



39 Years in Support of
Small-scale Fishworkers

Yemaya

ICSF'S NEWSLETTER ON GENDER AND FISHERIES

From the Editor

A series of regional workshops were held through the years 2022 and 2023 in Europe, Africa, Latin America, and Asia to mark the International Year of Artisanal Fisheries and Aquaculture (IYAFA) 2022. The workshops raised several issues that were common across regions.

In these workshops, women fishers discussed the multiple roles they played. Women are active in primary fishing activities, including shore-based subsistence fishing and fishing on boats; they are the main producers of processed fish products; they contribute significantly to fish trade; they provide allied services in sales and transportation. Women in Africa and Asia also participate in fish exports through cross-border trade.

However, women's work is also largely invisible, and lacks recognition by policy makers. The discussions highlighted the need to make the roles of women more visible, through better research into their roles, and improved data collection by the government. The need for capacity building among women was stressed, so that they can gain the skills to be more competitive in the sector.

The workshop discussions also noted with concern the persistence of violence that women experienced at homes, in communities, and in their workplaces. The need to ensure greater gender sensitivity, through training, advocacy and positive policy measures was repeatedly stressed.

Arguably, the single most important takeaway from the IYAFA workshops was the need for women to organize to gain visibility and amplify their demands. A case study from Galicia showed among shellfish gatherers, while women made up 32.88 percent of all guild members, they have only 4.76 percent representation in leadership positions in fisheries associations. At the same time, the workshop discussions also recognized the fact of a growing number of women's organizations in the fisheries sector.

During this period, a cross-regional study brought out the impact of capitalist development on small-scale fishing communities and their livelihoods. Case studies highlighted several issues of concern: in Kenya, small-scale seaweed farmers experienced the adverse effects of steel, cement and other forms of factory production; In several parts of India, the growth of coastal aquaculture, tourism and port construction has adversely affected traditional fisheries; in Sri Lanka, both large scale development projects like the Port City as well as environmental disasters like the X-Press Pearl ship oil spill, have affected traditional fishing livelihoods already reeling under the economic crisis the country faces; in Cambodia, tourism development has taken over coastal lands, restricting women's access to near-sea fishing.

Women are often also the victims of the risks inherent in fishing activities that help poor communities eke out a livelihood. In the 24 Parganas region in India, several widows of fishers killed by tigers, have struggled for years to gain recognition of their status and the compensation due to them from the Government.

The struggles of women fishers across the world highlight the need for gender sensitive policy making, while also affirming the role of organization for women to access their rights within fishing communities. **■**



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