Women's voice and identity

A development model driven solely by profit is eroding the small-scale fisheries and marine and coastal ecosystems in Thailand

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The decades of so-called 'development' and discourses of fisheries modernisation and blue growth have failed to uplift small-scale fishers and address gender inequality. Instead, they have led to environmental damage, social and cultural disruption widened gender inequality, and increased the violation of human and collective rights. The economic-driven policies are unlikely to ensure sustainable development but rather, they will create tensions between the environment and natural resource dependent communities. Employment is reduced; landlessness increased; community commons privatised; food security decreased; health and well-being have been negatively impacted; and acts of intimidation and violence are commonly witnessed. In all this, women in small-scale fisheries and in traditional coastal communities have suffered. Women fishers are still bearing the brunt of the costs of gender differences and inequality. The negative impacts on women have resulted in persistent poverty. Pro-people, gender mainstreaming perspectives are urgently needed on the questions of livelihood, coastal and marine commons governance, social justice, and ecological sustainability, in order to ensure that communities have full sovereignty over natural resources.

Marine and terrestrial ecosystems are an abundant source of social and economic benefits to human societies. They provide livelihood to many small-scale fishing communities whose ways of living have been connected to rivers, coasts and oceans. The communities' wisdom and knowledge of ecology and fishing are integral to the way they govern their ecosystems. Small-scale fisher communities, which support the majority of people in the fisheries sector, are dependent for their living on fishing as a principal source of income and nutrition. They engage in fishing from generation to generation. Some of them also manage small coastal aquaculture enterprises for an additional source of food and income.

The present growth-driven economic approach to fisheries and aquaculture which is based on exploiting ecosystems has caused conflict among resource users. Marine coastal resources have deteriorated as a result of the use

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Women mending fishing gear, Thailand. Women's rights as sea-going fishers have not been recognised, and the roles of women in post-harvest value addition and sales have been ignored

of destructive fishing gears and capital intensive investments in coastal regions including the expansion of large-scale aquaculture in which the participants may be non-fishers. The fishers' coastal common properties are leased out to corporate firms or other private entities for profit-oriented commercial purposes such as manufacturing industries, tourism, power plants, and other infrastructural projects. Export-oriented industrial fishing has looted marine resources leaving fishing grounds to resemble deserts. As a result, small-scale fishers experience food insecurity, insecure livelihoods and low family incomes. Customary rights over the marine and coastal resources of sea, river and land have been eroded as governments now hold the majority of rights. Small-scale fishers, especially women fishers, have not been recognised nor meaningfully involved in either fishery or coastal resource management.

In fishing communities, the household usually functions as an economic unit where the roles of both men and women are complementary. Fishing is however seen as a male activity despite women playing critical and significant roles in fish production. Women work in direct productive activities including collecting, processing, preparing and marketing of fish and other marine resources. In addition, they play an indirect role in the fishing economy in terms of caring for and nurturing their children. However, these contributions are often unacknowledged or undercounted in employment data. Women are not included as fishers in the formal statistics and a large part of their work is unaccounted in economic valuations.

Policy directions promoting the fishing industry have created many problems for the small-scale fishing sector and for women fishers, who constitute the most vulnerable and invisible sections of fishing societies. Industrial fishing has diminished the role of women in fisheries and their involvement in the collection and culturing of molluscs, crustaceans, shells, oysters and other edible products in the coastal ecosystems. Women's rights as sea-going fishers have not been recognised, and the roles of women in post-harvest value addition and sales have been ignored, allowing them to be displaced by more prominent traders in the commercialised harbour-based global fish trade. The overall disempowerment of coastal communities and small-scale fishers impacts women in unique ways as the burden of adaptation falls upon them. Yet, their voices are seldom heard.

The devastation of coastal and marine capture fisheries resulted in unemployment, forced migration and exclusion of women fish workers. Traditional marine fishers were forced into culture fisheries for livelihoods. From being self-employed many fishers have been forced into becoming workers in industrial companies where they generally occupy floor-level jobs, such as in seafood factories, and as contract workers in unskilled categories of work. This has also led to the further marginalisation of women who have no social protection against livelihood loss.

Women who used to be direct producers or sellers of seafood would first keep aside a portion of the fish for family consumption and then sell the remainder. With the decline of capture fisheries and the lack of opportunities in culture fisheries, these once self-employed women are now being forced into daily wage labour. Women in the fisheries sector are worse off as a result of the present economic model and the capital intensive growth in marine and coastal ecosystems that is wiping out marine and coastal resources. In addition to climate change and extreme weather events, these trends have threatened the livelihood and food security of small-scale fishers, particularly women.

The disproportionately negative impact on women is due to gendered cultural stereotypes that ascribe greater working burdens to women while restricting their access to resources, decision-making and participation in collective governance.

The prevailing development paradigm has shifted power away from traditional community-level governance mechanisms and into the hands of nation-state mechanisms driven by market interests. Fishing coastal communities have lost their sovereignty and are reduced to the status of environmental refugees in their own nations.

The prevailing development paradigm has shifted power away from traditional community-level governance mechanisms and into the hands of nation-state mechanisms driven by market interests

Evidence shows that the macroeconomic development paradigm has gradually resulted in a massive dislocation and displacement of traditional coastal communities towards harbour-based capital-intensive fisheries. This has damaged rivers, and riverine and coastal ecosystems, impacting the ways of living and livelihoods of small-scale fishers. Their exclusion from decision making processes has increased their vulnerability and workload and generated greater stress for women fishers looking after the health and nutrition of families and communities.

The result is a sea-change in the systems of knowledge, ecology and political economy vital for the prosperity and well-being of coastal communities and small-scale fishers, including women. The integrated nature of riverine, coastal, land and marine ecosystems has been totally absent in the mainstream public and policy discourse. Discussions on fisheries stock depletion and 'over-fishing' have overlooked these on-land anthropogenic factors. Resource depletion is a result not just of bad policy and destructive projects but also of the erosion of the right of local communities to govern resources

of which they were once the traditional custodians. Closely related to community governance of resources is food sovereignty. With the gradual destruction of small-scale fisheries, scores of families go without essential nutrients, and the reasonably better off become dependent on external markets for food. Thus, households are no longer in control of their own nutritional needs, and are increasingly dependent on markets or government welfare schemes. This brings into focus the question of food sovereignty where control of nutrition is being snatched away from the primary producer and the end consumer.

If national policies, plans and measures lack a gender perspective, they fail to recognise that women and men while sharing some basic needs also have other, divergent needs, interests, knowledge, skills and responsibilities concerning the use and management of coastal and marine resources. Practical strategies are therefore needed to make women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an important part of marine and coastal policies and plans. Without these, the gender gaps in marine and coastal biodiversity management will only widen.

These challenges need a multi-pronged and holistic set of responses. Alternatives to the current paradigm of macroeconomic development are needed, as are workable solutions and strategies for the struggles that lie on the path. It is towards this goal that small-scale fishery networks envision the need for greater sovereignty over coastal commons for their primary stakeholders and advocate for an overall restructuring of resource governance. This aims at reversing the role of the state from ownership to custodian by bringing policy and legislative changes to protect and promote the traditional rights of coastal communities under international conventions such as the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (the SSF Guidelines), as well as national and state-specific legislations.

PROFILE

Supaporn Pannarai

Supaporn leads the Network of Women from Songkhla Lake set up to conserve and manage natural resources in the region

This profile is by **Kesinee Kwaenjaroen** (kasineek@gmail.com), Sustainable Development Foundation, Thailand

Supaporn Pannarai is chairperson of the Network of Women from Songkhla Lake. Born in 1966, she started fishing when she was 14, accompanying her father on his fishing trips. The island of her birth, Ban Chong Fuen, is located in Pattalung Province, right in the middle of Songkhla Lake. 15 years later, however, Supaporn was forced to give up fishing, as, by this time, there was scarcely any fish left to catch. "My childhood memory", Supaporn recalls, "is that the lake was rich and community members lived happily on the basis of mutual aid. The surplus fish was sold at local markets and shared with neighbours. But now the lake is not as rich as before and more and more people go to work outside."

