farmer, and laments his days of practising *jaboya*. He parted ways with his fellow fishermen, quit fishing and embraced the initiatives of fish farming, being advocated and supported by World Vision.

With the decline in fishing, poverty has become rampant in the region, depriving the financially disadvantaged, particularly orphaned girls, adolescent mothers, widows, and single women, a chance to live a life of dignity

Born in Venado Island, in the Nicoya gulf of Costa Rica’s Puntarenas province, 44-year-old Sonia Medina Matarrita is part of the fourth generation of a small-scale artisanal fishing family. A single mother, Sonia has taken care of her family of two girls and one boy single-handedly for the past 13 years. The path has not been easy but all the years of struggle and hard work have paid off, and despite the odds, today Sonia has many achievements to her credit.

also, to engage in production activities, such as the aquaculture farming of oysters and red snappers. The association is fully involved in the implementation of responsible fishing in the Marine Responsible Fishing Area of Venado Island. As president, Sonia participates with active interest in the activities of the Marine Responsible Fishing Area Network, of which she is also a coordinator, being ably assisted and supported with technical advice by CoopeSoliDar R.L. and INCOPECA. An important objective of the Network is the implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (the SSF Guidelines).

Not only this, Sonia was also part of the effort that made possible the meeting and networking of women from the seas, the rivers, lagoons and mangroves in Costa Rica, which led to the formulation of a common agenda that had, as its main objective, the strengthening of fisherwomen’s capacities.

Today, Sonia is also a part of the Director Board of the INCOPECA. In this capacity, she will be representing Costa Rica’s small-scale fishing sector for the next four years, furthering the interests of this sector and of her association, as also, strengthening the board’s capacity to engage in meaningful action. ❏

PROFILE

Sonia Medina Matarrita: Fisherwoman from Isla Venado, Costa Rica

Single but not alone

By **Vivienne Solis Rivera** (vsolis@coopesolidar.org), Member ICSE, Costa Rica



Sonia Medina Matarrita

Sonia is the President of the fisher’s association of Venado Island, a post she has held for three consecutive years. Under her leadership, the association, which has 64 fishers as members, has been able to coordinate with academic institutions, such as the National University of Costa Rica; with state institutions, such as INCOPECA (Instituto Costarricense de Pesca y Acuicultura or the Costa Rican Institute for Fisheries and Aquaculture), IMAS (Instituto Mixto de Ayuda Social or the Mixed Institute for Social Help) and the Labour Ministry; and



As fish in Kenya's Lake Victoria region becomes increasingly scarce, women fish traders turn to fish farming to boost incomes and to find a way out of the pernicious practice of *jaboya*

"I immediately sold my two fishing boats after attending trainings organized by World Vision," says Mr. Oyare. "Now I have a stable occupation, with three fish ponds integrated with vegetables, fruit trees and poultry farming. I have managed to sustain good nutrition for my family and my family income has grown. I oppose *jaboya* through advocacy."

Over 300 vulnerable families in Homabay County are currently engaged in operating fish ponds, with support from World Vision. Many vulnerable and low-resilient families, including poor women fishmongers have shifted to fish farms to harvest tilapia fish. Besides getting cultured fish, some women, have ventured into integrated fish farming, incorporating aquaculture with poultry and horticultural farming. These practices are spreading across Homabay County.

Margaret Seya is a model fish farmer in Gwassi South Sub County of Homabay County. Seya who practices fish farming along Lake Victoria believes that the solution to *jaboya* is for women and even youth to engage in fish farming since the capture of fish in the lake has become scarce and almost unaffordable for poor households. She has demonstrated that women can receive a stable income from fish farming. Seya earns a stable livelihood from harvest and the sale of fish to fish traders as well as to local consumers, and the money has enabled her to diversify into other economic activities. Seya encourages women to shun immoral and indecent fish trade, and move to fish farming as a way of livelihood.

The entry of youth into fish farming in Homabay County can bring to an end the pernicious practice of *jaboya*. With a membership of 14 young men and 16 young women, the Waringa Youth Group engages in fish and poultry farming besides undertaking other economic activities. The group is supported by World Vision through an Integrated Fish Farming and Horticulture Project. The project supports the youth with basic needs such as scholastic materials for themselves and their siblings, school fees, and nutrition to strengthen their resilience. Youth who are dropouts from school also find a safe haven in fish farming instead of being drawn to gambling and alcoholism. The Youth Group has so far realised a profit of 20,000 USD and contributed to support vocational training among orphaned children.

