



Yemaya

ICSF'S NEWSLETTER ON GENDER AND FISHERIES

From the Editor

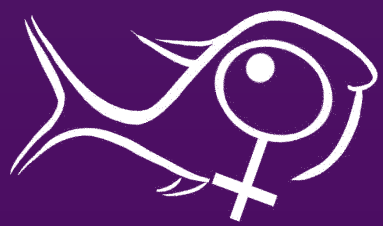
In a recent statement announcing the formation of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women—UN Women—the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon noted that this entity will significantly boost UN efforts to promote gender equality, expand opportunity, and tackle discrimination around the globe. While the UN has made significant progress in advancing gender equality, including through landmark agreements such as the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), gender inequalities remain deeply entrenched in every society, he pointed out.

This remains an unfortunate and unacceptable reality. Discussing the situation within fisheries, participants of the recently-held ICSF workshop titled “Recasting the Net: Defining a Gender Agenda for Sustaining Life and Livelihoods in Fishing Communities”, underscored the need to address this situation on an urgent basis. The “Shared Agenda for Sustaining Life and Livelihoods in Fishing Communities” adopted by participants noted that while women are an integral part of small-scale and artisanal fisheries and fishing communities, their work and labour continue to remain invisible. Specific forms of discrimination cut across all aspects of women’s lives.

Participants outlined their dreams of a future where, among other things, aquatic ecosystems are free of pollution, retaining their ability to regenerate living resources, sustain livelihoods and meet food security; fishing communities, including women and children, are able to live their lives in peace and dignity, free of violence, and to enjoy decent living and working conditions; the rights of fishing communities to their coastal lands, as well as the preferential access of small-scale and artisanal fishworkers and indigenous peoples to coastal and inland fisheries resources, are recognized; fishing communities have strong organizations, including producer organizations, enabling them to negotiate from positions of power, and in these organizations, women have central roles in decisionmaking; and basic economic, social, cultural and political rights are guaranteed by the State through a range of instruments, including the provision of social security, education and health facilities and a range of social and infrastructure assets for fishing communities. Action needed at various levels to translate these dreams into reality was spelt out by participants.

Whether the new entity, to be headed by Michelle Bachelet, the former President of Chile, will be able to play a role in translating these dreams into reality, remains to be seen. The formation of UN women, with a mandate to support inter-governmental bodies such as the Commission on the Status of Women in their formulation of policies, global standards and norms, help Member States to implement these standards, forge effective partnerships with civil society, and help the UN system to be accountable for its own commitments on gender equality, is being described as a historic step in accelerating the United Nations Organization’s goals on gender equality and the empowerment of women.

From the perspective of women of small-scale fishing communities, the issue really is whether the formation of this new entity will strengthen their hands to challenge an inextricably-linked sets of issues that form the basis of the discrimination and violence they and their communities face: inequitable and patriarchal gender relations within and outside the household, as well as models of development predicated on the unsustainable exploitation of resources, the unfettered and unregulated movement of capital, and the privatization of social services and hitherto commonly-held and collectively-used resources. ❏



Ecuador	2
Sierra Leone	4
What’s New Webby?	5
Milestones.....	6
South Korea	7
Mauritania.....	8
Profile	9
India	10
Q & A	11
Yemaya Mama.....	11
Yemaya Recommends.....	12

Mangrove Women, Dream Women

A serious reflection on the struggle of Ecuador's 'mangrove women' fighting industrial aquaculture, described in this article as an "absurd and criminal system...built upon the dreams of the colonizer"

This article by **Marianeli Torres** (marianeli@ccondem.org.ec) of the Ecuadorian NGO, C-CONDEM, is based on the speech she was to have presented at the ICSF workshop "Recasting the net: Defining a gender agenda for sustaining life and livelihoods in fishing communities", organized from 7 to 10 July 2010 in Chennai, India

Along with the brave women of my community, I have spent many years in a long journey—the journey to recover and defend the territories of the ancestral people of the mangroves of Ecuador. This journey has strengthened my life's commitment to contribute towards building a different world—a world where there is justice for historically-violated peoples, a world of our dreams.

I don't think that words are enough to convey a sense of the lives that women in the mangroves lead, lives lived daily in difficult conditions in a marvellous ecosystem, being systematically devastated by the rapacity of capitalism expressed through an absurd and criminal system—the system of industrial shrimp aquaculture—which devastates mangrove forests throughout the world, and with them the lives of thousands of families whose lives depend on the mangroves.

"Society despises us for being *concheras* (shellfish catchers), *cangrejas* (crab collectors) and fishworkers, because we don't have a university degree or a Bachelor's degree, because some of us were denied even the possibility to learn how to read and write.

