



International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF) Women and Gender in Fisheries Asian Regional Action Plan

During the *IYafa Asia Workshop: Celebrating Sustainable and Equitable Small-Scale Fisheries*, which took place in Bangkok, Thailand from 5-8 May 2022, one full day was devoted to a participatory exchange on women and gender in small-scale fisheries. The aims of the exchange were to reflect on the challenges women face in both harvest and post-harvest work; share inspiring examples of women's organizations and mobilization; amplify women's voices; and develop an Action Plan for the Asian region.

Participants in the workshop included representatives of small-scale fisher and fishworker associations, cooperatives, trade unions, community-based organizations, and non-governmental organizations from eleven South and Southeast Asian countries – namely Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam. Half of the workshop's 60 participants were women, with a wealth of experience in organizing and mobilizing other women in their communities to raise their voices and tackle the challenges they are facing in fisheries.

Women experience a range of diverse challenges across the Asian region. Despite different local and national contexts, they face many similar obstacles, including lack of access to fisheries resources, spaces to sell fish, participation in decision-making processes, opportunities to organize, education, training and technology. Women often experience a triple burden – trying to balance household responsibilities; harvest and pre- and post-harvest activities; and participating in community activities and organizations.

The women participating in the Asia workshop highlighted the importance of uniting their struggles and working together to find creative solutions to tackle the challenges they are facing. They collectively pinpointed several actions that need to be taken in the Asian region:

- 1) **Women's labour must be more widely recognized** for its crucial contributions to the fisheries sector, including household responsibilities (caring for families and children); harvesting (fishing and mollusk gathering); and pre- and post-harvest work (preparing for fishing, mending gear, processing and selling). This work is too often invisible, and seen as a familial duty without economic compensation, failing to acknowledge the fundamental role this work plays in the functioning of the sector.
- 2) **Women's organizations and networks must be established** as spaces where women can discuss common challenges, support each other, collectively develop ways to address the issues they are facing, and amplify their voices. These organizations and networks should be established by women in fishing communities themselves, with the technical and logistical support of allied groups and organizations. This also helps to foster valuable alliances with like-minded groups. Existing women's organizations need to be supported and strengthened in order to continue to grow, become more visible, and provide spaces for the next generations of leaders.

- 3) **Family support must be encouraged** to facilitate women's participation in organizations, networks and community work. Many family members worry that women's participation in community activities will interfere with their household responsibilities, or put them in danger for engaging in public activism. Women who are dependent on their husband's income are often not able to access funds to travel to mobilizations or other events. Efforts should be made at the community and family level to discuss these issues and find appropriate context-specific ways to address them.
- 4) **Training programmes must be set up** to provide support and guidance to the next generation of women leaders, including opportunities to learn from and be inspired by others in their communities. This is particularly important for empowering and building the confidence of young women, and educating them about their rights as community members. Women-led organizations can establish their own networks to mentor and train women in their communities, while allied groups and organizations can provide support and resources (technical, information, funding) for such programmes.
- 5) **Access to capacity-building opportunities** for women at the community level must be facilitated and supported by governments and local organizations, including access to education and training programmes to build knowledge, skills and technology literacy. Support – such as transportation, child care and funding – should also be provided in order to facilitate women's participation in such programmes.
- 6) **Spaces must be opened up for women to participate** in fisheries governance and co-management processes. Women have the right to a say in programmes and processes that directly affect them. Their direct participation will ensure that their voices are heard, and that they can contribute their knowledge and experience to developing programmes for addressing the obstacles they face and enhancing their opportunities. Community committees should ensure equal participation of male and female representatives, and women's representation must be real and equitable, and not just tokenism.
- 7) **Data collection on women** working in fisheries must be expanded significantly in order to develop a better picture of the contributions they make to the sector, the challenges they face, and what is needed to address these challenges. More data on women working in inland fisheries is particularly important. Women themselves should be directly involved in the collection of this data, as they are best situated to connect with other women in their communities, while governments and fisheries departments should include gender disaggregated information in fisheries databases.
- 8) **Gender-sensitivity in fisheries policies must be improved** in order to ensure that differences in roles and responsibilities in the sector are not glossed over. Women are too often excluded from social security protection, and become dependent on male family members to access government support, such as loans, healthcare, unemployment and life insurance, and childcare subsidies. Women should be able to register themselves and access services directly in order to facilitate empowerment and independence.