What caused this change? The answer to this lies in the history of development in this region. The Songkhla Lake, Thailand's largest natural lake, is located on the Malay Peninsula in the southern part of the country. Covering an area of 1040 sq km, it borders the provinces of Songkhla and Phattalung. There are three distinct lakes: Thale Noi, Thale Luang and Thale Sap from north to south, which are interconnected by narrow channels. A narrow strait of about 380m width connects Thale Sap with the Gulf of Thailand at its southeastern end. A gradient of salinity exists, therefore, between the brackish water of Thale Sap and the pure freshwater of Thale Noi. The middle lake, Thale Luang, approaches a freshwater condition during the rainy season, but is influenced by the invasion of seawater in other months.

In recent decades the increase in the numbers of fishing vessels and the intensification of fish processing has led to overfishing and degradation. One of the direct causes of the degradation of natural resources and the decrease in marine life has been the closing off of what is called Pak Rawa (the mouth of Rawa) that prevents seawater from entering the lake, significantly changing the lake's ecology and leading to a decline in fisheries resources. Equally destructive has been the construction of a deep-sea port in the provincial town of Songkhla. These developments have completely changed the ecosystem of the lake. To survive, people are being forced to abandon fishing for other occupations. The roles and livelihoods of women in the fishing communities have also changed. Women from fishing villages are forced to take up external employment, particularly in the fish processing industry. Men have also had to take up alternative employment outside the fishery sector to secure adequate daily incomes.

These changes have deeply affected social relationships as well. Supaporn understands this and pledges to do whatever she can to prevent further deterioration, both of the natural environment and of community relationships. "People are more individualistic," says Supaporn. "Family members do not live together. We do not have time to enjoy with friends as before. Therefore, I would like to help in whatever way I can to recover the lake." The Network of Women from Songkhla Lake, which Supaporn leads, is a progressive formation set up in June 2003 by women working around Songkhla Lake to recover, conserve and manage natural resources in the region. It focuses on conserving food security and the lake's natural resources. It also tries to build the capacities of local women as agents of change in their communities.

Guardians of the Sea

A meeting of women fishers from five provinces in Thailand led to the formation of a new women's network for defending the rights of fishing communities

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The meeting was held under challenging circumstances. Women from Phuket and Nakorn Sri Thammarat were not able to raise money on time for their travel. Due to the security situation, women from the provinces of Satun and Pattani could not join. Many had family responsibilities that came in the way of leaving home for even a few days. And yet, despite the odds, 79 women fishers from 27 sub-districts in five provinces gathered in southern Thailand for a four-day meeting between the 17th and 20th of March 2010, called by the Southern Women Fisherfolk Network.

The meeting was a platform for women to share their collective experiences of living and working in small-scale fisheries. The meeting also aimed to address the possibility of setting up a more formal network for women fishers in southern Thailand. Another purpose was to select those who would represent the concerns of Thailand's women fishers at the forthcoming international meeting to be held in early July in Chennai, India.

We begin this report by briefly introducing, province by province, each participating group. The group of women from the province of Songkhla consisted of women from the Songkhla Lake region and the Gulf of Thailand coastline. The unique ecology of the Songkhla Lake, which supports abundant aquatic and wildlife resources, is threatened today by the construction of a dam at the mouth of the lake. The women fishers from the Songkhla Lake region are struggling to conserve the lake's resources. They are organized into village-level savings groups. The savings not only improve the household economy but also go into a special fund for lake conservation and group capacity building. The women have had some success with setting up community fish-landing co-operatives. The women fishers from the Gulf of Thailand coastline face problems arising from developmental activities in their region, including gas leaks from drilling operations and coastal erosion due to port-related dredging works.

RAVADEE PRASERTCHAROENSUK/SDF

Women shared their collective experiences of living and working in small-scale fisheries

Women fishers from Pattalung Province—southern Thailand's only province that has no marine coastline and is located along a different part of Songkhla Lake—face the same dam construction-related problems that women fishers from Songkhla Province do. In addition, there is the problem of overfishing by large numbers of fishers, both small-scale and commercial.

Another province represented at the meeting was the province of Surat Thani, well-known for its abundant wildlife and natural resources. Bandon Bay, in particular, is home to a wide variety of plant and animal species, and also has a large coral reef area. Commercial fishing operations, pollution and waste water from expanding townships, and the development of aquaculture for oyster and clam farming, are serious issues in this region. Large parts of the provincial coastline are privately owned, with aquaculture farms stretching for kilometres on end.

Women fishers from Surat Thani have only recently started getting organized. Their visible role in community affairs is a consequence of growing anxiety over the ongoing degradation of marine and coastal resources. Women understand well that the industrial development projects being planned by the government will irreversibly change the nature of the province's coastline. Worryingly, the government plans for the coastal area of the

region include the construction of a nuclear power plant.

Women fishers from Trang Province, along the Andaman Sea, have been affected by the growth of commercial fisheries and the use of destructive gear like push-nets and drag-nets, which damage seagrass beds and coral reefs. They also face problems due to marine protection initiatives that involve systems of zonation and fishing restrictions.

The women fishers from Trang Province came together after the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami when they found they were being left out of relief and rehabilitation measures. Later, they organized themselves into income-generation groups, to raise money through the sale of products like chilli and curry powder. While they have yet to diversify their activities, they are increasingly being able to participate in community affairs on a more equal footing with men.

Women fishers from the province of Prachuab Kirika along the Gulf of Thailand, not far from Bangkok, face growing difficulties as tourism pushes up fuel and other prices. Commercial fisheries, urbanization, industrialization and tourism have degraded the region's marine and coastal resources. Most small-scale fisherfolk from the province have had to turn to tourism or wage labour for a livelihood. Only a few remain in fisheries. The women of the province rely on community fish-landing co-operatives to get a better price for their fish, and on setting up their own stores for fishing gear and other necessities.

Throughout the meeting there was a conscious attempt to avoid turning it into a training programme. There were no formal presentations. Instead, women shared their experiences and exchanged ideas. Groups of women also worked together on specific issues, so that they could take back concrete experiences of collective learning. To encourage self-reflection, each day began with meditation practice, and, to enable participants to relax after a long day, it closed with games, cultural activities and entertainment.

The women fishers' network from Pum Riang Village in Chaiya District of Surat Thani Province took charge of conducting the meeting. This took place in a Thai-style *sala* (pavilion) owned by the local administration—not in an expensive, formal setting. At night, participants slept in tents. The responsibility for each meal was taken up by the groups in turn, and this offered the opportunity of showcasing varieties of traditional local cuisine.

Participants at the meeting discussed issues at two levels. First, the specific issues of each province were discussed. Second, these issues were contextualized in a wider perspective, which took into account the Thai government's plans for the industrial development of coastal areas in accordance with its Southern Region Development Plan, as well as the impact of climate change on coastal livelihoods and ecosystems.

Several issues emerged from the sharing of experiences. One of the most serious related to the degradation of the coastal ecosystem, which has marginalized the small-scale fisheries and curtailed their access to marine and coastal resources. As a result, an enormous sense of livelihood insecurity grips coastal communities. Women are the ones most adversely affected because, apart from the fact that they make vital contributions to fishing and production processes, they are the main caregivers in small-scale fishing communities, responsible for both the food security and the general wellbeing of the household. Women's workloads have increased tremendously but they have few opportunities to participate in the processes and projects that are established to resolve the problems of small-scale fisherfolk.