Society does this because it does not know that we feed them, that because of us there is still nature that gives life to all mankind. They are not aware that we are not less human, that we are just different and necessary". These are the words of Jacinta Napa, shellfish collector of the island of Muisne in the province of Esmeraldas, located in the northern coast of Ecuador. These words, uttered during the first meeting of women from the mangroves that took place last year in the place where Jacinta was born, deeply humbled the participants. "I'm proud to be a woman of the mangrove, a shell woman, a woman of a hundred loves, kneading the mud with my hands every day to eat, as does the beast with its offspring...". This is a line from a poem written by Santa Cagua Vivero, a shellfish catcher from the same area and the words express the recovery of pride, the recovery of a sense of being.

The recovery of the sense of self has been accompanied by intense work to recover also our sense of belonging and membership. The struggle to reclaim, conserve and defend the mangrove ecosystem as a territory of life in Ecuador sprung from the awareness and sensitivity of women shellfish collectors from the northern coast of the country, who expressed a deep understanding of the symbiosis between their lives and the life of the ecosystem. "How not to love you, oh land of mine, if you're my blood, my daughter, my mother, my sense...?" asks Santa Cagua Vivero in a poem which goes on to summon the ancestral populations of the mangroves to a defence of the land, a defence of the ecosystem. "How can I build my body and soul with walls to stop the cruelty of your agony?", she continues.

The decade of the 1970s was marked by the passing of a death sentence upon thousands of hectares of mangrove ecosystem that flourished along Ecuador's coasts, providing work, food and other resources for local populations. Exports of non-traditional products to pay for the country's illegitimate external debt to the North led to the promotion of industrial shrimp aquaculture. Huge national capital, linked to political and economic clout, was mobilized rapidly to

GLADYS CORTEZ



Woman shell-fish catchers have a deep understanding of the symbiosis between their lives and the life of the ecosystem

convert the Ecuadorian coastal mangrove estuaries into large industrial shrimp ponds. This greatly increased the fortunes of the few Ecuadorian families who controlled export and banking activities. The shrimp activity developed illegally and violated the rights of the ancestral populations of the mangrove ecosystem. This is the political and economic context in which we started to address the situation of women in the mangroves, to understand how our sense of wellbeing and belonging were being compromised.

Mangroves on the Ecuadorian coasts have been systematically destroyed in the last four decades. Thousands of impoverished families survive upon the last meagre resources the mangroves contain, and thousands have been displaced to cities where they are forced to live in terrible conditions. And what about the women? The women of the mangrove ecosystem face even greater hardships. A double working day, violence, exclusion from decisionmaking, limited access to health and education, no access to productive credit—these are elements that make up their lives.

Neiva, a crab collector, Andrea, a shell collector, and Edita, whose community's ecosystem was destroyed but who today survives upon the tourism activity organized around the last remaining mangroves, all share the same story: abuse at the hands of their partners, poorly paid and too much work, lack of any leisure time, discrimination and poor health. This reality is so pervasive in the lives of women of the mangroves that it is sometimes regarded as a natural and inescapable condition. This was the first reflection on which we started to work and raise questions: what collective responsibility do we have towards solving the problems facing us that, as women, we might be shrugging off? Is this the responsibility of only men in the community, or of the organization to lead the struggle against a violent society that is turning upon those it considers the weakest?

Women from the Ecuadorian mangrove ecosystem are women of struggle who have been on the streets fighting for their rights. The fight is not for individual rights but for the rights of the entire community. Their struggle is the struggle for all. Thirty years of collective resistance has drawn in grandmothers, mothers, daughters and granddaughters. They are the movement's leaders but the cost they have to pay is high. "That cost is not paid by a man," observes

a companion. "When men leave the house, they are not accused of abandoning their sons and daughters; when they leave, there is not a whit of doubt about their moral integrity; when they leave, they don't know if their sons and daughters have eaten or not; when they leave, they don't announce their return; they are free to explore while women are expected to sacrifice for the household." Women have hardly gained access to a leadership position in the national organization but this is so not because they do not have the will or the capacity but because society ensures that all doors to participate in public life are shut for women, if necessary, even by physical violence.

The situation of the women of Ecuador's mangrove ecosystem is something that we have started to address and confront in our organizations and communities in the past two years. The disadvantages that women face are an unavoidable reality and the removal of these difficulties is everyone's responsibility. While the loss of ancestral rights to the mangrove ecosystem and its biodiversity as well as the violence of industrial aquaculture and the State is shared by both men and women of artisanal fishing and foraging communities, the hard reality is that women face a double discrimination and exclusion as peasant women, migrant women, women workers and women running the household.

The women of the mangrove ecosystem do not consider that the fight for their rights is a divisive struggle. In fact, they believe that the struggle for the rights of women should bring together men and women. They believe that there can be no comprehensive or real struggle to defend the mangrove ecosystem if it is not at the same time a struggle for the rights of women.

