



33 Years in Support of
Small-scale Fishworkers

Yemaya

ICSF'S NEWSLETTER ON GENDER AND FISHERIES

From the Editor

Women in fisheries and aquaculture are witnessing a curious paradox today. While on the one hand, women's lack of visibility, capacity and resource access is being discussed increasingly and in ever-widening spaces, there is arguably little evidence that the response of national and international policy is in any way proportionate to the task of what needs to be done. This is worrying because precious time is being lost even as challenges, in terms of overfishing, tenure loss and climate impacts, continue to multiply. As a result, women in the sector run the risk of being pushed back into greater positions of exclusion and defensiveness. This exclusion in turn intensifies negative impacts on the sector.

The exclusion of women in all but tokenistic ways from fisheries policy and programme is largely due to the lack of data on women's presence in the sector, in terms of actual numbers, work and value add. Milika Sobey's article highlights this problem and draws attention to yet another paradox. A report commissioned by the Women in Fisheries Network-Fiji found a dearth of accessible baseline data on women in the sector; at the same time, it also found that, in reality, a wealth of data exists but it exists in silos, distributed across different Ministries and in different formats. Therefore, by way of first steps, there is a need to collate and analyse such data in order to fill existing data gaps.

The Fijian conundrum of no data in the midst of plenty might well apply to most countries. The need for fisheries data, in particular sex-disaggregated data, was repeated in many sessions in the 7th Global Conference on Gender in Aquaculture & Fisheries (GAF7) held in Bangkok in October 2018. Nikita Gopal's article highlights the key takeaways from this conference in which two of ICSF's associates, Nalini Nayak and Cornelie Quist, made a joint presentation, highlighting the intersectionalities of power relations in the fisheries sector.

The importance of spaces like GAF 7 cannot be overstated since the context of data scarcity, women associated with the fisheries are always keen to share their experiences and learn from each other. Recently, a round table discussion brought five women leaders from India's marine and inland fisheries sector together and led to a rich exchange of views and experiences related to organizing women and communities. The dialogue highlighted the challenges that women face when they begin to organize – confrontations with traditional decision making structures; invisibility in State decision making bodies; lack of official recognition of women's work; loss of livelihood due to modernization and coastal development projects. At the same time, the dialogue highlighted the tremendous gains that women make when they collectively raise their voices in demand of their rights.

The current issue also celebrates the recent edition of Slow Fish held in Genoa, Italy, earlier this year, which is a forum that promotes small-scale fishing and responsible fish consumption, and provides a unique space, particularly for women, in the small-scale fisheries sector to narrate their stories and share experiences.

We regret that this issue does not carry the much-loved cartoon strip "Yemaya Mama" as Surendra, our cartoonist, is unwell. Please join us in wishing him a speedy recovery! 🙏



Fiji	2
What's New, Webby?	3
Network	4
Milestones.....	6
India	7
Profile	9
WIF.....	10
Yemaya Recommends	12

Where's the data?

A recently-concluded meeting of the Women in Fisheries Network-Fiji calls for sex-disaggregated data on the participation of women in the fisheries sector

By **Milika Sobey**
(milikasobey@gmail.com), Women in Fisheries Network-Fiji

The Women in Fisheries Network-Fiji (WiFN-Fiji) was established in 1993, and currently has 63 members. Its core areas of focus are capacity building and advocacy. The network promotes capacity building to improve livelihoods and food security opportunities for women in fisheries, focusing on financial literacy, resource management, post-harvest handling, market identification, gender equality and social inclusion. It also promotes gender advocacy for improved policy and policy implementation for greater gender equality in all aspects of fisheries through research, participation in national policy consultations and information sharing.

The network held its second forum in the city of Suva in Fiji on 4 December 2018, with 82 participants representing the government, academia, non-government organizations, the private sector and representatives of women communities. The event was inaugurated by Fiji's minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation, Mereseini Vuniwaqa. In her opening address, the minister extended an invitation to the WiFN-Fiji to work more closely with her ministry to advance the interests of women in the fisheries sector, an invitation warmly embraced by the network.

The key highlight of the forum was the launch of the report entitled 'National Stock-take of the Institutional and Enabling

Mechanisms That support Gender in Fisheries in Fiji'. The report, commissioned by the WiFN-Fiji with funding by the Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade (DFAT), Australia, channelled through the Fiji Women's Fund, was a follow-up activity to the inaugural forum where an urgent need for sex-disaggregated data on the participation of women in the fisheries sector was stressed by participants.

The key findings of the report include the following conclusions. One, that there is no baseline data available on the number of women engaged in the fisheries sector in Fiji. Two, that there are three key government ministries that hold a wealth of data on women in fisheries, stored in different formats: the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs, the Ministry of Fisheries and the Bureau of Statistics. And finally, that there is need to mine and analyze currently available data with the government and NGOs, to quantify the role of women in fisheries.