Women are also expected to conform to traditional stereotypes, and not break out of the mould, for fear of inviting criticism. At the same time, women's work is disregarded and devalued. This causes women to become invisible both within communities and society at large. To establish an identity within the community is not easy, particularly because any sort of decision-making role regarding resource management, conservation and rehabilitation is seen as falling within the exclusive domain of men. Women are often told that the male fisherfolk are already taking care of these matters and so there is no reason for women to get involved. This lack of acceptance is a barrier to women's active participation in fisheries.

There was agreement that while change is necessary, it cannot happen overnight. It would take time and must involve the men of the community. However, for change to occur, the starting point must be self-awareness and a willingness to struggle. No organization, agency or any other external force will be able to bring about equality for women unless women themselves are willing to act.

Women fishers must work at different levels today to deal with the multiple challenges they face—not only within fishing communities but also with other communities and the wider small-scale fisheries movement.

Participants also attempted to contextualize the experiences that had been shared in discussions on global warming and aggressive industrialization. All women agreed that communities had been forced to change their fishing patterns significantly over the years, and that their traditional knowledge systems were losing relevance. Inexplicable changes were taking place, like the appearance of new species, coastal erosion and the formation of new coastal land masses. Could these be on account of global warming or were some other forces responsible? Even though fisherfolk are at a loss for explanations, climate change experts agree that the most intense impacts of global warming will occur in marine and coastal areas, acidifying the seas and altering weather patterns and ocean currents. Fishing communities must equip themselves to deal with such phenomena.

There was a detailed discussion on the Thai government's Southern Region Development Plan. Crafted in association with politicians and investors, it aims to heavily industrialize the coastal areas of southern Thailand. Petrochemical industries, energy production, nuclear power plants, logistics and tourism—all except small-scale fishing communities—find a place in the plan. Small-scale fisheries will inevitably be affected in terms of displacement of communities; encroachment into important coastal ecosystems, such as mangrove forests; further degradation of already critically-depleted marine and coastal resources; pollution; and curbing of access and usage rights of small-scale fisherfolk. Significantly, the plan was drafted without a single consultation with small-scale fishing communities, whose lives it will disrupt.

There was consensus that small, piecemeal, single-issue-based efforts were no longer enough; rather, what was needed was a broad and holistic view of the overall context and the need to work for change in an integrated way. Women fishers must work at different levels to deal with the multiple challenges they face. They must work not only within fishing communities but also with other communities and the wider small-scale fisheries movement.

Recognizing this, the assembly formally established a network of groups of women fishers, which was named 'Women's Network for the Defence of Fisherfolk Rights'. This network would develop the role of women in protecting community rights in accessing, using and managing natural resources. It would put in place practices aimed at protecting, conserving and rehabilitating marine and coastal resources to protect the small-scale fisheries, and would increase the knowledge, skills and capacities of women fishers to enable intervention in matters of policy and legislation.

A co-ordinating committee was formed, which included three representatives from each of the provinces; funds were raised through a collection drive; and a working plan was drafted. Two network members—Supapron Pannaria (Network of Women Fisherfolk from Songkhla Lake) and Suphen Pantee (Surat Thani Small-scale Fisherfolk Network)—were selected as representatives to attend the upcoming international women fishers meeting in Chennai, India. The meeting ended with the unanimous view that the four days had been productive and well spent!

Securing Fundamental Freedoms

Although over 50 years have passed since the introduction of international human rights instruments pledging 'the equal rights of men and women', discrimination against women persists

By **Jackie Sunde,** (jackie@masifundise.org.za), a researcher with Masifundise Development Trust, an NGO working with fisher and coastal communities in South Africa, and Member of ICSF

> *"Adopt specific measures to address, strengthen and protect women's right to participate fully in all aspects of small-scale fisheries, eliminating all forms of discrimination against women…"*

The hopes of women living in fishing communities around the globe were expressed in the above statement issued by the Civil Society Workshop in Bangkok, held prior to the Global Conference on Small-scale Fisheries in the same city in October 2008. The statement was presented to the 28th Session of the Committee on Fisheries (COFI) of the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO) held in Rome in March 2009. The statement as a whole reflects the outcome of considerable work undertaken by civil society organizations to advocate a 'human rights-based approach' to small-scale fisheries. But looking back, what do these words mean: '*adopting specific measures*' towards '*eliminating all forms of discrimination against women*'? They express no doubt a radical and transformatory goal for a traditionally highly male-defined sector. Is the 'human rights-based' approach, as it is currently articulated, able to realize these aspirations? If not, what perspectives and strategies can help realize these freedoms for women?

VENKATESH SALAGRAMA

Shoe dhoni fishers in Kakinada, Andhra Pradesh, India. Much of women's work is in the 'private' sphere

What does a human rights-based approach actually mean for women in fisheries? UNIFEM, the United Nations Development Fund for Women, defines a human rights-based approach as "a framework for the pursuit of human development that is normatively based on, and operationally directed to, the development of capacities to realize human rights". Its origins lie in legally-binding inter-national instruments that reflect international consensus on a framework of entitlements and obligations to achieve human rights—the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and subsequent human rights conventions and treaties, including the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

Taken together, these instruments set a standard of rights for all people everywhere, recognizing the inherent dignity and equal and inalienable rights of all human beings. And yet, despite the fact that more than half a century has passed since the introduction of many of these instruments, and the provisions they contain discrimination against women remains a global phenomenon. Women face daily violations of their human dignity and freedoms. Why? Recently, feminist and gender-just analyses of the human rights framework have argued that mainstream international human rights law, and the conceptions of equality and rights that flow from this, reflect 'male stream' experience and notions of equality, and, as a result, fail to adequately challenge the basis of women's discrimination. They argue that one of the main obstacles to the protection of women's rights in international human rights law has been the assumption of gender-neutrality in law, which is based on a liberal notion of an individual as a 'genderless rights-bearer'. This failure to cite sex/gender differences, and the inequalities attached to these differences, result in the perpetuation of the myth that equal treatment will lead to equality.

Closely linked to this is the way in which the scope of human rights law has been interpreted—what constitutes 'public' interest and what is 'private', in the sense of being beyond the reach of international law? Historically, much of what constitutes the 'private' sphere concerns the social relations within communities, households and domestic relationships that shape women's everyday experience of life and livelihood. Traditionally this sphere has not received attention in international human rights law.

This division between the 'public' and 'private' sphere is also reflected in some of the international instruments aimed at protecting social and economic rights. For example, the

International Convenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), in its definition of the right to just and favourable work conditions (Article 7), focuses on paid work in the public sphere, neglecting the private sphere where much of women's work in fisheries is performed.

This is true even where attempts have been made to address family responsibilities, for example, in the 1981 "Convention concerning Equal Opportunities and Equal Treatment for Men and Women Workers: Workers with Family Responsibilities". A legally binding instrument, this convention conceptualizes the issue of women's equal treatment in a way that fails to address the fact that women are clustered within particular types of work; that women carry the brunt of familial responsibility; and hence, that specific measures are needed to transform the social relations that shape these responsibilities.

International fisheries instruments have been shaped along similarly 'gender-neutral' lines, resulting in the failure of these instruments to adequately conceptualize the gendered experiences of men and women in relation to fisheries. In most instances, these instruments are completely silent on the discrimination faced by women and silent also on the specific measures that should be adopted to protect and promote women's rights.

The United Nations Fish Stocks Agreement 1995, Article 24 2 (b) merely requires States to take into account "… the need to avoid adverse impacts on, and ensure access to, fisheries by subsistence, small-scale and artisanal fishers and women fishworkers, as well as indigenous people…". As noted in *Yemaya* No. 29, the FAO's Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (CCRF) adopts a similarly gender-neutral stance when urging states to ensure the participation of all stakeholders, with no specific reference to gender differences and discrimination. Yet, despite this silence, the CCRF does cover a range of issues of critical importance to furthering women's economic, social and cultural rights, which, if articulated in a more gender-sensitive way, would provide guidance to member States on the specific measures that they could adopt to eradicate discrimination against women in the sector and promote the full enjoyment of their basic human rights.