Today what is needed above all else is to respond to the crises we face in ways that will safeguard the lives of our future generations. We must consolidate our struggles, the struggles of the people, and the struggles of women now as never before. We cannot, indeed we must not, leave as an inheritance to our sons and daughters a world built upon the dreams of the colonizer; a world that has made us deny and repudiate who we are and made us aspire to be who we are not; a world that has taught us to destroy nature in the service of development, without pausing to reflect that in the process we destroy ourselves. ❏

"I'm proud to be a woman of the mangrove, a shell woman, a woman of a hundred loves, kneading the mud with my hands every day to eat, as does the beast with its offspring..."

The Fish Mammies of Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone's artisanal fisheries would all but collapse without its fish mammies, entrepreneurial women in charge of post-harvesting activities, some of whom today even own boats and gear. But why aren't they their own bosses yet? This article finds out...

This article is by **Ranita A Sandi** (ranitadama@gmail.com), Institute of Marine Biology and Oceanography (IMBO), Fourah-Bay College, University of Sierra Leone

The artisanal fishery of Sierra Leone at 120,000 tonnes accounts for 90 per cent of the national catch and is an important source of livelihood for coastal communities, with huge potential to reduce poverty. Two species, *bonga* (*Ethmalosa fimbriata*) and herring (*Sardinella spp*) account for 62 per cent of the artisanal catch. Fishing operations are undertaken using planked or dug-out canoes ranging in size from five or six to up to 21 metres in length. The Ghana boat, introduced by the Ghanaian migrant fishers in the 1950s, is the largest, while the Kru canoe is the smallest craft in the range. A Ghana boat could have between 10 and 30 crew on board while the Kru canoe is usually a one-man operation.

Fishing nets include set and driftnets, beach seines, ring- and cast-nets, handlines, pots and traps. Fish processing involves sun-drying on raised platforms (*banda*) and smoking using

ovens. There are no markets exclusively for fish products in Sierra Leone although markets in the capital city of Freetown, such as Dovecot, Kennedy Street, Bombay Street, Garrison Street, Krootown Road and Congo Market have sections for fish products. Poor road conditions hamper accessibility.

Limited post-harvest facilities are provided along the coast but there are no functional jetties at landing sites for unloading fish. Operations

across the fish chain are gender-based with men more or less restricted to catching fish and women in charge of all the subsequent activities. A careful examination of the role of women, locally known as 'fish mammies' in the artisanal fisheries of Sierra Leone, signals their indispensability in the running of the artisanal fisheries.

'Mammy' is the term used to salute a mother or an elderly woman in Sierra Leone. In the West African parlance, entrepreneurial women of sound financial stature in the artisanal fisheries are known as fish mammies. In Sierra Leone, mammies consolidate their collective power through economic organizations and institutions such as *Osusu*, a rotating savings/credit and labour organization, acting to share labour and profits, regulate market prices for fish inputs, and mobilize to protest against activities that might diminish their incomes.

In many West African countries these women have traditionally played vital post-harvesting roles. Today, they are diversifying from selling fish for profit to directly investing in fish capture. Like their male counterparts, nowadays women are also owners of boats and gears; they finance fishing operations and dominate the processing and marketing of fish products.

A recent gender and fisheries workshop organized by the Institute of Marine Biology and Oceanography (IMBO) and the British Council Development Partnership in Higher Education (DelPHE) Programme in Freetown, Sierra Leone revealed that women are more reliable than men for credit repayment, which makes them more reliable as development partners in the artisanal fisheries subsector. If fish mammies facilitate all stages of fish production in the artisanal sector by providing money as loans to fishermen and are also boatowners, fish processors, the principal marketers and fish distributors, then it is evident that they are the hub around which the artisanal fisheries of Sierra Leone rotates. Clearly, the fisheries would be handicapped without fish mammies.

Despite the wealth women generate from the fisheries of Sierra Leone, their economic activities are mediated within a male-dominated environment—on the coasts by fishermen, in the family by their husbands and sons and in public life by male-dominated

THOMAS LEBBIE



Fish mammies at Tombo, with catfish landings. They are the hub around which the fisheries revolve

government, educational institutions and industrial institutions. Women may generate wealth but they do not necessarily own assets as most of their income is spent on meeting the needs of the household, making savings difficult. Women own less than 10 per cent of fishing assets and 40 per cent of their income goes into family expenditure.

Generally speaking, the role of women in artisanal fisheries and community development is overlooked by fisheries scientists and economists. In Sierra Leone, the roles these women play in the artisanal fisheries communities have been largely ignored. The Sierra Leone Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper made but passing mention of the need to empower fisherwomen. The Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources has no roadmap to take women in fishing communities out of poverty, as, historically, women's roles have been considered subordinate to those of men in fishing communities.

Fish capture, undertaken by men, masks a whole gamut of activities such as pre-financing, buying, processing, preserving and marketing performed largely or exclusively by women. Socio-cultural values and norms in Sierra Leone ensure that women are expected to give moral and physical support to the fishermen, while remaining submissive to their husbands in every respect. Women are not allowed to deny sex to their husbands who are largely unfaithful

and shy away from using condoms, thereby increasing the spread of sexually transmitted diseases. It is a cultural taboo for women to be part of the fishing crew.