At the forum, success stories were shared by women fishers from Ra who run a very lucrative trade in sea-grapes (known locally as nama) and the pearl farmers from Vanua Levu engaged in culturing the mabe pearl. The women related the hardships, rewards and lessons learnt from their struggles to become established in their respective fisheries. Community representatives stated that financial literacy training conducted by the network in partnership with Westpac had

WILDLIFE CONSERVATION SOCIETY



Participants at the Women in Fisheries Forum with their copies of the gender stocktake report that was launched. At the forum, success stories were shared by women fishers from Ra who run a very lucrative trade in sea-grapes



Minister for Women, Hon Mereseini Vuniwaqa speaking at the Opening of the Women in Fisheries Forum. Given the positive feedback received from participants, the Women in Fisheries Forum is likely to become an annual feature

The key highlight of the forum was the launch of the report entitled 'National Stock-take of the Institutional and Enabling Mechanisms that Support Gender in Fisheries in Fiji'

a profound impact on the women fishers and made a significant positive change to the lives of their families. The final session of the forum involved group discussions with each group working on a specific recommendation from

the stock-take report, and suggesting next steps for implementation.

Given the positive feedback received from participants, the Women in Fisheries Forum is likely to become an annual feature. ❏

What's New, Webby?



By **Raffaella Turner** (raffiturner@gmail.com), Graduate Student, Royal Holloway, University of London, United Kingdom

Families in a Changing World: Progress of the World's Women 2019-2020

This report provides an extensive and detailed guide for the factors that need to be addressed in order to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment, in regards to the changing landscape of family norms. Policies and laws must be adopted to support these diversities, in particular to hold national governments and international agencies accountable to their obligations in making Human Rights a reality for all.

Despite significant advances in women's rights and opportunities, reflected by lower birth rates and some degree of economic autonomy, this report recognises the unequal burden women continue to carry, particularly in regards to unpaid household work and caregiving responsibilities. The report focuses on the vital need for women to have personal income and for societies to support families in the face of change, as well as exploring issues around domestic violence.

Looking ahead, UN Women uses this report to outline specific issues that must be targeted in order to create a family friendly policy agenda. These address subjects from family laws which recognise diversity and equality, to those which uphold women's rights in marriage, divorce and custody (aiming to preventing violence against women in families), to the provision of quality public services which support gender equality such as reproductive healthcare, together with basic services that decrease the burden of household work. The success of these aims will be dictated by political will and resource provision, and supported by investment into gender-sensitive data on families and households which allows appropriate policy design.

The report is available at <http://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2019/progress-of-the-worlds-women-2019-2020-en.pdf?la=en&vs=3512> ❏

Expanding the horizons

The 7th Global Conference on Gender in Aquaculture & Fisheries (GAF7) showcases progress towards and challenges to gender equality

By **Meryl Williams**

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The 7th Global Conference on Gender in Aquaculture & Fisheries (GAF7) was hosted by the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT), in Bangkok, from 18 to 21 October 2018. This was the first stand-alone event of the Gender in Aquaculture & Fisheries Section (GAF Section) of the Asian Fisheries Society (AFS), and saw 149 experts, researchers and practitioners deliberate on 95 research papers and nine special workshops. Participants came from 28 countries representing Africa, Asia, Europe, North America, Oceania, Australia, South America and the Caribbean.

This was an exciting opportunity to create a platform for sharing the latest research on gender in fisheries and aquaculture, learning new methods and approaches, launching new training products and crafting a vision for the future. GAF7 followed 28 years of women and gender symposia and workshops supported by the AFS and its Indian branch. The event co-organizers included the GAF Section of the AFS, the AIT and the Network of Aquaculture Centres in Asia-Pacific (NACA). It was sponsored by the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research, WorldFish, The Crawford Fund, USAID Oceans and Fisheries, Plan International, Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau, and the Commission on

Gender and Geography, and had 17 partners and supporters from Asia, Australia and beyond.

A warm welcome from Dr Eden Woon, President of AIT, was followed by Dr Darian McBain, Thai Union Global Director for Sustainable Development, delivering the keynote address, stressing the important role of women in the seafood industry. Dr Amornrat Sermwatanakul, Senior Executive Expert in Fisheries Management, Department of Fisheries, Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives, Thailand, was presented with a special plaque recognizing her promotion of gender equality in fisheries and aquaculture.

The GAF7 papers were spread across eight thematic sessions which, with the nine special workshops, were run in four well attended parallel sessions.

The focus was on sharing emerging gender research methods and approaches, including the gender transformative approach; applying feminist intersectionality; innovative technologies that empower and transform; and women's collective action which is attempting to close the gender gap in aquaculture and fisheries.