In order to address the neglect of women's specific experiences of discrimination and human rights violations, and to develop international jurisprudence on women's rights, several women's rights instruments have been developed. The CEDAW is central in this regard and has been an important tool in attempting to mainstream a gender approach into international human rights law. Significantly, the definition of the scope of CEDAW and the responsibility of the state address the 'private' sphere.

The obligation on states to adopt specific measures to eliminate both *de jure* and *de facto* discrimination against women is clearly articulated. However, recent reflections by many women human rights activists and theorists have highlighted concerns with CEDAW and other 'gender mainstreaming' instruments. Radicic, in a paper on Feminism and Human Rights, articulates one of the key concerns:

> *"gender mainstreaming has mostly been concerned with the integration of gender concerns into the preexisting framework of international human rights law, rather than transforming the framework itself.… 'Adding women' (and stirring) cannot secure inclusiveness of international human rights law… The very framework of international human rights law, therefore, needs to be reconceptualized to include the concerns, values and ethics associated with women*" (Radicic, 2007).

It is clear that the process of developing a human rights-based approach to fisheries, which is a key concern of several civil society organizations in small-scale fisheries, must interrogate the premises upon which this approach rests. Their efforts have highlighted the links between women's work in the 'public' and 'private' sphere and the indivisibility of family-household-community relations. They have strongly advocated a transformatory and gender-based perspective that takes into account the full contribution of women in small-scale fisheries. They have argued for a re-thinking of the false separation of the 'public' and 'private' spheres through which relations of production are separated from the social relations that sustain this production. They have drawn attention to the way in which stages in the fish supply chain have been alienated from the underlying community basis that supports all life and development.

The challenge now facing the sector appears to be the need to lobby international human rights bodies to ensure that all future work based on general human rights instruments incorporates a gendered perspective, clearly identifying the areas where women continue to experience discrimination in both the public and private sphere as well as in the intersection of these spheres. Further, we need to advocate specific measures that will promote a more integrated perspective to the range of life giving and sustaining processes in small-scale fishing communities, reflecting the indivisibility of the human, social and ecological dimensions of life.

PROFILE

Sunant Jewton

Sunant Jewton, President of a women's group in Baan Tung Prai, Thailand, has helped link conservation with income generating activities

By **Chattima Charnsnoh** (yadfon@loxinfo.co.th), Yadfon Association, a non-government organization based in Thailand

Meet Sunant Jewton, president of the local women's group in Baan Tung Prai, a village in southern Thailand. In just four years, she, along with the other women of this group, have not only managed to regenerate a dying species of local palm but also to position handicraft made from the palm as highly-prized local souvenirs.

Theirs is a story of hardship and resourcefulness, crisis and opportunity; of conservation efforts leading to additional income generation in ways that do not destroy local livelihoods but benefit the community as a whole.

Baan Tung Prai is located in a brackish water area on the Palian Estuary of Trang province in southern Thailand. A small community, 60 per cent Muslim and 40 per cent Buddhist, comprising fishers and rubber-tappers, lives here. In the past, Baan Tung Prai was a victim of intensive shrimp farming that overran mangrove forests as well as forests of a local palm—the Nypa palm—resulting in great hardship for the community whose livelihoods were completely dependent on the resources these forests provided.

The shrimp farm industry which had boomed during the 1980s, collapsed in the 1990s with global outbreaks of shrimp disease. Most shrimp farms in the Baan Tung Prai region were abandoned. What remained were degraded swamps, polluted by chemicals and supporting no life. Most severely affected were the fishers as fish stocks went down and other aquatic species disappeared.

"Not all of us are fishers. But, fishing families were badly affected. Fishers could find enough fish for just the family, not for sale, and we knew that it was caused by the loss of the mangrove forests in our homeland," says Sunant, adding, "So, that's when we started."

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, a conservation group in Baan Tung Prai consisting of local men and women initiated mangrove restoration activities. After the condition of mangroves improved, local groups began giving serious thought to Nypa palm restoration.

In the year 2005, Sunant Jewton, aware of the looming threats and eager for a solution that would benefit the entire community, began working closely with other locals to develop a sustainable conservation, utilization, and management programme for the Nypa palm.

The Nypa palm is a local plant which yields many products, such as sugar, vinegar, food wrapper and roofing material. But before the local women's group came into being, no one had ever thought that the palm could be used to make handicrafts.

"The art of handicraft-making has always been there in our community, but we never used Nypa palm as a raw material, even though it grows naturally in our area. It all began with a discussion within our group when some members were complaining about waste from Nypa palm, left over from other traditional usages, which became hard-to-get-rid-of junk. As the group was brainstorming, it came out with this most creative solution!" says Sunant.

With initial funds and training for capacity-building from Yadfon Association, the Baan Tung Prai women's group, with Sunant as the group leader, began experimenting with various types of Nypa palm handicraft. Some authorities stepped in to help the group with marketing channels. As a result, today, just four years later, Nypa palm handicraft is regarded as one of the most prized souvenirs in Trang province.

"Now, we have many types of Nypa palm handicraft—fruit trays, baskets and lamps. We don't mark up the price too high, but we do make enough profits to go round," says Sunant. "Ten per cent of total income is put into the group fund and used for group activities. We also teach the art of handicraft-making to kids in the local schools."

This resourceful women's group is engaged in sustainable conservation, income generation as well as the handing down of local wisdom to the next generation, ensuring the viability of the community in the long run.

"Today, community members have an alternative job. When a storm comes, no one can go fishing. So, women from fishing families, as well as the kids, can help generate income to keep the family together, without having to leave home to find jobs in factories," says Sunant with a smile.

Women's future in fishing

This article reflects on the issues and challenges facing women in small-scale fisheries, in the context of the recently-held international conference in Bangkok, where women, however, continued to be under-represented

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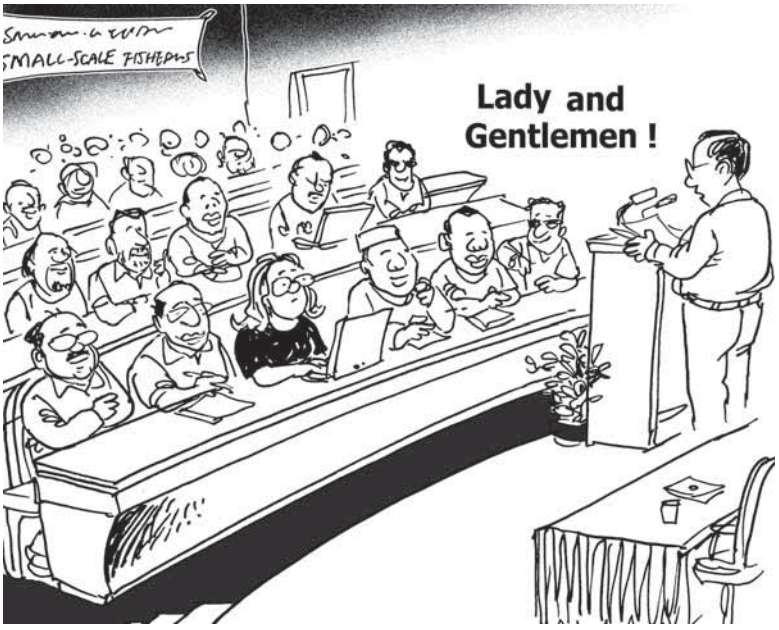
From 13 to 17 October 2008, the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the Department of Fisheries, Thailand, organized an International Conference in Bangkok, Thailand entitled: "Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries: Bringing together responsible fisheries and social development". A preparatory meeting was organized from 11 to 13 October. This was convened by the World Forum of Fisher People (WFFP), the Sustainable Development Foundation (SDF), the Federation of Southern Fisherfolk (FSF), the International NGO/CSO Planning Committee (IPC) and the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF). It enabled discussions to take place to prepare the demands for artisanal fishing worldwide.