Women boatowners, unlike their male counterparts, therefore, cannot ascertain true landings by monitoring their crafts at sea. Child bearing and nursing also greatly impede the involvement of women in fishery activities. These are barriers to fish mammies' ability to contribute meaningfully to the fisheries and to community development as well as nation building. Despite these obstacles, women are overcoming many institutional problems to make meaningful contributions. Outside the domain of fisheries, women have been able to influence the outcome of national elections and participate fully in debates about food security and production. Their significant contributions towards the achievement of socio-economic and developmental goals in the post-war era have received recognition through increased entrepreneurship opportunities for economic empowerment.

However the flipside is that women too engage in practices which should be discontinued. Women are blamed for the proliferation of the illegal *mina* fisheries. *Mina* is the local name for juvenile herring. Women get free landings from this fishery and, as argued by workshop participants at a gender and fisheries workshop in June 2009,

Fish mammies are the hub around which the artisanal fisheries of Sierra Leone rotates.

Shared Agenda

ICSF has recently published the proceedings of the international workshop on women in fisheries (WIF) titled "Recasting the Net: Defining a Gender Agenda for Sustaining Life and Livelihoods in Fishing Communities", held from 7-10 July 2010, at Mahabalipuram, India. The 39 participants of the workshop were from 18 countries, and included women fishworkers, representatives of fishworker organizations, NGOs, activists and researchers. The workshop was meant to reflect on what needs to be done to develop a 'gender agenda' for sustaining life and livelihoods in fisheries. It was also organized against the backdrop of the growing international recognition of small-scale fisheries and efforts to enhance their contribution to food security and poverty alleviation, as evidenced in the deliberations of the Committee on Fisheries (COFI) of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

The presentations at the workshop captured organizational processes and concerns of women fishworkers from

several countries, as well as the major shifts that have taken place over the last three decades in the dominant discourse on women in small-scale fisheries. They also focused on international legal instruments relevant to women in fisheries, as well as processes underway through COFI to support sustainable small-scale fisheries.

Active discussion, debate and analysis formed the basis of a "Shared Agenda" agreed on by workshop participants. This captured their "dreams for the future" as well as the "agenda for action" needed to realize these dreams, addressed to different sections of society. The publication—the official proceedings of the workshop—will be a useful source of information for community organizers, fishworker organizations, women's groups, government officials, multilateral organizations, researchers and donors, as well as all those interested in gender issues.

http://icsf.net/icsf2006/uploads/publications/proceeding/pdf/english/issue_111/ALL.pdf

What's New, Webby?



Towards gender equality and empowerment

In July 2010, the United Nations General Assembly created UN Women, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. This is a historic step in accelerating the United Nations Organization's goals on gender equality and the empowerment of women. The creation of UN Women is part of the UN reform agenda, bringing together resources and mandates for greater impact. It will merge and build on the important work of four previously distinct parts of the UN system which focus exclusively on gender equality and women's empowerment: Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW); International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW); Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women (OSAGI); and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM). In carrying out its functions, UN Women will be working with an annual budget of at least US \$500 million—double the current combined resources of the four agencies it comprises.

The main roles of UN Women are to support inter-governmental bodies, such as the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), in their formulation of policies, global standards and norms; to help Member States to implement these standards, standing ready to provide suitable technical and financial support to those countries that request it; to forge effective

partnerships with civil society; and to hold the UN system accountable for its own commitments on gender equality, including through regular monitoring of system-wide progress.

The year 2010 is an important time to reflect on progress, as it marks the 15th anniversary of the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action at the Fourth World Conference on Women (1995), and the 10th anniversary of the Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security.

Ten years have also passed since the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were launched, with a series of time-bound targets for advancing development and reducing poverty by 2015 or earlier. While goal 3 of the MDG focuses on promoting gender equality and empowering women, there is now broad recognition that gender equality is both a goal in itself, as well as a means towards the achievement of all the MDGs.

The work of UN Women is framed by the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which marked its 30th anniversary in 2009. The Convention provides the basis for realizing equality between women and men as well as an agenda for action by State parties to guarantee the enjoyment of those rights. As of June 2010, 186 countries are party to the Convention.

<http://www.unwomen.org/>

are culpable as receivers of illegal catch. Participants pointed out that poor fish mummies, because of their dependence on resale of the product, would be most adversely affected if the *mina* fisheries were to be stopped. Some fisherwomen also engage in transactional sex to acquire fish from fishermen and, thus, risk contracting and spreading HIV/AIDS.