The eight session themes included gender assessments in fisheries and aquaculture; gender-disaggregated statistics; gender and the seafood

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Participants at the 7th Global Conference on Gender in Aquaculture & Fisheries (GAF7), from 18 to 21 October 2018 at Bangkok, Thailand. Based on requests, discussions were also held with participants wishing to create GAF networks and organizations in their own countries and regions



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industry; gender and fisheries and aquaculture governance; gender and climate change with reference to fisheries and aquaculture; focus on Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 and other SDGs in fisheries and aquaculture; gender research methods in fisheries and aquaculture; and learning exchanges: experiences and lessons.

The following nine special workshops were also held:

- Photo-voice: Researching gender in aquaculture and fisheries through the camera lens (Janine Pierce, AwF Australia)
- GAF101: Using 'Intersectionality' in Research on Gender and Fisheries and Aquaculture. A GAF 101 Training Session (Marilyn Porter and Holly Hapke)
- Plan International Seas for Change (Sadiah Tahseen and Iris Caluag)
- Furthering/Deepening Feminist Perspectives in Fisheries (Nalini Nayak and Cornelia Quist)
- Exploring Gender Equity and Equality in the SSF Guidelines (Danika Kleiber, Whitney Yadao-Evans, and Cynthia McDougall)
- Role of women fishworker organizations towards implementation and monitoring of small-scale fisheries guidelines: case of African Women Network of Fish Processors and Traders (AWFISHNET) (Editrudith Lukanga and Kafayat Adetoun Fakoya)
- Gender transformative approaches in fisheries and aquaculture: An exploration of strategies and emerging outcomes (Cynthia McDougall)
- Gender Analysis through Micro and Small Aquaculture Operation (MiSAO) Best Aquaculture Practises (M-BAP) (Zumilah Binti Zainalaludin)
- Mainstreaming gender in fisheries education (Mary Barby Badayos-Jover, Arpita Sharma, Kyoko Kusakabe, Salin Krishna and Kumi Soejima)

In their workshop, Nalini Nayak and Cornelia Quist shared the experience of the ICSF's Women in Fisheries programmes spanning the years from 1990 to 2014, and delved into the feminist analytical framework of fisheries as developed in the ICSF in the special workshop on 'Furthering/Deepening Feminist Perspectives in Fisheries' (https://www.icsf.net/images/resources/papers_presentations/ICSF_WIF_Nalini_Nayak_Cornelia_Quist_GAF7.pdf_125.pdf). They discussed concepts of feminist analyses like power relations, patriarchy, and violence on life and livelihood, presenting the same within the spheres of production and reproduction. The interesting discussions that ensued included questions on whether Marxist or feminist theories address

This was an exciting opportunity to create a platform for sharing the latest research on gender in fisheries and aquaculture

the challenges of industrial society, neo-liberal production systems, consumerist society, and the need for a feminist political ecology think tank. They also stressed the need to look at the intersectionalities between different types of power relations.

As in previous conferences, outstanding student presenters were awarded prizes. The winners at GAF7 were Angela L. Cruz (presenter), Patrick J. Christie and Alan T. White for the presentation titled 'Addressing gender gaps from a programmatic perspective'; Veena N. (presenter) and Kyoko Kusakabe for their presentation 'Migrant women's strategies to cope with employment practices in Thai food sector: A case study from Rayong and Trat'; Sarah Lawless for her presentation titled 'From resistance to internalisation: The spread of 'gender equality' in small-scale fisheries governance'; and Benedict Mark M. Carmelita (presenter), Alice Joan G. Ferrer, Jinky C. Hopanda, Herminia A. Francisco, and Canesio D. Predo for their presentation 'Gender differences in possession of unused livelihood skills and desire to be involved in livelihood opportunities in coastal households in the Philippines'.

At GAF7, based on requests, discussions were also held with participants wishing to create GAF networks and organizations in their own countries and regions. In particular, colleagues from Bangladesh and those from several African countries sought to find out about the lessons

learned in the 28 years of informal, formal and establishment experience of GAFFS.

The GAF Section launched its new policy brief titled 'Fishing for Equality: Why gender matters in aquaculture and fisheries'. The policy brief highlights the key actions that are needed to make real progress toward gender equality. It contains a synthesis of the information on the state and consequences of gender inequality in fisheries and aquaculture and what can be done to address this. The Section advocated the collection of regular and accurate gender-specific catch-to-consumer employment data to track trends and progress; a hundred-fold increase in gender projects, research and educational outreach; support for women's empowerment; and greater collaboration on gender as stated priority in policy, research and programmes.

While discussing gender issues in aquaculture and fisheries, GAF7 didn't forget gender issues in conference participation either. It put theory into practice by offering free childcare services to all participants, which allowed researchers/writers with young children to join in the immense sharing and learning experiences the conference offered. This facility was much appreciated by all delegates, and would be a welcome service at all AFS conferences, regardless of topic.