Aquaculture has greatly reduced stiff competition for fish among fish traders. Today, committed women who have adopted integrated fish farming report improved income and nutrition, and are able to provide for their children and other family basic needs. They are able to take their children to good schools for quality education and access health services. However, *jaboya* is still a threat along the beaches because the population of tilapia fish in Lake Victoria has dwindled and fish prices are high. Interventions of projects like the World Vision programme are very important to help restore dignity to the lives of the poor fisher communities around Lake Victoria. ❏

Gender inequalities and the path forward

A survey among seafood professionals, while revealing gender inequalities across the seafood industry in most countries, also provides pointers for positive change.

By **Marie Christine Monfort** (womeninseafood@wsi-asso.org), Co-founder and President, The International Organisation for Women in the Seafood Industry (WSI)

Several research studies and debates have addressed the issue of discrimination against women in the seafood industry. All segments of this industry, including fishing, aquaculture, seafood processing and all related services, have evidenced that the participation of women is constrained by strong cultural rules, robust societal conventions, and even, in some cases, by discriminatory laws. Women play an important role in all segments of the seafood industry, yet are invisible. They are efficient workers, yet most often underpaid. They are excluded from most decision making spheres. They have little or no access to resources allowing them to face adverse external events, as they do not receive the same public support as men. In addition, ongoing global changes including the demand for cheap inputs, the widespread decline in marine resources, the deterioration of marine habitats and the impact of climate changes, further affect already fragile populations, to which many women belong.

In order to complement this understanding of the role of women in fisheries, the International Organisation for Women in the

Seafood Industry (WSI) sought to hear the perception of seafood professionals, and their opinions regarding possible corrective measures. In 2017, WSI launched a survey asking seafood professionals to share their opinion on the crucial issue of the level of gender equality and inclusiveness in the seafood industry.

Between September and December 2017, WSI put out an online survey asking male and female seafood professionals to express their views about the situation of women in the industry, to talk about their experience and to share their views on how changes could be driven. A total of 695 professionals filled an online questionnaire titled 'Female/Male Inequalities in the Seafood Industry', of which 29 per cent were males and 71 per cent females. With three quarters of respondents originating in the northern hemisphere, the results reflect more accurately the situation of women in developed countries.

A primary finding was that over one in two seafood professionals considered this industry is gender unequal. Discriminations, unfavourable work conditions for women, deep-seated prejudices, inequality of opportunity and difficulty in accessing more senior positions were reported. 56 per cent of respondents felt that the sector is inequitable with regard to gender; 58 per cent (65 per cent among women) indicated



Milestones

By **Venugopalan N** (icsf@icsf.net), Programme Manager, ICSF




The Santiago de Compostela Declaration: Promoting equal opportunities in fisheries and aquaculture

The 'Santiago de Compostela Declaration for Equal Opportunities in the Fishing Sector and Aquaculture' was approved at the end of the opening day of the First International Conference of Women in Fisheries 5-7 November 2018. Held in Santiago de Compostela, the capital of northwest Spain's Galicia region, the meeting was organized jointly by the Ministerio de Agricultura, Pesca y Alimentación (the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, also known as MAPAMA) – a ministerial department of the Government of Spain – and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

Calling attention to the vast but undervalued contributions of women both in terms of labour force and wealth generation, to the fisheries and aquaculture sectors, the Declaration recognises that women are the predominant human capital

in activities such as transforming and trading with fisheries products, and they constitute a workforce of 20 million across the world engaged in extractive fishing and processing or selling, comprising 70 per cent of the aquaculture industry's workforce. In view of the deep structural barriers and constraints that women in these sectors face, the Declaration supports the formation of women's associations and the creation of organisational structures that bring together and represent several professional groups of women in fisheries and aquaculture. It also recommends the creation of a network or international platform of women in fisheries which will foster their empowerment and leadership.