Given the importance accorded to the role of women in this sector by the FAO and the need to assure their presence and active participation in this conference, it is worth pointing out that women comprised only one quarter of the participants.

We need to reflect on the thirty years of struggles by women from around the world for their representation in organizations engaged with the issue of fishing rights. In the 1990s, ICSF organized the first meetings between women from countries in the North and South in order to encourage their participation in decision-making processes in the fisheries sector. At Loctudy in October 2000, the two World Fisher Forums decided that in future all their delegations to meetings anywhere in the world would have equal representation of men and women. In this context, we see from the Bangkok meeting that we are clearly still a long way off from that decision of equal representation!

The first issue addressed by the preparatory workshop was "how to recognize and strengthen the role of women?" However, such a discussion is meaningless when women themselves are under-represented in the meeting. The discussion can only move forward when the role of men is challenged in not allowing women to come forward. It can only make sense when we transcend recognition, and move on to concretely discussing the leadership role of women.

There is adequate recognition in the fishing sector that women's work (whether paid or unpaid) in post-harvest activities adds value. They have a direct and equal stake in all engagements on the issue of fishing rights. Men in the sector can no longer be allowed to take all decisions on their behalf.

A theme of one of the working groups at the Conference was on how the economic, social and human rights of women as self-employed, as co-workers, and as community members could be secured.

The working group felt that although we have an ideal framework to guarantee women's rights, putting this into practice is not always possible. Women must get organized and mobilize themselves around important questions and issues. Often a crisis may be used as a springboard (as in the case of France in 1993-1994). Such organization can facilitate recognition by government; and allow women to demand participation in decisionmaking. Having a legal constitution also benefits organizations.

Women's organizations need to have a clear vision/mission and a good understanding of the aims and objectives of their lobbying activities. A strategic approach must be applied to influencing politicians and for using electoral processes to promote women's interests. Women's rights must be placed in a wider context of the roles that women have in communities, and of community needs. Women often require training to enable them play a greater role. In many instances, illiteracy prevents women from

taking up their rights (as in Nepal where female illiteracy stands at 70 per cent). Here NGOs can and do play an important role.

Women's groups need to establish networks, contacts and alliances with organizations in other sectors to share experiences and to identify strategies, for example, in monitoring the application of conventions. Collecting information on the roles of women and the kind of work they do, as well as on their access to, and control over, resources, could provide a way of capacity building and awareness among women to help them demand their rights (as in India). Legal recognition of the rights and role of women in labour is important. But there are few countries that have attained this goal (like in France, the status of collaborating spouse). Women and men must work together to guarantee rights and to change gender relations. Traditional and religious customs may represent serious obstacles in putting commitments into practice at policy level. Use of media may provide an effective strategy for drawing attention to the role of women.

On reading the report of this group, one can see that all the levers for obtaining the objective of affirming the role and place of women are there. However, the leverage is easier spoken about than done. In Europe, the decline of the fisheries sector has provoked a serious de-mobilization of women. Their future is totally dependent on the state of the resources, and on the dynamism of the sector. In the South, women in fishing communities live in poverty, and religion and tradition are large obstacles to their coming out and participating in deciding their future.

The current global crisis shows us how weak our financial system is. Countries have blindly fixed development targets based on economic performance without taking into account social or environmental repercussions. There is an increasing urgency for people, women and children and to look at alternative development models. Such a worldview will also move us closer to discussing forms of fisheries that are more sustainable.

"Women's rights must be placed in a wider context of the roles that women have in communities, and of community needs."

Asia / Thailand

For a better world

This article by Sanitsuda Ekachai, was carried in Bangkok Post on 23 June 2005

We all die. What matters is how we live so the world we leave behind is a better place than when we first came into it. While many of us still have to wrangle with this question, Miya Hawa has passed this criterion with flying colours.

Affectionately called Jaya by her family and friends, the cheerful Muslim mother and dedicated grassroots environmentalist passed away from heart ailment early this month, at her seaside village of Ban Jao Mai in Trang province. She was 47. Miya is survived by her husband Yahed, a fisherman and active grassroots environmentalist, and five children.

My deepest condolences to Yahed, the children, and all fisherfolk at Ban Jao Mai who share Miya's dreams and determination to return life to their once-barren sea.

I first met Miya at Jao Mai in 1994 during my trip to do a story on Tone, a dugong cutie that became the symbol of the Trang fisherfolk's conservation movement.

Outgoing and opinionated, Miya—with her trademark toothy smile and contagious laughter—did not fit one bit the submissive stereotype of traditional Muslim women. Through the years, Miya always worked shoulder-to-shoulder with her husband and other fisherfolk to fight against commercial trawlers, which were destroying their seas. But she would cringe at the idea of being called a feminist.

Her reason for rehabilitating the seagrasses and protecting the dugongs in the Trang sea was very simple. "I do it for my children," she said. You see, Ban Jao Mai, like most other fishing villages in the South, have long cried foul against big trawlers which sweep clean their sea, destroy seagrasses and corals which are nurseries for young marine lives.

Around 1990, the Jao Mai villagers, together with environmentalists from the Yadfon Foundation, started rehabilitating seagrasses in front of their home village. Only three months afterwards, abundant sea creatures returned. For Miya and other Jao Mai villagers, there was no looking back.

The trawlers, however, remained a threat until a lone, young dugong named Tone became their godsend in 1994. In a rare phenomenon, Tone came to feed on the seagrasses in front of Jao Mai every day. Tame and trusting, it also allowed humans to touch it. When news spread, people came to visit and learned about the Jao Mai fisherfolks' conservation efforts. The ensuing public concern finally forced the authorities to keep trawlers at bay. "Before, we villagers said we protected the sea to save seagrass and dugongs. Now it's the dugong that protects us," said Miya. "I then must protect Tone for my own children."

The little dugong was later killed by trawlers' nets. Its skeleton is still kept at Miya's home as a reminder for her family and her community to continue their fight against destructive trawlers more vigorously.

Miya was proud of the changes she helped bring about in Ban Jao Mai. The fish have returned. Husbands no longer have to work as hired hands on big trawlers, and wives no longer have to leave their children to work in factories in the towns, she once reported.

From helping found fisherfolk's clubs in her village and in Trang Province, Miya was also one of the driving forces behind the Federation of Small-Scale Fisherfolk's campaign for better fishery practices and conservation policies.

Last year, she was honoured with the Conservationist Mother Award from Mahidol University.

Miya blamed State greed for the vast environmental destruction in the country. The government, she charged, sees nature as a mere resource to be exploited for monetary gain, which is why the authorities shun the poor in favour of the rich and powerful, who destroy nature for their own profit.

"Forget money if it ends up destroying community ties," she once cautioned policymakers. "Also take good care of the environment. For we cannot live if nature dies." What if the government still turns a deaf ear? "We then must get organized," she said with deep conviction.

Miya has done her part to leave a better world behind. Have we?

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Asia / Thailand

Making a difference

By Jim Enright, Southeast Asian Coordinator of the Mangrove Action Project (MAP), based in Thailand

Miya Hawa was a special leader amongst local fisherfolk leaders in Thailand. As a woman and a Muslim she automatically stood out amongst the other leaders, mostly all men, whenever they gathered. But what really made Miya an outstanding leader was when she spoke, which was directly from the heart, in bold, passionate, colourful, terminology that captivated her audience. I remember an interview of Miya's with the media, where she called fishing trawlers the 'tractors of the sea'. It was such a fitting, descriptive analogy of the destructive force they cause to the sea bottom habitat. Many academics that met her had difficulty believing Miya had only completed four years of school, and they thought somehow she had been trained by someone to give certain answers, when in fact she was speaking her own thoughts and insights to complex problems.