All the products from GAF7 can be found on the GAF website: <https://www.genderaquafish.org/>; <https://www.genderequality.genderaquafish.org/>



Milestones

By **Nilanjana Biswas**
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Independent Researcher



Boosting women in seafood and ending gender inequality

This year, on 8 March, International Women's Day (IWD), seven women engaged in seafood communities and promoting gender equality, released an opinion piece titled 'Boosting women in seafood and ending gender inequality'.

On the occasion of IWD, this opinion piece takes stock of women's status and representation in the seafood industry. It states: "Some workplaces have joined in celebrating this day, featuring heartening commitments to gender equality. But it is also frequent to see in the workplace the omission, forgetfulness, or ignorance of what this day commemorates: the international day of women's rights."

The opinion piece broadly reviews women's status in the seafood industry, their participation and visibility, and the gendered distribution of

power across the sector, manifested in, for instance, the gender wage gap and in the gender blind distribution of public spending. It calls for understanding the seafood industry through a gender equality lens. Finally, it gives four "tips" on what needs to be done: Women in the industry need to work together and advocate their interests jointly; there is a need for regular 'proselytising' efforts to raise awareness on gender issues; training and capacity building are needed; and there is a need for an environment that obliges and encourages men's engagement.

Read the opinion piece at <https://www.seafoodsource.com/news/supply-trade/op-ed-boosting-women-in-seafood-and-ending-gender-inequality>

Organising women

Five groups engaged in organising women in fishing from different parts of India recently got together to share their experiences

Nikita Gopal (nikiajith@gmail.com), Principal Scientist, CIFF-ICAR, India moderated the round table discussion on *Organizing Women* at Kochi, India during the brainstorming meeting on Mainstreaming Gender into Fisheries Policies and Legislation. The participants are Jesu Rethinam (jesur1955@gmail.com), Jyoti Rajesh Meher (jyoti.meher26@gmail.com), Ujwala Jaykisan Patil (ujwalajpatil@gmail.com), Seeta Dasan (sewakerala@gmail.com) and Jharna Acharya (jharnaacharyya@gmail.com). The discussion was documented by Manas Roshan (icsf@icsf.net) and transcribed by C. Manjula (manjula.c6@gmail.com), Shilpa Nandy (shilpanandy@yahoo.co.in), A.J. Vijayan (vijayanaj@hotmail.com) and Samyuktha (sam.pc.work@gmail.com)

Recently, five groups working with women in marine and inland fisheries across a number of states in India came together for a round table discussion to share experiences of organising women in the fishing sector. The five were: SNEHA from Tamil Nadu; Dakshinbanga Matsyajibi Forum (DMF) from West Bengal; Maharashtra Machimar Kruti Samiti (MMKS-Palghar) and Maharashtra Machimar Kruti Samiti (MMKS-Mumbai) from Maharashtra; and Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) from Kerala. The discussion was moderated by Nikita Gopal, Principal Scientist, Central Institute of Fisheries Technology, India. The round table highlighted the common issues of women in fisheries and also showed how effective the organised strength of women can be in terms of gaining rights and benefits. This article summarises the experiences shared during the discussion.



Jesu Rethinam

Responding to questions posed by Nikita Gopal, the moderator, Jesu Rethinam, Director of SNEHA, shared that her organization has been active with fishing communities, focusing on the

women, since 1984. Structuring was done at the village level, with units, called *sangam*, federated up to the district level in the Karaikal district of Tamil Nadu. The first major achievement was in getting women to participate in meetings of the traditional fisher community organizations at the village level, called panchayats. Traditionally, only men have been allowed to sit in and be a part of panchayat meetings. The participation of women in sangam activities initially led to tension and even clashes between the panchayats and sangams. Today women find they have a collective voice in decision making in the village.

The second issue for women members of SNEHA, according to Jesu Rethinam, came with the establishment of a harbour in Karaikal, which led to the shifting of traditional fish landing sites to the harbour. Women had to travel greater distances and also compete with other large buyers for fish. The organization

of women helped them to at least enforce a first right on purchasing fish from traditional fishers at the harbour. They even went on a collective strike, with around 400 fish vendors refusing to buy any fish till the first right to fish was granted to them. The fish vendors reduced their purchase and transport costs by pooling resources and buying together. The organizational strength also helped the women fishers in Kariakal to get compensation after the tsunami. Women have now taken up the issue of allowing local fish markets to be handed over on lease to cooperatives of women fish vendors.

Despite years of activity in the region with women fishers, the challenge of women's representation remains an issue for SNEHA. The Tamil Nadu Fisheries Welfare Board does not have any women representatives. The demand to include fishworkers in all government benefit schemes still remains to be addressed. Women were included in savings-cum-relief schemes of the state, but only to the extent that there was one representation per family in the fishing community. Issues of fish vendors and street vending have remained a large, unfinished task.