Women also contribute to the overexploitation of mangrove forests. Field studies indicate that 46 per cent of women fish processors use mangrove wood for smoking fish. This unregulated use of mangroves destroys the coastal ecosystem and leads to environmental degradation by destroying the nursery grounds for fish and other marine and terrestrial fauna such as shrimp, crocodile, crabs and turtles. Mangrove wood is preferred because it is believed to produce more heat and impart an attractive aroma and appearance to the smoked fish. The poor handling of fish also results in further post-harvest losses. Sorting

is sometimes done on the ground; the fish is not washed or cleaned properly and is sold in unhygienic environments. As a result, it spoils more quickly, leading to post-harvest losses. With an eye on enhancing profits, women sometimes postpone selling, which could lead to further deterioration of the quality of the fish.

In conclusion it may be said that the importance of fish mummies in the artisanal fisheries sector in Sierra Leone cannot be overstated. The subsector would virtually come to a standstill without them. Their domestic and community roles are very important although largely unrecognized. However, women also engage in environmentally unfriendly practices which impact adversely on their livelihoods and the environment. Policy recommendations should prioritize the issues of recognizing women's contributions, empowering them to participate fully in community and fisheries development and helping them to discontinue ecosystem misuse. ❖

The Women Divers of Jeju

A 400-year old practice, unique to the village of Jeju in South Korea, is recognized and safeguarded by the government

This article is by **Nalini Nayak** (nalini.nayak@gmail.com), Member of ICSF

Seaweed diver Kim Yong Ja is 73 years old. Part of a community of divers of Jeju in South Korea for whom diving for seaweed and seafood is a way of life, Kim Yong Ja started diving at the young age of 14. She began by accompanying her mother who was an experienced diver. She also attended school and worked on the family farm. Kim Yong Ja still goes out diving four days a week. Each trip is three or four hours long. She claims that she is as able and healthy as any of the younger women divers.

I met Kim Yong Ja as part of a field trip to the International Museum of Women organized for the participants of the Asia Pacific Fisheries Conference (APFIC) held in Jeju, South Korea recently. This museum vividly documents and preserves the history and practices associated with traditional forms of livelihood. We were greeted by a group of 25 women divers from Jeju who, through a programme of song and dance, brought alive for us the main features of their unique way of life.

Chatting afterwards with Kim Yong Ja with the help of an interpreter, I came to realize what a challenging life she had led. In her younger days, they did not have the protective diving suits that they now have, which helps them brave the cold water and remain submerged for long periods, resurfacing with catch that is dropped into baskets floating above. Today divers wear rubber swim suits and goggles. However, no other scuba gear is used. At the end of each trip, Kim Yong Ja hands

over the catch to the village co-operative, the Eochongae, from whom she receives about 98 per cent of the sale price.

Things, however, are no longer as they used to be. There is much less catch. But Kim Yong Ja is happy that she is paid a minimum wage by the government, which allows her community the right to pursue its traditional form of livelihood regardless of catch volumes. Kim Yong Ja is a member of the Haenyo, an organization of women divers. The Haenyo works as an autonomous and decentralized local organization, managing diving operations as well as laying down rules of work and extraction in demarcated areas of coastal waters to which it has access rights.

Since 1960, in recognition of the 400 year-old practice of diving, the South Korean government has granted customary rights to diving communities. Marketing co-operatives have also been setup by the State. It is evident that the government is not only keen to manage resources but also to safeguard the women diver's traditional way of life and culture. As a result, the Haenyo is on the itinerary of most tourists, a tribute to the government's farsightedness. The job of the women divers may be physically difficult but they engage in it with pride and joy. ▣

NALINI NAYAK



Women divers of Jeju in South Korea for whom diving for seaweed and seafood is a way of life

Organizing for Change

Mauritanie 2000 works to improve working and living conditions of vulnerable groups in the artisanal fishing sector

This article by **Moctar Nech Nedwa** (nedwa.nech@yahoo.fr) of ONG Mauritanie 2000 and Member of ICSF, is translated by Brian O'Riordan (briano@scarlet.be), ICSF

Women in Mauritania play a key role in the promotion and development of artisanal fisheries. This role is especially visible in the retailing and processing of fish, two lucrative activities that generate income, and without which fish would not arrive on the table. But as women represent a weak link in the chain, they remain marginalized. They still do not have much in the way of means of production or any recognized training in management. Women working in the artisanal fishing sector benefit neither from State support nor from professional fishing organizations, which regard the sector as a strictly male preserve.

To address the problems of women in the artisanal fisheries, a group of fifteen young graduates set up Mauritanie 2000 (M2000), a non-governmental organization (NGO) in 1993. Spurred by the desire to put their competence to work in helping their country's development, this group of young people has since then focused on women in artisanal fisheries, processors and petty traders helping them organize themselves as a Grouping of Economic Interest (GIE).