The declaration is available at: <https://wsi-asso.us17.list-manage.com/track/click?u=5541e561077c854f904076de9&id=a44bdbcea2&e=9b67e46e5a> 

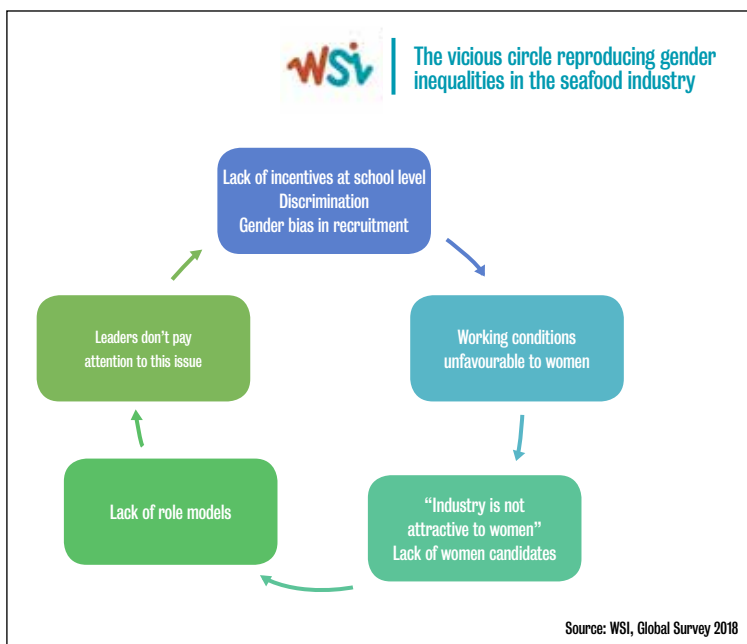
A primary finding was that over one in two seafood professionals considered this industry is gender unequal

that gender inequalities are unrecognised; and 80 per cent respondents considered the sector is ‘unattractive’ to women. The survey revealed a strong gap in perception between men and women. 61 per cent of the women respondents, as against only 44 per cent men considered the industry not gender-equal. Fifty-two per cent of women said that the problem is not even recognised within the industry.

Situations of inequality have been reported from all parts of the world, with the exception of Scandinavia. Professionals from this region have the strongest perception of equality and gender fairness, fully coherent with the macro gender indices which rank Denmark, Iceland and Norway at the top of countries closest to full gender equality.

Work-family balance and flexible work practise were found to be among the top barriers to gender equality at work. In many work places, maternity was still seen as a problem that supposedly carried economic losses for the companies concerned. This vision about pregnancy and motherhood resulted in mechanics of discrimination which ended up penalising women.

The non-gender inclusive character of this industry was reinforced by its old-fashioned and male dominated milieu. This environment added difficulties for women who had to conform to rules originally made by men for men. The survey found that the barriers to equal participation by women did not operate separately from each other; rather they stimulated each other creating a vicious and reinforcing circle that shaped gender characteristics and interactions among professionals in the seafood industry. The vicious circle is reproduced below:



From the analysis of WSI’s survey results, three steps emerged as possible efficient tools for breaking the vicious circle of gender inequality: raising consciousness of stakeholders so that they understand what is at stake; engaging men in this conversation; and encouraging progressive actions at the workplace.

First, in order to raise consciousness, the issue needs to be recognised, and responsibilities need to be owned by stakeholders.

Second, it is essential to bring men into the conversation for two reasons. The challenge should not be viewed as only a women’s issue but as a gender issue where balanced relationships between the two genders contributes to a progressive environment. Further, as decision makers, men are in the best position to influence the business environment. Finally, the survey revealed a strong gap in perception between men and women, between those directly concerned and others less concerned. There is an urgent need for a diagnosis shared by all professional organisations (fisher cooperatives, trade unions, professional organisations). Interestingly, the responses of male executives depended on their personal situation: if they had close female relatives in the industry, such as daughters, they were more likely to be open to the discussion.

Third, in order to stimulate change, dialogues on gender equality in the seafood industry should be stimulated to create consciousness, to bring information, and share good practices and progressive initiatives. All stakeholders including international organisations, national institutions, private corporates, professional associations, trade unions, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) need to be around the table and address the gender equality issue in a pragmatic and constructive way. Many NGOs in developing countries fight relentlessly to improve the situation of women and the well-being of their communities. The results of the WSI survey indicate the debate is awaited in the northern hemisphere to ensure equal access to women in all spheres; and this debate in turn will influence discourse in the South.

Introducing the changes along these lines requires expertise, time, money, and, more crucially, the change in attitude among decision makers that gender equality will benefit their organisations. Unfortunately, calls to social justice do not seem to be strong enough drivers to propel changes.

This is where further work needs to be done by WSI and other organisations who want to push the seafood industry on a more progressive path, and to make this feminist dream of equality in the seafood industry, a reality.