In response to the moderator's questions, Jharna Acharya, an organiser with DMF, said that they had been working with fishers and fishworkers for the last 30 years. One of the demands while organising women was for identity cards and access to government benefits and schemes. The DMF has been successful in securing over 1000 women's identity cards in the districts of South 24 Parganas, North 24 Parganas and Purbo Medinipur in West Bengal. Another important issue, according to her, was organising communities for rights under the Forest Rights Act in the mangrove-rich region of the Sundarbans, to protect their traditional fishing rights. The community members were given organizational and legal support to face up to harassment from forest and coastal authorities. The women successfully protested against a ban on collecting firewood, and



Jharna Acharya



Nikita Gopal

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attempts to cancel traditional boat licenses. The intervention of the DMF also enabled 'tiger widows', the widows of fishers attacked and killed by tigers in the Sunderbans, to get compensation, including a monthly government pension.

The DMF has formed a union of fish vendors, among around 1000 women fish vendors in the region. The union has taken up issues of lease rights to marketplaces constructed by the government, provision of toilets and water facilities in fish markets, and proper location of the marketplaces. On the union's intervention, the government authorities have provided women with ice boxes to preserve fish.

Working with inland fishers in the Howrah region, the DMF was able to get identity cards and credit cards under schemes earlier restricted to farmers working on land. It was able to campaign for restriction in the use of pesticides in farming, which was adversely affecting fish ponds and rivers in the region, and for the government agencies to provide fish fingerlings and feed for small aquaculture operations. The DMF is also working to get land titles to protect tenure for traditional inland fishers.

The DMF has a membership base of 2000 women fishers in its union. The union has been making demands for extending benefits of state schemes announced for women and the youth to fishing communities. However, when asked by government officials to give a list of potential beneficiaries to be considered, the union finds its membership base too small for it to make demands for all women in fishing communities in West Bengal.

Jyoti Rajesh Meher and Ujwala Jaykishan Patil represented the MMKS from Palghar and Mumbai respectively, in Maharashtra. For the MMKS-Palghar, a major struggle is against the various development projects by big industry that threaten the livelihoods of traditional fishers. These include the continuing fight against the establishment of the proposed Wadhawan port by the Jindal Steel Works, as well as ocean surveys by the public sector Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) in some of the most productive fishing belts. The state's Minister for Fisheries had promised compensation to fishers for fishing days lost



Jyoti Rajesh Meher

due to the ONGC surveys, but the calculation of compensation was a big challenge. Fishing along the coast was also impacted by pollution from the Tarapur Industrial

Area, and the MMKS was struggling for a ban on effluent disposal into the sea.

The MMKS as a trade union was also working with women, to set up women's cooperatives, and take up various issues of their rights. Through continuous struggle, it had managed to get reservation of a few compartments in local trains for women to transport fish in the Palghar-Mumbai belt. Efforts for compensation helped women fish vendors affected by the destruction caused during the Phyan cyclone in 2009, and those impacted by the oil spill from the collision of the two ships, MSC Chitra and Khalija 3, in 2010.

The struggle for compensation has been carrying on for nine years, with a final resolution yet to be achieved.

MMKS in Palghar and Mumbai also took up the issue of street



Ujwala Jaykishan Patil

fish markets being affected by Mumbai city development plans, in turn impacting women fish vendors. A survey undertaken with the help of ICSF helped the MMKS to identify 102 fish markets in the city and to provide a map of these fish markets to the municipal authorities, with a demand that the fish markets were retained in situ in the new city Master Plan. The lack of facilities to women fish vendors at the Sasoon and Colaba Dock landing sites was also taken up with the city administration.

The union is working with the health of women in the fish trade. Most women are forced to retire from this work due to medical reasons by the age of 45 to 50 years. Many suffer from chronic problems because of the heavy work. The union has been demanding health compensation and pension for women in the sector.

The union has a membership of around 500 fish vendors in Palghar town alone. It has further members from the nearby villages of Palghar district, which is entirely coastal. The union sees as its next challenge a proper enumeration of membership, including detailed demographical information. It seeks to conduct workshops and training sessions to build awareness among members with regard to issues faced in the sector, and their rights. Ujwala Patil shared that in Mumbai, the demand of the union includes ownership rights being granted to women vendors in the Bombay Municipal Corporation fish markets. The union also has been demanding reservation of land adjacent to the fishing villages for use by the communities. Women have been actively participating in the government exercise of demarcating the outer boundaries for fishing villages in Mumbai.

Seeta Dasan of SEWA in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, India shared that for SEWA in Kerala, the biggest challenge was the the setting up of a commercial port at Vizhinjam. The fishing community was aware of the consequences of coastal erosion, resulting from even the initial construction activities of the project. Struggles included joining in demonstrations by the various fishing community organizations on the streets of Thiruvananthapuram city, campaigns

addressing church organizations and political parties, and taking up the matter with the media. SEWA views the organization as a platform to build unity, and provide a forum to take up issues of women fishworkers in the state. ❖



Seeta Dasan

From child bride and adolescent mother to community leader, the journey of 48-year-old Tapasi Dolui, President of the women’s wing of Dakshinbanga Matsyajibi Forum (DMF), a registered trade union of fisherfolk in West Bengal, India, though daunting and full of challenge, is an inspiration to women everywhere.