The organization has a pyramidal structure. At the base of the pyramid are the base-level GIEs, each consisting of around six women who want to work together. These are followed by hamlet-level GIEs, professional-level GIEs, department-level GIEs, and finally, the regional-level GIEs. March 2009 witnessed the creation of a national-level GIE of women in the fisheries, grouping and officially representing around 1,800 women at the level of the administration and government. In a sector until now considered a male domain, this is no mean achievement and has allowed these women to be recognized as undisputed actors in the sector.

M2000 has also established projects and training for fish vendors in several markets in the peripheral neighbourhoods of Nouakchott and Nouadhibou. In this way, 600 women from peripheral neighbourhoods receive the benefits of training and a framework for women's activities in fisheries is assured. It also develops programmes to build up the commercial skills of Mauritanian women through different training courses and tries to build upon the knowledge and experiences of women in order to define a strategy for organization.

Recently, since 2003, the activities of the group have acquired greater breadth. These are now organized around the training of women for literacy, processing techniques, hygiene, commerce and management skills, organizing through the GIE network, providing productive investments in equipment as well as financial assistance. This year M2000 launched a production centre for processed fish, the first of its kind, in keeping with the hygiene norms established by the authorities in order to allow women to work under better conditions and to make their products more competitive on the Nouakchott market.

M2000 activities have succeeded in giving its beneficiaries a structured and profitable economic activity. The income of the 1,800 women, who are all illiterate and who are amongst our country's poorest, has greatly improved. External evaluations show that women members rapidly attain levels of income above poverty levels in our country, which allows them to invest in their activities. They are able to purchase, for example,

MOCTAR NECH NEDWA



Women processors drying *Yeeet* and *Tollo* in Mauritania

shops, equipment for their market stalls, vehicles for transport, and *pirogues* for the young fishers in their families. They are also able to improve their living standards, construct and furnish homes, send their children to school and improve household nutrition.

In 2008, M2000 changed not only its structure and governance policies but also redefined its strategic vision. The vision document describes the organization as a socio-economic development NGO, working towards “fighting poverty, and through engaging in the economic development of our country to increase food security and improve the working conditions of vulnerable groups

in the artisanal fishing sector by strengthening their organizational, technical and financial capacities”. This new, or rather, revised vision reflects the desire of M2000 to open itself to the entire artisanal fisheries sector and include fishers and actors from inland fisheries as well.

Several challenges continue, however, to trouble the artisanal fisheries. A key challenge comes from upstream in the sector in terms of the organization of fish supplies. The poorly-structured and technically- and financially-weak artisanal fisheries also face a continuing challenge from the anarchic development and destructive impact of industrial fisheries. ❏

External evaluations show that beneficiaries rapidly attain levels of income above poverty levels in our country, which allows them to invest in their activities.

Shaikh Keerio is a remote village located at the extreme south of Sindh province in Pakistan in the coastal belt of the Arabian Sea, 40 km from Badin city. Nearly 300 people belonging to about fifty households live here. Before the cyclone struck in 1999 this was a prosperous and self-sufficient village. The cyclone left a trail of misery destroying land, homes, property, cattle, fishing boats and infrastructure. Today Shaikh Keerio has no basic amenities, no school, no dispensary, no road, no electricity, not even drinking water. All that people have

level in Pakistan. It works towards bringing about a change in the attitudes and policies of the government with respect to fishing communities and envisages the introduction of a sustainable fisheries policy. It believes that fishing communities who historically derived their livelihoods from the resources of the coasts and inland waters should have ownership rights over those waters.

As part of the PFF, Bhagi and Sajan have been playing a vital role in mobilizing and sensitizing their communities on issues impacting deeply on the lives of fishing communities, including climate change, sea water intrusion and drinking water shortage. They were in the forefront of PFF’s campaign against the occupation of fresh water bodies—the source of the livelihood of the local fishers—by Pakistan’s paramilitary forces. During the struggle, when male protestors were arrested or driven underground, Bhagi played a central role in uniting women’s voices against police violence, torture and repression.

Bhagi currently heads the Shaikh Keerio unit of the PFF. She played a key role in the Long March initiated by the PFF for the restoration of the Indus River and Indus Delta. Marching from 2 to 14 March 2010, PFF activists covered a distance of 350 km from Kharo Chhan (where the Indus River meets the sea) to Almanzar Jamshoro. All through the march, Bhagi continuously cheered and encouraged other marchers and was a symbol of dedication, commitment and struggle. Truly, the PFF and the villagers of Shaikh Keerio are proud of her. ❏

PROFILE

Bhagi: Leading by example

Bhagi, head of the Shaikh Keerio unit of the Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum (PFF), played a key role in the long march for the restoration of the Indus River and Indus Delta

This profile is by **Hussain Jarwar** (pakistanfisherfolk@hotmail.com), Manager Programmes, PFF

is the extremely muddy, stagnant and poisonous water that collects in nearby ponds or in the Mirwah canal.

Bhagi, 45, lives in Shaikh Keerio with her husband Sajan Shaikh. They have a 25-year old daughter who was married for five years and has two children. Bhagi and Sajan joined the Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum (PFF) in 1998, the year the organization came into existence. Initially uncomfortable with speaking in public, both have, over the years, become active members of the governing body of the PFF.

