

ICSF Gender Policy

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

1. Preface

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

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

This document outlines ICSF’s perspective and strategy in working to change the persistent discrimination and oppression of women in fisheries. ICSF is committed to ensuring that it prioritises transforming unequal gender relations as a core component of its work.

Our specific intention has been to enable ICSF’s social and civil society partners to engage with ICSF’s perspective and strategy. Towards this end ICSF is committed to reflecting on and adapting its approach towards gender relations and women in fisheries as it learns and interacts with its partners and refines its perspective in response to changing circumstances.

2. ICSF's gender perspective

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

It is this knowledge that has helped the ICSF develop what it has called a feminist perspective in fisheries, a perspective which is anti-patriarchal and focuses on respect for life and livelihood, simultaneously contributing to the sustainable use of natural resources. Such a perspective is non-violent and based on care of the natural resource and the well-being of the people that depend on these resources for their life and livelihood. This is what ICSF calls the “nurture approach to fisheries”. Such fisheries development gives equal importance to the work of **both** men and women depending on the sexual division of labour that has evolved in each community. In many contexts, where men and women work together – often complementary to each other - the returns to the household are both in cash and kind – leading to nutrition, food security and social development. Modern fisheries development, which is based on the model of commoditisation, industrialisation and privatisation, threatens to irreparably deplete natural resources but also affect the life and livelihood of the communities that depend upon them.

ICSF developed this concept of the ‘nurture approach to fisheries’ in the early 1990s through its work on the impact of globalisation and development on women and men in fishing communities. More recently it has integrated this ‘nurture approach to fisheries’ with its ‘transformative’ and ‘human rights-based’ approach to fisheries. Foundational to this perspective is a vision that all human beings have the right to dignity and that nature should be respected. All human beings have the right to life and livelihoods. A feminist approach to fisheries seeks to understand how unequal social and economic relations undermine women’s and men’s lives and livelihoods and impact nature in destructive, unsustainable ways. It aims to understand how unequal relations on the basis of gender, class, and ethnicity define approaches to nature and to human development as a whole. It finally strives to change and transform the social relations that lead to women being oppressed on the basis of their gender and also lead to the unsustainable exploitation of nature, to poverty and food insecurity.

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

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

Every four years ICSF members together with the members of the Secretariat have engaged in internal reflection, which then informed ICSF’s programme planning . In addition, ICSF has regularly engaged external consultants for support in evaluating its work. In 1998, ICSF engaged an external consultant to support the organisation in evaluating its Women in Fisheries programmes and again in 2005 the organisation reflected on its approach to working with ‘women in fisheries’. Several workshops were organized during the decade.¹ In 2010, ICSF held an international workshop with women fishworkers and their supporters, including academics, fishworker organisations and international agencies. The title of the workshop was “Recasting the net: defining a gender agenda for sustaining life and livelihoods in fishing communities”. As part of the preparation of this workshop, ICSF organized regional studies and workshops with women of fishing communities.

It also commissioned a review of global developments in the discourse on ‘Women in fisheries’ . This position paper discussed five major trends: the shift from a framework of political economy to one of political ecology; the rise of the notion of empowerment; the rise of rights-based arguments; the growing articulation of ‘community’, and, finally, a growing dependence on aid.² This paper was shared with participants and debated extensively before finalisation. Drawing on insights from various regional studies and workshops, the position paper (2010, finalised in 2011), and the discussions that took place at the international workshop, the participants then developed a ‘Shared Gender Agenda’.³

The Shared Gender Agenda of 2010 presented an integrated, multi-pronged perspective underpinned by an understanding of the social relations that intersect at different levels and in different social spaces. It argues that women are an integral part of small-scale fisheries and fishing communities, and yet that their work largely continues to be invisible. Discrimination is held to cut across manifold aspects of women’s lives - their labour, their sexuality and their fertility - undermining their dignity and sense of self esteem. Central to this was an understanding that women’s labour sustains the existing model of development, which is based on the unsustainable