When she turned 13, Tapasi Dolui was married off to a fisherman in the village of Tangrachar in Kulpi Block, South 24 Parganas District in West Bengal. Everyday thereafter, she accompanied her husband on a small boat, helping him catch fish in the nearby river. Soon she also became mother to two sons. However, Tapasi’s life was full of hardship, with poverty and deprivation, and very little support from her husband.

Tapasi Dolui has emerged as an active community leader, working closely with the DMF which, since 2015, has functioned as a registered trade union body of fisherfolk in West Bengal. She is the President of DMF’s women’s wing, and leads campaigns and protests in support of the rights of fisherwomen.

The current struggle of the community is for official biometric cards. This is a very important document, which establishes the work identity of a fisher, entitling her to government schemes and subsidies. Historically, women have found it extremely challenging to obtain this card since fishing is traditionally regarded as a male activity.

Tapasi Dolui recalls the battle she had to go through to obtain her biometric card: “I submitted the application for the card at the anchal (local) office, but for months after that, despite constant follow up on my part, nothing moved. Then, following the advice of Milan Das, the Treasurer of DMF, I decided to directly approach the office of the Assistant Director of Fisheries (Marine), or ADF(M). I related my story to the officials there and told them that I would not leave the office without my biometric card. Luckily, the office of the ADF(M) was sympathetic to my appeal and the card was issued to me. I am now mobilising the community on this issue. Three hundred fishers have joined the struggle and we are collectively raising our voice for our recognition, for our identities, for the protection of our rights to life and livelihood, and protesting against the various types of unlawful activities that have overtaken our coasts in recent times.”

Tapasi’s main objective now is to increase DMF’s membership base. As many as 280 fishers have received the biometric card under her leadership. She is proving to be a catalyst in the lives of the fisherfolk of Tangrachar area. Her work is leading to the empowerment of fisherwomen belonging not just to Tangrachar but also the blocks of Shyampukur I and II, Kaddwip, and Howrah in West Bengal. These are all marginalized women, unheard by society around them, and by the planners and policy makers of our country.

Truly, Tapasi has emerged as the voice of the voiceless. ❖

PROFILE

**Tapasi Dolui:
Fisherwoman from West Bengal, India Leading
the struggle of fisherwomen in Tangrachar**

By **Shilpa Nandy** (shilpanandy@yahoo.co.in), Assistant Professor, Khudiram Bose Central College, Kolkata, India, and Advisor, Women’s Wing, Dakshinbanga Matsyajibi Forum



Tapasi Dolui

These hardships, far from crushing Tapasi’s spirit, bestowed her with a growing resolve to become independent and to fend for herself and her two sons. She joined a local self help group. Then, with the help of a loan from the group, another loan from a local bank, and money gained from selling her jewellery and some assets, Tapasi purchased a single-cylinder motorised boat and ten acres of land. Next, she set about training her sons to use the boat. Today, the two boys are adept fishermen and support themselves through fishing.

In December 2017, wishing to help other women stuck in disempowering situations just as she once was, Tapasi decided to form a local fisher cooperative. The cooperative, Tangrachar Matsyajibi Samabay Samity, now has 36 members – 16 female and 20 male– and meets regularly once a month. With the hard work and enthusiasm of its members, the cooperative has helped to transform and empower the lives of many marginalised and deprived women.

Queens of the sea

Women involved in sustainable fishing take the stage at Slow Fish 2019

By **Giulia Capaldi** (g.capaldi@slowfood.it), Slow Food HQ, Communication Office, Italy

Slow Food is a global network of local communities, founded in 1989, to prevent the disappearance of local food cultures and traditions and counteract the rise of the fast food culture. Since its founding, Slow Food has grown into a global movement involving millions of people in over 160 countries, working to ensure that everyone has access to good, clean and fair food.

Slow Fish, which is an international campaign of Slow Food and a Slow Food event held once every two years in Genoa, Italy, gathers academics, researchers, small-scale fishers, representatives of public bodies, and enthusiasts to discuss sustainable fishing and production, responsible fish consumption and the health of marine and freshwater ecosystems. A large market, conferences, meetings, workshops, and tasting sessions make Slow Fish a unique event entirely dedicated to the world of fish. The event takes place in odd-numbered years and is organized by Slow Food and the Region of Liguria with the patronage of the City of Genoa and Italy's Ministry for Environment, Land and Sea Protection, with the support of the Genoa Chamber of Commerce and the participation of MIPAAF (Italy's Ministry for Agricultural, Food and Forestry Policies).