She always spoke honestly and truthfully, directly to the issue, and she was not afraid to offend anyone in the audience. I remember on another occasion, when she was in a meeting with other Trang fisherfolk, discussing with a World Bank-hired consultant about a proposal to build a huge tuna fishing port and processing facility on the Trang coast. After much heated discussion she simply said to the consultant: "We're not interested in jobs cleaning washrooms in your factory. We are proud, independent, fishers and we need a healthy coastal environment." The project never did go ahead, and I believe it was partly due to her and other fishers' strong convictions that this development would threaten their way of life.

Miya and her husband, Yahed, were a wonderful conservation team, for Miya was always comfortable speaking about her convictions with others, be it at their simple seaside bungalow or in any large conference hall with international representatives. Whereas, Yahed is totally at ease with guests in his fishing boat sharing his knowledge and showing his concern for the marine world. Both always supported and complemented each other in their conservation work, influencing many people they came in touch with over the years.

What I will always remember most about Miya is her laughter, smile, and light hearted nature even in serious discussions. She never showed anger or the heavy burden put by the pressures on their way of life. She was able to make one feel that people can truly make a real difference. And Miya Hawa truly did make a difference!

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Asia/ Thailand

Protect rights of women survivors

Excerpts on Thailand from report on* Women's Human Rights Concerns in Tsunami-affected Countries*, brought out by the Asia Pacific Forum on Women Law and Development (APWLD) on 22 March 2005

The tsunami affected six provinces in southern Thailand located along the coastlines of the Andaman Sea: Phuket, Krabi, Sathun, Ranong, Trang, and the hardest hit province of Phang Nga. Three groups have been identified among the people affected by the tsunami in Thailand: (1) residents of the six affected provinces: fisherfolk, mainly Muslim; sea-gypsy communities; employees and owners of tourist businesses and hotels; small-scale business groups and hawkers on the beaches and agriculturists; (2) non-residents of the affected provinces: tourists, both Thai and foreign, migrant workers from various parts of Thailand and from the neighbouring countries, mainly Burmese migrant workers; and (3) workers in the service sector, now unemployed due to suspended businesses. These groups include marginalized women such as heads of household, women hawkers, small traders, sea gypsy women, labourers, migrant workers, sex workers and workers in the entertainment industry. They lack access to the relief assistance and cannot voice their concerns.

The Thai government has been providing relief support to the affected people, including loans for big businesses, temporary housing, monetary compensations for the destroyed boats and assistance to the orphaned children. Nine sub-committees have been appointed to monitor the rehabilitation projects. However, in many cases, the tsunami survivors have problems accessing relief assistance due to several factors.

Lack of access to information, and discriminatory and inflexible procedures

Many women in fisheries and their families, sea gypsy communities, sex workers, entertainment workers, migrant workers and small traders, cannot access various types of government assistance that require documents such as identification cards, social security cards, boat registration documents, and so on. They either lost the documents or did not have them in the first place. They also lack information on the assistance, procedures and documents required. Hence, they do not receive relief food and assistance or compensation from the government. The sea gypsy villagers in some islands still need food support, especially rice. Women and their families staying with their relatives, not in the camps, are also denied assistance. The less affected areas seem to have been left out of the relief assistance, especially for food. The affected internal migrant workers who went back to their hometowns in other regions of Thailand have not received any compensation or assistance.

Assistance not based on the real damage

Women in the fisheries complain that the flat assistance rate of 20,000 Bht (US$500) is not sufficient to repair the damaged boats and fishing or nurturing equipment. In some islands, for example, Koh Lanta, villagers received only partial boat assistance to pay for the repair of engines. Most fisherfolk cannot access even this partial assistance as they do not have boat registration documents. They also have high debts from the pre-tsunami period and, therefore, are not eligible to borrow more loans. So they struggle to make ends meet.

The right to land and housing

Many women and their families, especially sea gypsy groups, fisherfolk and others who lived on the seashore, have been deprived of their rights to the land they used to live in for decades. It is reported that as many as 32 villages in the affected areas may have been wiped out of the map of Thailand because private corporations have claimed ownership to the land in many villages right after the tsunami. A woman who had lived in her house for 30 years in Nam Khem Village, Takua Pa district, Phang Nga, said her house and land were fenced off so she could not even get into the premises to search for her daughter who has been missing after the tsunami. She also received life-threatening phone calls. Several other families in her neighbourhood are in the same predicament. Their houses happen to be located on the land leased by the government to the mining companies. The question is how these private corporations claiming the land have obtained land titles.

Sea gypsy communities living near the beaches face the same predicament and have been fighting for the land they have been residing on for a hundred years. In Ranong province, villagers' lands have been claimed by the national park.

These communities face housing and livelihood problems due to the loss of land. They are forced to relocate to places far from the sea from which they

make a living. If they refuse to move, they will get only partial compensation for their houses, which would be meager.

Lack of participation and special attention to the needs of women and children

The affected communities, including women, are not consulted by the agencies providing relief assistance. Some women expressed the need for educational support for their children (at least 500 baht or US$10 per month) and some educational activities for children for the coming summer holidays.

Safety and gender-based violence at internally displaced persons (IDP) camps

It has been reported that a teenage girl was harassed by a man in a women's toilet at an IDP camp in Takua Pa district, Phang Nga province. This raised a question of safety and the trend of gender-based violence at IDP camps.

Violation of labour rights and assistance to labourers

There are reports of widespread violation of labour rights of tsunami survivors. Female workers in the service sector such as entertainment workers, workers at resorts, hotels or massage parlours, in addition to not being able to access the government assistance for lack of required documents from the employers, do not receive redundancy compensation when their employers' businesses close down. Loopholes in the labour law (Section 75 of the Labour Protection Law) and the employers' evasive tactics contribute to the lack of access to the social security fund.

Environmental concerns

Affected communities, especially the fisherfolk, face environmental problems which they cannot solve without assistance of the local and central governments; for instance, a river mouth must be cleaned of sand deposited by the tsunami to let fishing boats in.

Recommendations

Short-term recommendations

Right to information and non-discrimination

- The Thai government must disseminate information about assistance through different channels to ensure that the affected communities, especially the marginalized groups, including women, have access to the assistance.
- The assistance must be based on the survey of real damages so that the survivors receive adequate assistance to facilitate their recovery and self-sufficiency.

Economic and social rights

- Land rights: Land titles of business companies claiming lands of affected people must be examined so that the survivors' right to land is respected.
- Housing rights: Affected communities must be consulted about their housing needs. The ongoing construction of houses that do not suit their need must be stopped.
- Labour rights: The government and private employers must provide adequate compensation and assistance to affected workers and migrant workers, both internal and foreign, according to the law.

Right to safety

- Safety must be guaranteed to women and girls in IDP camps. Adequate measures must be taken to prevent violence against women and children.

Special attention to the needs of women and children

- Trauma counselling must be provided for women and children survivors of the tsunami.
- Revolving funds for women must be established to facilitate income generation. Vocational training for women should be provided.
- Special support for women, especially heads of households, must be provided, for example, education support for their children.

Long-term recommendations

- The affected communities, including women, must be able to participate in the rehabilitation management, including environmental and coastal resources management.
- The government must facilitate social and economic reconstruction of the affected communities by providing access to fair and adequate funding to enable employment generation and restoration of livelihoods. Government development plans must not hinder employment generation opportunities as there are concerns about the government plan to issue a Bill on special economic zones in the tsunami-affected areas.