With units in the coastal areas of Karachi, Thatta, Badin and Gawadar Balouchistan, the PFF is the only network of fishing communities that is recognized at the national

Fish Vendors Struggle for their Rights!

The coastal fish vendors of East Medinipur, West Bengal, India come together to assert their rights as fishworkers

This article is by **Pradip Chatterjee** (pradipdish@gmail.com) of DISHA, West Bengal, India, as told to Ramya Rajagopalan, ICSF

On 16th November 2010 the small town of Contai, located about 150 km west of Kolkata, capital of the Indian state of West Bengal, witnessed an unusual event. Hundreds of fish vendors, under the banner of (East) Medinipur District Coastal Fish Vendors' Union, gathered in protest outside the office of the marine fisheries department. The fish vendors, having experienced years of neglect and being at the very bottom of the social hierarchy with neither rights nor benefits, have now begun to come together in struggle.

In the Contai subdivision of East Medinipur district, fishing and fish processing provide a means of survival to thousands of people who are among India's poorest. Living conditions are hard—almost every year the district is lashed by cyclonic waves and winds that flatten the houses of fishers, farmers and other local residents.

Though only men engage in active fishing, both men and women are involved in the selling of fish. There are about 5,000 fish vendors in the district, with more men vending fish than women. The district has about 42 landing centres used by small-scale and traditional fishers and three

harbours from where fish vendors buy fish, typically using as working capital money borrowed from local moneylenders at interest rates that range between 160 per cent and 200 per cent per year. With daily earnings averaging around Rs100 (USD 2.2) per working day, fish vendors face backbreaking levels of indebtedness.

While fishermen, that is, men who engage in active fishing, receive occupational recognition in the form of a government-issued identity card, and hence are entitled to the welfare benefits floated by the fisheries department, fish vendors enjoy no official recognition at all. The fishing communities of East Medinipur largely occupy "Below Poverty Line" or BPL status, a poverty marker which currently marks nearly one-third of India's population. However, welfare schemes of the fisheries and other departments remain largely out of the reach of fish vendor, either due to lack of information or due to lack of access.

Caught between a callous state on the one hand and the loan shark on the other, the life of fish vendors is a daily struggle. Infrastructure and facilities for fish marketing are woefully inadequate. They have to vend fish in the open along roadsides and in a few designated markets. These markets, like the Seven-Mile Market in Contai, offer spaces as little as 200 sq feet for up to 150 fish vendors, with no supporting infrastructure such as storage facilities, ice, water supply and toilets. Men and women vendors have to travel long distances without public transportation, often on poorly maintained roads to reach these congested and dilapidated markets. Due to their vulnerable position local clubs, goons and musclemen frequently fleece them through forcibly-taken exorbitant contributions.

For women fish vendors, the situation is even grimmer. In addition to household responsibilities, they also have to bear the brunt of fish vending in circumstances that are often much more difficult than what men face. They are also exposed to sexual harassment by the local mafia that controls the fish markets.

A long list of violations and denials makes up the story of the lives of East Medinipur's

PRADIP CHATTERJEE/DISHA



Hundreds of fish vendors gathered in protest outside the office of the marine fisheries department in Contai, East Medinipur, West Bengal

Basic Demands of the (East) Medinipur District Coastal Fish Vendors' Union, affiliated to the NFF

- Issue Government Fishworker Identity Cards to fish vendors as recognition of occupational dignity
- Provide working capital at soft interest rates to save fish vendors from moneylenders and usurers
- Arrange for markets with proper facilities for selling fish
- Provide transport facilities like cycles and motorcycles to fish vendors with subsidy and under easy repayment terms
- Provide modern weighing machines and cold boxes for preserving fish to fish vendors with subsidy and under easy repayment terms
- Provide fish vendors with modern *carrates* (carrier boxes) at subsidized rates
- Bring all coastal fish vendors under the 'Relief cum Savings' scheme (that operates during the lean fishing season)
- Permit formation of Marine Co-operative Societies by fish vendors for their socio-economic upliftment.
- Immediately introduce old-age pension and insurance schemes for fish vendors
- Bring fish vendors under housing schemes for economically-backward sections (EWS)
- Stop coercive and unauthorized collections from fish vendors by local clubs, goons and musclemen

fish vendors. The good news is that they are no longer willing to suffer silently. The vendors are slowly realizing the worth of their contribution to the economy and demanding a measure of fairness and justice in return.