The sea is a source of food and natural resources, energy, and also a means of transportation. It stores carbon dioxide and produces oxygen. It provides livelihoods and employment in the fisheries for more than 60 million people around the world. Unfortunately, however, the sea is all too often taken for granted. The time has come for each one of us to act to protect it for future generations. Among the major threats that the sea is facing are the harmful effects of climate change; pollution from plastics, microplastics, and other chemicals; the damage caused by human activities to coastal areas and natural habitats; and indiscriminate fishing, putting species like bluefin tuna at the risk of extinction.

For this reason, 'The Sea: A Common Good' was chosen as the theme for the 2019 edition of Slow Fish, which took place from 9 to 12, May 2019. The focus of the event was on positive messages, good practices, decreasing global warming, and resisting single-use plastic. The connection between environmental, social, and gastronomic issues has always been particularly

strong at Slow Fish, showing how consumers, fishers, chefs, and scientists all have a role to play in protecting the sea.

Members of small-scale fishing communities from all over the world attend the event, and several fisherwomen shared particularly interesting stories. The role of women in fisheries is often underestimated, as fishing is usually perceived as a male activity. Women, however, play a crucial role in fishing communities around the world. They clean and process the fish for selling in markets. Some even take to fishing, challenging traditional gender roles.

A South Korean delegation of fishers presented a unique fishing method performed by female divers (*haenyeo*) of Jeju Island: Fisherwomen dive ten metres underwater holding their breath to harvest seafood by hand. Interestingly, this job requiring strong physical endurance and specific breathing techniques is performed by women in their 50s and 60s, with some even in their 80s or 90s. This unique knowledge is passed down through the generations. However, this purely female fishing method risks becoming extinct as the number of *haenyeo* has decreased dramatically over the years, from 23,000 in 1965 to just 4,000 diving fishers in 2015. "Many people do not want their family members to become a *haenyeo* because today women have more opportunities to get a good education and a good job. We are concerned about declining numbers," says Minsoo Kim, Slow Food International Councillor from South Korea, adding that it is vital to find ways to "continue this tradition."

Among the women present at the event was also Sally Barnes, who has been preparing smoked fish "for longer than she can remember" and is the only person in Ireland who still smokes wild salmon. Barnes uses an ancient method, which consists of putting the fish under salt and then drying it with smoke. It took her about three years of experimentation with different smoking techniques to find the best method: salt, beechwood, and no dyes. "Dyes allow fish producers to create a product much more rapidly, so they sell you a lot of water in the fish. With the slow smoking technique, the fish retains much more of its natural flavor". The intensive production of farmed salmon is a huge challenge for Barnes. Another challenge is getting fresh fish, as the boats usually go to

the sea for six days and keep their catch on ice until they come back to shore. Although Barnes agrees that it is tough to be a woman in the fishing world, the last wild salmon smoker says she wouldn't want to do anything else.

Another woman with a powerful story is Barbara Rostenburg-Geerstsena, an oyster gatherer on the Wadden Sea in the Netherlands. The sea, whose shores extend to Denmark and Germany, is often called a "sea of mud" as part of the coast is periodically submerged by tides. The Wadden Sea is very shallow and demand specific fishing techniques. Due to these unique conditions, the fishers of the Wadden Sea rarely fish in other seas, as this would typically require different fishing equipment, boats, and licenses. Says Barbara, "We are dependent on this little piece of water, and this gives you a special connection to your profession. In the last decades, the number of fish has decreased in the Wadden Sea, and so has the number of fishers. Changes in the ecosystem pose a threat to some species, and it also poses a threat to us and our fishing tradition." She adds that, unlike in the neighboring North Sea, it has been historically common practice for wife and husband to fish together in the Wadden Sea. However, this tendency is changing, and fewer women are directly involved in fishing now.

SlowFood is also working to bring indigenous peoples' voices to the forefront of the debate on food and culture, to institutionalise indigenous peoples' participation in the movement and its projects, and to develop both regional and global networks. Several indigenous communities were at the center of the conversations at Slow Fish. For many small-scale fishers and coastal indigenous communities, fish is much more than food, it is a way of life. These communities are facing significant threats from climate change and industrial fishing, which risk cutting the ancient ties between indigenous peoples and the oceans. At Slow Fish, three delegates from the Netherlands, Finland, and South Africa shared their experiences of working with their local indigenous and small-scale fishing communities. Here are their stories.