The full document is available in English, French and Spanish at <https://wsi-asso.org/wsi-reports/>

Female fishers in Lake Chapala

Meet Alejandra and Maria Elena, women fishers from Mexico's Lake Chapala region, whose work contradicts the belief that fishing is something that only men can do

By Carmen Pedroza-Gutiérrez (pedrozacarmen@yahoo.com), Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, (UNAM), México

Lake Chapala is the second largest lake in Mexico, and fishing has been an important economic activity in the region for hundreds of years. From colonial times to the 19th century, there was a high regional demand for fish, thanks to the region's abundant native species. The introduction of carp and tilapia forced a change in the market structure, including a shift to fish processing and other value-adding activities. Currently, women mostly engage in the task of filleting tilapia and carp. If you talk to the fishers, most will say that women don't fish in the lake; in fact, even little boys will say: "Only men go fishing, not ladies."

However, Alejandra and Maria Elena have been fishing in Lake Chapala with their husbands for years. Though they came from different communities, they learned how to fish when they got married, Alejandra in Jamay, a fishing community on the banks of Lake Chapala,

and Maria Elena in Petatán, another fishing community along the lake. Alejandra is 43 years old and has four boys and two girls, while Maria Elena is 68 years old and has nine girls and two boys. Alejandra has been fishing for about 23 years and Maria Elena for about 50. Alejandra says that in her community, Jamay, there are about six fisherwomen. Maria Elena recalls that in her youth there were only one or two women going for fishing in Patatán, but that now more women are turning to fishing with every passing day.

Women normally fish with their children or husbands, very rarely on their own or with another woman. "In Jamay, there are no boats that go fishing only with women on board," Alejandra explains. "Fishing is not an activity you do on your own, especially because to pull the net out of the water, it takes two people. But," she adds, "I've seen women fishing on their own in Ocotlán, with other types of nets."

Maria Elena fishes with tumbos (button set gill net). Since her husband and she are older, to take out this net and pick out the fish is not as difficult as with the manguadora, which is a small mesh, like a filtering net.

ALEJANDRA CRUZ FLORES



Alejandra has been fishing in Lake Chapala with her husband for many years. Women normally fish with their children or husbands, very rarely on their own or with another woman



Lake Chapala is the second largest lake in Mexico, and fishing has been an important economic activity for hundreds of years

One of the reasons why the women go fishing is so that their husbands do not have to pay a worker to go fishing with them; thus, all the catch and earnings stay in the family and they save money, says Alejandra, “There are times when no workers can be found to accompany my husband, so I go to help and to take care of him.” On the other hand, if women go fishing it has to be with their husbands or kids, as otherwise it might be ‘seen badly by people in the community.’”

Alejandra belongs to the same fishers’ cooperative as her husband, and she says that all fisherwomen from Jamay in fact are members. Only cooperative members are legally allowed fishing permits, and so, membership provides Alejandra

The most common catch in the lake is tilapia, says Alejandra, whose typical day starts early with household chores. “We start fishing every morning by nine and continue until four or five. If the fish doesn’t come, we might stay in the lake until seven or eight at night. In the morning before going fishing, I feed my kids and take them to school. Later, my mother-in-law takes care of them.”

legal status as well as certain cooperative benefits. María Elena, on the other hand, does not belong to any cooperative; only her husband and one of her children are members. She explains that the reason for this is that they don’t have the money needed to pay the registration fee. As a result, she misses out on the government subsidies that cooperatives receive.

A new Women in Fisheries project

What’s New, Webby?



By Venugopalan N
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New research exploring women’s roles in fishing families officially got going in August 2018, with the launch of the new Women in Fisheries project website.

This research examines how women contribute to the survival of both fishing families and the fishing industry, and will shed light on women’s roles, identities and well-being.

Collecting data on both sides of the Atlantic – in Newfoundland, Canada, and in the United Kingdom – the Women in Fisheries project is also hoping to understand how small-scale fishing families (those using boats under ten meters in length) are adapting to a changing environmental and economic climate.

Dr Madeleine Gustavsson, a Research Fellow at the University of Exeter’s European

Centre for Environment and Human Health, is leading the study and wants a wide range of people to take part: “Listening to women’s stories is a central part of this research and the new website provides information about how people can sign up and share their stories. We want to hear from as many women involved in fisheries as possible, whatever their roles might be,” she says.

Funded with support from an ESRC New Investigator grant, the project is also working closely with the small-scale fisheries practitioners and advocacy groups: AKTEA (European network for women in fisheries and aquaculture), LIFE (Low Impact Fishers of Europe) and the Coastal Producer Organisation.

You can view the new website at www.women-fisheries.com and follow Madeleine on Twitter here <https://twitter.com/mcgustavsson>.