Their union, the (East) Medinipur District Coastal Fish Vendors' Union, affiliated to the National Fishworkers' Forum, has begun by presenting a set of their basic demands to the Fisheries Department, Contai. The struggle is poised to move forward, with the fish vendors realizing the power of collective struggle for achieving their demands. ❏

Interview with Maria do Livramento Santos (Mentinha), a leader of National Articulation of Fisherwomen (AMP) in Brazil

By **Naina Pierri** (naina@cem.ufpr.br), a sociologist and professor at the Federal University of Paraná, Brazil

What did you feel about the workshop "Defining a Gender Agenda for Sustaining Life and Livelihoods in Fishing Communities" which you attended in Chennai, India in July 2010?

Although for me it was the first meeting outside Brazil, and there were many communication difficulties because of many different languages and cultures, the workshop was quite fruitful. We were able to share our experiences with each other. I realized what amazing similarities we share across countries as women, as fisherwomen, as humble people, and above all, as fighters for our rights.

Tell us about the fishworkers situation in your community, Curral Velho, in Ceará, Brazil.

We are suffering from the threat of losing our lands to prawn farms and wind energy enterprises. But we are strongly organized to defend our lands, our rights, and our freedom. We struggle for our food sovereignty which is under threat as mangroves are being illegally cut. We even face the threat of physical violence. But it is our responsibility to defend our mangroves because we depend on them.

What is the current state of development of the National Articulation of Fisherwomen in Brazil?

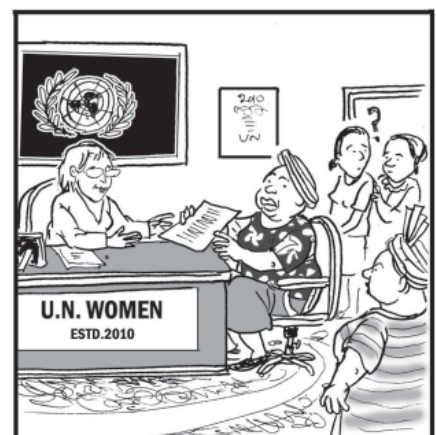
There are many difficulties but we fight to overcome them and achieve our goals. The movement is growing increasingly stronger because women are united and working together for autonomy, dignity and respect. But we need to improve our communication, which is still a big difficulty, in order to organize our actions and meetings better.

What are the prospects of the national struggle of fishermen and fisherwomen in Brazil?

We plan to strengthen our struggle and to find ways not to be intimidated. That would mean, for example, to strengthen the participation of fishermen and women in the decision-making process in which we are often ignored today. Our rights are denied not because we lack interest but because we are excluded and our voices are not sufficiently heard. ❏

YEMAYA MAMA

...dreaming?



VIDEO

Mangroves and Prawn Raising: Violated Green

A Documentary about Brazilian Coast

“... that’s why we want the protection of our mangrove, because if we don’t have our mangrove, we won’t have the river, we won’t have fish, we won’t have our food, we won’t have our survival.” Luis Caboclo, Tremembé



This video is reviewed by **Natália Tavares de Azevedo** (nataliatavares@ufpr.br), a sociology student working for a doctorate in environment and development at the Federal University of Paraná, and **Náina Pierri** (naina@cem.ufpr.br), a sociologist and professor at the Federal University of Paraná, Brazil

The documentary “Mangroves and Prawn Raising: Violated Green,” shows the impact of extensive prawn farming on the communities of the coast of Ceará state in Brazil. Produced for the Second General Assembly of the Redmanglar International in 2004 by the Forum in Defence of the Coastal Zone of Ceará and the Environment and Justice Foundation, the documentary brings together many testimonials from community and institutional leaders.

The state of Ceará is located in northeastern Brazil and has a ragged coastline with well-preserved dunes and mangroves of great scenic beauty. The indigenous and fishing communities living here rely on local knowledge to sustain their traditional livelihoods which include artisanal fisheries using boats, collecting molluscs from the mangrove forests, handicrafts, as well as subsistence farming.

The documentary shows how the watersheds of the Jaguaribe River on the east coast and of the Acaraú River on the west coast are being degraded by prawn farming. Based on accounts from residents of the communities of Curral Velho, Itarema and Cumbe Icapuí, the film shows how the business logic of productivity is triggering widespread environmental, socioeconomic and cultural

damage. Large areas of mangroves have been destroyed, in violation of national environmental regulations, leading to decline in fish and other species upon which the coastal population depends. Other impacts include the contamination of mangroves by untreated effluents from the prawn farms, and the disruption of the traditional livelihood base due to the degradation of mangroves and soil salinization in adjacent areas. The film reveals that most of the prawn farms have been established illegally, without environmental licenses, and have led to major conflicts, even violence.

The privatization of public lands and the support of the government to groups wielding the power of big money demonstrate the state’s connivance with a model of development which is making the survival of the traditional fisherfolk of Ceará’s coast, unviable. The words of the shaman of Tremembé, Luis Caboclo, in the closing statement in the film, summarizes the mood of the coastal communities of Ceará: “We don’t want prawn cultivation here inside our area or on the upstream of the rivers. If the Court does not act on it and stop it, we will!”. ❏



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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.