The full report put together by APWLD can be downloaded from http://www.apwld.org/tsunami_humanrights.htm

Asia/ Thailand

Plight of Burmese migrants

Excerpts from a report on* Women's Human Rights Concerns in Tsunami-affected Countries*, brought out by the Asia Pacific Forum on Women Law and Development (APWLD) on 22 March 2005, on the situation of women in tsunami-affected regions

Over 120,000 Burmese migrants and their dependents registered with the Thai authorities in the four provinces in the south of Thailand were issued temporary identity (ID) cards, according to July 2004 statistics. Most of them lost their cards during the tsunami. Of them, about 7,000 were employed in the sectors most affected by the tsunami: fisheries, construction and tourism. There are also many unregistered migrants working illegally in Thailand who have lost family members, their homes and their jobs. Most unregistered migrants are women.

In the tsunami aftermath, the Thai government started arbitrary arrests and forced deportation of Burmese migrant workers. Due to the pressure from both inside and outside the country, arrests and deportation were stopped. However, two months after the tsunami, Burmese migrant workers are still hiding in the hilltops, among plantations of coconut, rubber and banana. Some migrants have also gone to neighbouring provinces in search of work, and are staying with friends and relatives. Many intend to return to the tsunami-affected areas soon and seek work with their employers, hoping that by that time they would also have recovered and be ready to employ them again. Some of them have got back from Burma and neighbouring provinces because they heard that there have not been any arrests recently and that NGOs are providing assistance to re-issue work permits and emergency relief supplies.

Burmese migrant workers who survived the tsunami need the State authorities to reissue their temporary ID cards as quickly as possible. Without the cards, they have no right to stay in Thailand, have no access to health services and cannot apply for a work permit. They are forced to live in a climate of fear, desperation and humiliation.

Migrants with children, who lost a spouse, are worse off but do not dare to go back to Burma as they have heard reports that migrants returning from the tsunami-affected areas have been arrested, fined, imprisoned or forced to dig graves. Currently, the Thai authorities are not arresting or deporting migrants back to Burma.

Due to the humanitarian crisis in the area, most migrants are not engaged in paid employment. Employed migrants are not receiving regular pay since their employers also suffered huge losses during the tsunami. Relief is provided as an intermediary form of survival for migrants waiting for paid work to become available.

Many employers have lost family members and their livelihood, and have become stressed and financially insecure. As a result, some employers are unable, and sometimes unwilling, to pay migrants. Coercion has been reported where employers have not allowed migrants to leave the work sites at fishing areas.

Migrants who lost their ID cards during the tsunami, or whose employers who were holding their cards, died during the tsunami receive assistance from the TAG team, a migrants' rights NGO, at Takuapa District office. They helped search for the details of their registration for a temporary ID card, and the district office re-issued the cards. To date, 93 migrants have had their cards re-issued.

About 7,000 migrants registered in Takuapa district for the temporary ID card. Of them, 5,139 registered for a work permit. The total number of migrants who registered for the temporary card in all the districts of Phang-nga was 30,572 (20,391 men and 10,181 women).

The process of re-issuing cards is slow due to many factors. Migrants are spread out throughout the country, and they get information mainly by word of mouth. Also, they are still intimidated to meet Thai authorities. There are technical problems: lack of staff and office space, an old computer-search mechanism, and need for Burmese-speaking volunteers. Solving these problems would speed up the process of re-issuing cards to, at least, 130 a day. Currently, it is limited to 10 cards a day.

The Thai government must ensure protection of aid workers who are facilitating the return or re-registration of migrants. Burmese migrants who have organized themselves into outreach teams are facing harassment and arrest, and yet they are the only people who speak the same language and who other migrants will trust, the only people who could find the migrants in their hiding places to ensure they had food and shelter. Three Burmese World Vision aid workers, one of them a woman, were locked up in a cage in Baan Tab Lamu fishing village in Phang Nga province because the employer was angry with them for facilitating Burmese migrant workers to go back home after the tsunami.

The following are the main concerns of the migrant women:

- With most migrants hiding in the jungles, it is obvious they do not have access to basic medical assistance and have problems accessing food.
- Most migrant women do not have access to reproductive health services.
- Many expecting mothers do not have access to prenatal care and safe delivery.
- Mothers with young children need better nutrition; mothers with low breast milk production need regular milk supplies for their children.
- Tsunami survivors do need psychological counselling or mental healthcare, which is not available to them.
- There are a lot of male migrants who lost their wives and are taking care of their children. They need special assistance. On the island of Koh Khao, a man was taking care of three children (3- and 7-year old and an 8-month baby), and the children were sick.

The full report put together by APWLD can be downloaded from http://www.apwld.org/tsunami_humanrights.htm

Useful websites with information on gender and disaster

UNIFEM
http://www.unifem.org/campaigns/tsunami/
The website provides useful resources and articles on gender and disaster, as well as links to other relevant websites.

United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)
http://www.unfpa.org/emergencies/pacific/index.htm
The website provides information on UNFPA's response to the tsunami disaster, and in helping ensure that the special needs of women and youth are factored into the design and delivery of short- and medium-term humanitarian efforts.

Disaster Watch
http://disasterwatch.net/index.htm
The website provides information on various resources available on women and disaster, including on short films about the roles women have played in post-disaster reconstruction and rehabilitation.

Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD)
http://www.apwld.org
APWLD has put together a report *Women's Human Rights Concerns in Tsunami-affected Countries,* a joint effort of women's organizations and groups involved in relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts in the countries affected by the Indian Ocean tsunami.

YEMAYA
ICSF's Newsletter on Gender and Fisheries

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Please do send us comments and suggestions to make the newsletter more relevant. We would also like names of other people who could be interested in being part of this initiative. We look forward to hearing from you and to receiving regular write-ups for the newsletter.

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

Asia/ Thailand

Coming together

A recent meet in Thailand focused on Asian fisheries in the era of globalization

By Chandrika Sharma of ICSF's Chennai office

Millions of people in Asia depend on fisheries for a living, making it a critical component of economic growth and a major source of food security in the region. According to FAO estimates 84 per cent of the world's fishers were concentrated in Asia—9 million in China, nearly 6 million in India, and 4 million in Vietnam, Indonesia, Bangladesh and the Philippines taken together. The majority are small-scale, artisanal fishers, eking out a living from coastal and inshore resources. A conservative estimate would place the total number of people involved in fishing, processing, trading and other fisheries-related activities in Asia at about 120 million. For artisanal fishing communities, fishing is a source of livelihood as well as a culture and a way of life.

Asian fisheries have, however, witnessed major changes in the past few decades, as governments have sought to modernize the sector by bringing in more efficient gear and technologies, including bottom-trawling and purse-seining. The focus on expanding production and exports has received an impetus in the current phase of globalization.

It was to discuss these developments and their implications for the small-scale marine and inland fisheries sector that representatives of fisherfolk and peasant organizations as well as NGOs from 11 countries in Asia met from 25 to 29 January 2002 at Prince of Songkhla University, Hat Yai, Thailand for the *Asian Fisherfolk Conference: Cut Away the Net of Globalization*.

Representatives from the following countries were present: Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam, along with representatives from the World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP) and those from Aotearoa-New Zealand and South Africa.

The conference was organized with the following objectives:

- to analyze the impact of globalization, specifically liberalization, privatization and deregulation, on the small-scale fisheries sector;
- to document initiatives and gains by Asian fisherfolk to improve their situation, such as, but not limited to, organizing, peoples' campaigns, advocacy, resource management and lobbying;
- to learn about the role and situation of women in the fisheries sector; and
- to consolidate networks among fisherfolk organizations in the Asian region.

The workshop was a joint initiative of several organizations. These included the Federation of Fisherfolk of Thailand, the Sustainable Development Foundation (SDF), the Foundation for Sustainable Agriculture (FSA), NGO-COD, the World Wide Fund for Nature, the Andaman Project, the Prince of Songkhla University and the Waliluk University—all from Thailand, as well as PAMALAKAYA (the National Federation of Fisherfolk Organizations in the Philippines), the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF) and the Asia-Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD).