Maria Elena fishes with tumbos (button set gill net). Since her husband and she are older, to take out this net and pick out the fish is not as difficult as with the mangueadora, which is a small mesh, like a filtering net

Both women enjoy fishing. Alejandra finds most rewarding that moment when she hauls catch out of the water. She says, “I prefer fishing to filleting. When I fish, I ask God to bless us and send us a lot of fish. In one day I can earn more by fishing than by filleting. Also, fishing with my husband gives us the chance to keep all our earnings in the household, leaving us with more for household expenses. Moreover, I like to be in the lake because I feel that I am working, that I am together with my husband, and that we are getting each day’s bread. I would not like to do any other work because I like fishing and also because I think I am too old to start on anything else.”

Maria Elena has other reasons. She says, “I have to help my husband because he is old, and I like rowing and going into the lake. Now that I’ve been sick for some days, I can’t wait

to go back fishing.” Until recently, in addition to fishing, Maria Elena was also filleting fish. “After fishing, I would go filleting,” she says, “because my kids were at school, and that would cost about a hundred pesos (five USD) per day. But I had a surgery done in one of my eyes, and now that I have certain problems with it, I can no longer fillet. I like both, filleting and fishing,” She adds, “I get bored of being at home.” She says that the previous year there was so much fish that they hardly had the time to take it out of the net. But three months ago, water from the Lerma River, which is highly polluted, entered the lake and now they are passing through a period of fish scarcity.

Says Alejandra: “I think fishing is for women because I too fish! I can fish and be a fisherwoman!” ❖

“I think fishing is for women because I too fish!”

YEMAYA MAMA

Reading between the lines!



FILM

Give a woman a fish

Produced by Conservation International and Fintrac; filmed and edited by Dominique Tardy, scripted by Olivier Joffre and narrated by Susan Novak. Duration 12 min 29 sec; Language: English

By **Kyoko Kusakabe** (kyokok@ait.asia), Professor, Asian Institute of Technology, Thailand

This documentary is about women fishers living in the floating villages of Tonle Sap Lake, Cambodia, considered the world's most productive inland fishery. In these villages of floating huts and boats, both women and men depend on fishing and fish processing, and there are few other livelihood options. Most are trapped in a cycle of poverty, often indebted to middlemen to buy fishing gear and for daily expenses. This documentary describes how a successful project supported a women's group to upgrade their fish processing techniques, introduced savings and helped to diversify livelihoods.

As a result of the project, a women's group came to adopt improved production techniques for prahok (fermented fish paste) and smoked fish. With new equipment such as new stoves, it was able to make more hygienic and better quality products, leading to better incomes and newer markets, including in Phnom Penh, an exposure that led to further improvements in quality to meet the higher standards demanded in Cambodia's capital city. The project organized savings groups too. Through repeated borrowing and repayments, these groups were

able to cultivate mutual trust. The low interest loan allowed the women members to diversify their livelihoods to non-fishing activities like growing vegetables and maintaining livestock - activities that would seem impossible to carry out on water and which make the documentary a must-watch!

There are beautiful shots of floating villages with villagers pursuing their daily chores to the soothing sound of lapping water. Floating villages represent a particular way of life, and this documentary is a good introduction for those who wish for a glimpse of this unique water based lifestyle. The documentary would be an excellent educational tool to demonstrate the importance of supporting women's groups in fishing communities.

There are certain aspects, however, that the documentary does not particularly address. We might like to note, for example, that women do fish in these communities alongside men, unlike in coastal villages where it is mostly the men who fish and women engage in fish marketing and processing. Also, while this may be a successful project, the problem of poverty still remains an enormous challenge. These floating villages have a high level of labor outmigration. Children start school late because of the difficulties of transportation on water. There are also issues of racial division between ethnic Vietnamese and Khmer, and, in fact, the ethnic Vietnamese usually are unable to come on shore because they cannot access land without Cambodian citizenship. There is a threat from capitalists working on tourism to capitalize on their lifestyle while leaving no opportunity for the local people to benefit from such tourism. There is also the serious issue of pollution in the Lake.

This documentary was shot in 2014, but the fish catch has drastically decreased since then, leaving fewer and fewer resources for women to process fish. When we view it, we need to remember the huge challenges that still lie ahead.

The documentary can be viewed at <https://vimeo.com/138482914>



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Writers and potential contributors to YEMAYA, please note that write-ups should be brief, about 1200 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.