¹ <https://wif.icsf.net/en/page/855-Reports.html>

² https://www.icsf.net/images/occasionalpapers/pdf/english/issue_112/112_ALL.pdf

³ <http://wifworkshop.icsf.net/en/page/623-Shared%20Gender%20Agenda.html>

extraction of natural resources. The Agenda recognises the need to ensure that all work of women should be valued equally to men, throughout the value chain, including reproductive work. Towards this end the Shared Gender Agenda committed to working at the level of households and communities, fishworker organisations, civil society groups, research institutions, governmental bodies and international organisations, in order to target the strategic needs of women and challenge the existing model of development.⁴

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

The Shared Gender Agenda, developed in partnership with ICSF's international civil society partners such as the World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP), the World Forum of Fish harvesters and Fishworkers (WFF) and other fishworker organisations, confirmed the organisation's earlier approach and strategy towards 'women in fisheries' and achieving gender equality in fisheries. ICSF members and the secretariat drew on this approach at the ICSF General Body meeting that followed in 2010, and that developed the organisation's overall vision and mission. Members agreed to continue to integrate the understanding of gender relations as a cross-cutting theme in all programme work, whilst also continuing with a specific 'women in fisheries' programme. The strategy was therefore two-pronged: mainstreaming understanding of gender relations and working with men and women for social transformation throughout all ICSF's programmes, and also undertaking specific programmes that focused on women's empowerment. In this way ICSF chose to highlight the fact that 'gender' and 'women' are not synonymous, but underscored an understanding that transforming gender relations requires a multi-pronged strategy that works with and for both men and women.

ICSF subsequently undertook a range of activities towards implementing the Shared Gender Agenda, most notably, advocating actively for the SSF Guidelines to include a human rights-based approach that addressed social inequality and promoted women's rights in fisheries and fishing communities. Towards this end, ICSF established an internal Women in Fisheries (WIF) Working Group, which developed a submission on gender concerns in the Guidelines for the Civil Society Organisations (CSO) group, which has been used extensively to inform the submissions from all international fishworker groups. ICSF also contracted the expertise of a member of the WIF Working Group to undertake a gender analysis of the draft text of the SSF Guidelines and to assist in the negotiations for a final text that would firmly support a human rights-based perspective that included gender equality. Central to this process was the recognition that much of the language in the draft text was infused with neoliberalist thought, and hence whilst many participants professed a commitment to a human rights-based approach, the understanding thereof differed amongst organisations. ICSF played a leading role in helping the CSO platform to lobby for the integration of references to address gender inequality throughout the text as well as in the section specifically devoted to this issue (though ICSF had actually lobbied against a separate chapter on gender equality, because gender would be seen as a separate and not an integrated concern). ICSF then undertook an analysis of the final text in order to inform its own internal planning processes.⁵

In July 2014, ICSF hosted an international workshop entitled "*Towards an equitable and*

⁴ <https://wifworkshop.icsf.net/images/stories/recasting/1279686472111-Shared-agenda-final.pdf>

⁵ <http://www.asianfisheriessociety.org/publication/abstract.php?id=1115>

sustainable small-scale fisheries in the context of poverty eradication and food security'. This workshop was attended by representatives of key international organisations such as WFFP, WFF, as well as FAO and International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty (IPC), as well as partners with whom ICSF works at local, regional and international levels. A key aim of the workshop was to develop a shared understanding amongst civil society partners of what a human rights-based agenda in SSF means in practice. Using gender relations as one key example of social inequality, an ICSF member presented an understanding of a transformative, human rights-based approach to the international SSF Guidelines.⁶ In their deliberations on how the SSF Guidelines should be implemented, participants confirmed the transformative, human rights-based approach, emphasising the need to ensure that it started at the local level.