Chef Loubie Rusch from South Africa works side by side with local communities to promote their products. She told the Slow Fish audience about a new project in Cape Town, ABALOBI, which works with small-scale fishers. "It is a series of five applications that we have developed along the entire supply chain. In South Africa, small-scale fishers are marginalized, completely invisible, and the quotas give preference to industrial fishing. This application enabled small-scale fishers to collect their data and gave them direct access to chefs." The project has also developed a QR code, which is used by partnering chefs and their restaurants. By scanning the QR code on the menu, customers

can read about who caught the fish and how it was caught. It also provides further information on the sustainability rating of the fish and a detailed description of the species. "It is an incredibly empowering tool which is benefiting small-scale fishers," said Rusch, who is planning to introduce fishers to indigenous coastal foods which could be either harvested wild or brought into cultivation. "This is another layer that could contribute to the fishers' livelihoods."

Lauri Hamalainen is a Finnish fisher from North Karelia, and a member of Snowchange, an organization that works with indigenous communities in the north of the country. Over the years, Snowchange has become an essential scientific reference point in the debate on climate change and traditional fishing techniques in the region. Says Hamalainen, "In recent years, winters have become very warm and secure ice, a central requirement for seining, today comes a few months later and starts melting a few months earlier than it used to. Often fishers take risks by working on unsecure ice. In the North, we are clearly witnessing climate change in action, and its effect on our fishing tradition."

Mariëlle Klein Lankhorst is a Dutch photographer with a passion for travel. Her most important journey has turned into a long-term project around Europe's coasts, including the Netherlands, France, Spain, Portugal, Italy, and Ireland, where she met small-scale fishers and told their stories through pictures. "Everyone knows what a fisher is and everyone is aware of the crisis in fisheries. However, the story often lacks nuance, so I share more colorful light on small-scale fishing as a livelihood. What I have learned is that fishers are extremely passionate about what they do. It is not just their job; it is their way of life." Through her observations of small-scale fishers, Klein Lankhorst has learned about the daily obstacles that they face in Europe. She noticed that despite being generally optimistic in nature, fishers tend to become melancholic when discussing the future. The rules of the European Union favour industrial rather than small-scale fishing, and small-scale fishers are less well-organized, have less time and political clout. Klein Lankhorst called the current situation "threatening", and drew attention to the shocking statistics: "Eighty percent of fishing boats in Europe are small-scale, yet they account just 14 percent of the total value of the catch."

These are just some of the interesting stories that were shared at Slow Fish. If you would like to attend the next edition of the event, which will take place in 2021, stay tuned at www.slowfood.com! 🍷

The role of women in fisheries is often underestimated, as fishing is usually perceived as a male activity

FILM

Fished! The Fisher Women of Mumbai

Directed by Daya Gupta; Duration 19 min 28 sec; Language: English

By **Indu M.G.** (indumg@yahoo.com), Freelance Communication Consultant, Mumbai, India

This short video gives a bird's-eye view of the lives of Koli women. The Kolis are a traditional fishing community from Mumbai, India – one of the original inhabitants of this island city of mostly migrants.

The women form a formidable force in the fishing industry of Mumbai. Although they are not involved with the catch, most of the other aspects are handled by them, such as the sorting, cleaning, drying, packing and selling fish in the local markets. They are the fulcrum on which the livelihoods of the families turn; without them, the industry would come to a standstill. Brief interviews with some of them give glimpses of their back-breaking and relentless work. Some women accept it because they feel they have no other choice; some cherish a hope in their hearts for a better tomorrow. The film also touches upon the issues of domestic violence and male alcoholism within families.

The film begins with the story of Mumbai as a city of migrants and then moves to the Kolis, but it does not explore the connections between the two. Structurally, it is repetitive. Women work very hard; they have few choices, as this is

the only work they know; they have very little money; some have to double up as domestic maids as well; they get no support from the government...these ideas are repeated by all the talking-heads.

There are many problems faced by this traditional community living on the fringes of their ancestral land. However, the only issue that is explored in any depth by the filmmakers is that of the emerging threat of e-commerce. What about the larger questions of survival such as displacement, restrictions on fishing practices because of urban construction projects, environmental problems diminishing the catch, and so on? The film turns a blind eye to the core issues faced by the community.

Another glaring omission is with regard to the business of fishing. Some of these questions are likely to pop up in the viewers' mind: Has the demand increased? Has the changing landscape of Mumbai affected business? How will the proposed infrastructure projects impact fisher livelihoods? What impact does environmental pollution have? What does the changing demand say about the health of the fishing industry? The film talks of government apathy but fails to give details of the specific aspects where the fishing communities feel let down.

While the focus of the film, with its understandable limitations of time, is on women, by omitting the roles of the men and the community, a precious context is left out. The viewer does not get a sense of community life in the villages, the koliwadis, dotted all along the coastline of Mumbai. Similarly, the case against e-commerce or government apathy could have been more convincingly and thoroughly made through the use of argument and counter-argument.

Despite its shortcomings, the film holds a beacon to the women fishers who are the very essence of not just their families and communities, but of the artisanal fisheries of Mumbai.

The documentary may be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pQaDImryQA&feature=youtu.be>



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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.