Participants felt that globalization processes lead to a loss of income and livelihood, dislocation from fishing grounds, denial of access rights, breakup of communities, social problems, loss of traditional systems of knowledge and wisdom, degradation and destruction of aquatic resources and violations of human rights. The pressure on women of fishing communities has increased in specific ways, translating directly into increased workloads, stress and pressure to earn higher incomes. Participants called for a reversal of laws, programmes and policies as well as the dismantling of institutions of globalization that are primarily attuned to the interests of powerful economic players and that marginalize fishing communities.

One of the objectives of the meeting was to understand better the situation of women of fishing communities in Asia. For a start, the effort was to ensure that there was equal representation of women from fishworker organizations at the meeting. However, this was not possible in all cases. In several countries of the region efforts of fishworkers to organize are relatively recent. Even where fisherfolk have organized, women often do not participate actively within the organization. As a consequence, there were fewer women representatives from fishworker organizations.

It was also clear that this situation was problematic as everyone recognized that women were playing active

roles within the fishery and the fishing community. At the same time they were at the receiving end of several developments within and outside the fisheries—developments that were negatively affecting their income, livelihood, workload and quality of life. The participant from Sri Lanka, for example, shared how artisanal women processors, mainly women, are being affected by imports of dried tuna from neighbouring countries. As the imports were priced cheaper, local processors are finding it difficult to compete.

That governments in the region have largely failed to recognize the role of women of fishing communities and constructive support their work, was also discussed. To quote from the presentation of a participant from India: "The history of the 100-years of fisheries development in the country is also one of 'masculinization' of the sector where, with increasing inflows of technology and outflows of fish, women found themselves at the receiving end, both literally as well as figuratively. A review of the 'development programmes' shows a heavy bias against women—in the plethora of programmes that were spawned as part of the modernisation drive, there is hardly one targeting specifically the women in the sector."

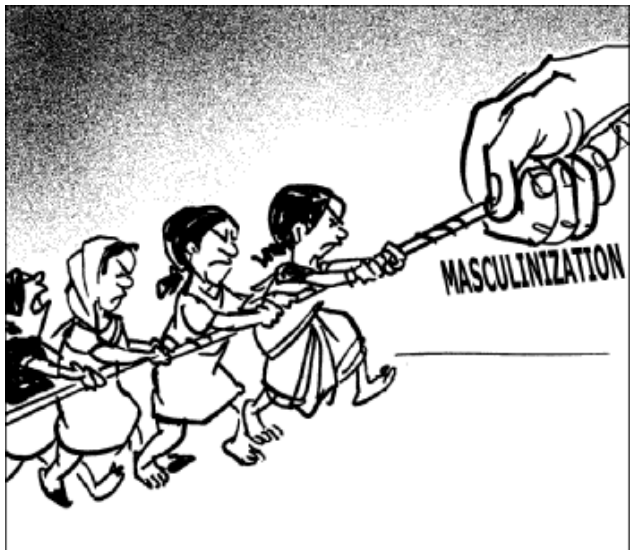
At the meeting, there was discussion on these issues. Nalini Nayak, a resource person from India who has been involved with the fishworker movement at various levels, made a presentation on the women in fisheries. Her presentation critiqued the current model of fisheries development that has marginalized women, destroyed livelihoods and the environment. She highlighted the need for a feminist perspective in fisheries.

A representative from one of the stronger fishworker organization in the region, with a long history of trying to organize women fishworkers, shared the difficulties they still faced in trying to facilitate the genuine representation of women in their organization and in adopting a feminist perspective in their work. Even though these were desirable goals, he said, they were difficult to translate into reality.

Overall, it seemed clear that women of fishing communities within Asia are starting to organize only in a few countries. They have a long way to go yet and special efforts need to be devoted to helping women organize in defense of their livelihoods and communities.

Participants at the meeting called for establishing participatory mechanisms to ensure that all decisions related to the use and management of fisheries resources at the local, national and international level are made in partnership with the fisherfolk.

Above all, participants called for the sustainable and non-destructive management and use of the resources of the lakes, rivers, seas and oceans by all humankind and asserted that the rights of artisanal fishing communities—the guardians of these water bodies—to use, manage and benefit from them, must be protected and accepted.



Finally, participants committed to protecting the rights to life and livelihood of fishing communities and to protecting and conserving aquatic resources, indigenous species and ecosystems, while demonstrating concrete alternatives towards a people-centred development. They also committed to observing the World Food Day on 16 October, the World Fisheries Day on 21 November and the Anti-WTO day on 30 November at the Asian level with a regionally co-ordinated action by fishing communities to demonstrate their solidarity.

At the end of the workshop, participants formed a follow-through committee (FTC) to take forward some of the issues discussed at the workshop. The plans discussed related to participation of fisherfolk in events related to the World Summit for Social Development to be held in September 2002, research and training on fisheries-related issues, exchange programmes between fisherfolk in the Asian countries, World Fisheries Day celebrations, training for lobby work, and participation at the World Food Summit in June 2002. The report of the workshop is under preparation and should be available by May 2002.

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From Asia/ Thailand

Revivers of the Thai Seas

The following 'communique' was issued at a seminar held in November 2000 in Hatyai, Thailand. It is compiled from information provided by the Project on Coastal Zone Management through Community Organizations and Networks in Southern Thailand.

Fisherfolk, academics, students, NGOs and social activists held a seminar on 'Fisherfolk and Coastal Resources Management: Problems and the Strategies for Finding Solutions'. This was held at the Central Library, Prince of Songkhla University, Hatyai, Songkhla Province from 18 to 20 November 2000. The communique issued was as follows:

1. Thai seas are now in crisis with the ecological fallout of overfishing due to the use of destructive fishing gear that destroy aquatic life. The total area under mangrove forests has decreased from 2 million rais to 1 million rais (1 rai equals 2.5 acres) between 1961 to 1999. Songkhla lake has become shallow because of the impact of the 'Pakrava Dam'. Waterways are polluted by waste-water from factories and shrimp farms. These crises must be solved urgently by every sector of society to bring life back to Thai seas.

2. The rehabilitation of Thai seas must be based on a clear vision, together with a clear target for recovering the bounty and biodiversity of marine resources. The administration and management of the coastal resources should be initiated with people's participation in all activities, and by respecting the rights of the community to benefit from the sustainable economic use of the resources of the sea.

3. Fisherfolk have been misunderstood by some segments of Thai society and it is believed that they are fighting for more fish trade and for more profits. In fact, the way of life of fisherfolk is simple. They use boats and small-scale fishing gear that do not destroy the sea and its resources. The main objective of their struggle is to demand the conservation and sustainable use of marine resources.

4. The participants of this seminar agree to continue work towards the following objectives:

- To increase community awareness, to reinforce networks of co-operation for the conservation and revival of Thai seas, to protect the community against destruction of natural resources, and to protect their rights to it;
- To campaign for the amendment of the Fishery Law, so that it is in agreement with the constitution of 1997, creating the space for the empowerment of people in resources management, for respecting local and community rights, and for reinforcing people's participation in making policies and laws related to the sea and to the way of life of local people;
- To prohibit fishing gear that destroy the marine ecological system and natural resources.

5. The recommendations to be submitted to politicians and political parties are as follows:

- Change the aim of marine resources management, from an economic to an ecological orientation, with the greatest emphasis on restoring the marine environment.
- To improve the Fisheries Law of 1947 with people's participation;
- To prohibit destructive fishing gear, such as push nets, trawl nets and the use of electric lights for nocturnal anchovy fishing.

We, the network of people's organizations, strongly state our common will to revive the Thai seas. We will follow-up on our proposals and demands with the government, politicians, political parties and concerned sectors, to maintain the integrity of the marine ecosystem and the food and economic security of Thai people, and to make sure that the Thai seas will be a heritage for future generations.

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