ICSF recognises the need to transform gender relations within the fishing community, which is essential to freedom of choice for women and ensures their social well-being.. Freedom for women therefore might require the right to education and to be able to make informed choices, for example, of whether to stay in the fishing community or not. The implementation of the SSF Guidelines can therefore be a good instrument for liberation and equality, especially in countries where gender disparities are large. In societies in transition towards democracy, transformation of gender relations is believed to have a greater chance of evolving.

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

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

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

The General Body affirmed the human rights-based perspective and the need to continue its strategy to address unequal social relations, in particular unequal gender relations, as well as to prioritise empowerment of women in fisheries. It was agreed that all policies, programmes and activities would integrate the human rights-based perspective that includes a transformation of gender relations approach.

5. ICSF's work on gender

- **At the programme level**

The ICSF members and the ICSF secretariat have given expression to ICSF's gender perspective in a variety of programmes and projects over the years. Several ICSF members work closely with fishing communities to support the creation of local cooperatives, in order that families receive the largest share of the consumer price – doing away with merchants and moneylenders. Several of the ICSF members also work with communities on resource management issues so that the use of destructive fishing gear is reduced. Other members have engaged with communities in conservation and the re-greening of the coastal habitat. ICSF has supported research and documentation of

⁶ (*Developing a Transformative Agenda towards Socially Just and Sustainable Fisheries* (<https://igssf.icsf.net/en/proceedings/article/EN/142-945-Developing-a-Tr.html>))

women's experiences and research on gender relations in fisheries at the local level. A large research project was undertaken by ICSF to review literature and undertake field studies on gender relations and women's role in community-based natural resource management.⁷ Training events have supported women fishworkers and their supporters in analysing social relations, and in particular gender, that shape the fisheries. Considerable work has also been done with women in the post-harvest sector, supporting them in advocating for fair and adequate working conditions. ICSF has also worked with youth, and continues to strengthen networks of young fishers and fishworkers to reflect on the SSF Guidelines, maintain cultural identity and work towards transformation of gender relations.

One of the most consistent programmes in ICSF since 1990 has been the 'women in fisheries' programme through which it worked with fishworker organizations to evolve a gender (feminist) perspective in their own work. In addition, ICSF has engaged with women directly to help them secure their spaces within the fisheries and within fishworker organisations. This strategy has borne dividends: in some cases women have succeeded to access leadership in fishworker organizations. ICSF's engagement with the formation of the World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fishworkers (WFF), contributed to the principled decision that there would be 50% of men and women in the leadership. ICSF furthermore played an important role in international networking of women's organisations in fisheries and their supporters, including activists and academics. Women in fisheries networks have grown in several parts of the world, and ICSF's women in fisheries work has been cited extensively.

More specifically ICSF has undertaken the following activities:

1. Supported women fishworkers to attend the ICSF programmes and share their experiences and ideas.
2. Communicated information and analyses on gender issues in fisheries to its members and allies. This has been done through providing multi-media materials and training. These included the publication of Yemaya, pamphlets, monographs, training materials and films.
3. Organised international and national workshops to promote the inclusion of a gender (feminist) perspective in relevant global discussions on fisheries.
4. Recognized the role of women in its documentation and research, being critical at all times of traditional patriarchal perspectives in fisheries.
5. Promoted and strengthened its women members' participation at all levels.
6. Integrated its gender (feminist) and human rights perspective in its advocacy efforts at the international level.

- **At the organisational level**

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

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

⁷ See https://wif.icsf.net/images/resources/bibliography/docs/english/816_oxfam%20novib_gendercb-crm_final%20dec%202008_.pdf

nature of the job and the job description, guaranteeing equal rights in pay, working conditions and career prospects.

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

6. Goals and objectives

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

The ICSF would like to achieve the following objectives:

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

7. Accountability mechanism

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

8. Time frame

This policy will be effective for the period 2015 to 2023. ICSF will ensure that its annual operational plans and their implementation reflect this gender policy and perspective.

Further Reading

ICSF's Journey with Women in Fisheries https://wif.icsf.net/images/history/WIF_15Sept%201.pdf

ICSF's Women in Fisheries website <https://wif.icsf.net/>