



39 Years in Support of
Small-scale Fishworkers

Yemaya

ICSF'S NEWSLETTER ON GENDER AND FISHERIES

From the Editor

In July 2024, the 36th Committee on Fisheries (COFI) convened at FAO Headquarters in Rome, gathering global delegates to address pressing issues in fisheries and aquaculture. A central theme was advancing gender equality, with particular attention to the essential yet underrecognized contributions of women. Efforts to promote gender equity and equality while preserving the fishing culture, highlight the intersection of empowerment, systemic challenges, and the need for authentic, inclusive narratives that reflect marginalized communities' voices. This complexity is explored in this last edition of Yemaya for 2024.

The challenges are well illustrated by fishing culture as a way of life. For instance, the *haenyeos*, Korea's traditional female divers, exemplify how safeguarding cultural traditions can inadvertently lead to the commodification and romanticization of the means of livelihood, obscuring the nuanced realities of women's lives. This tension underscores how gendered dynamics in fisheries intersect with broader inequities, reflecting the need for systemic approaches.

The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework provides a promising path to advancing gender equality in environmental and ecological contexts. Its Gender Plan of Action, approved during the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (COP15), outlines a framework for equitable financial allocation and monitoring. However, delays in critical discussions on gender have hindered immediate progress, as was demonstrated in the recently concluded COP16.

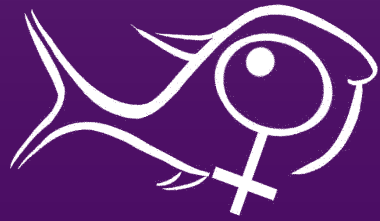
Albeit setbacks, however, gender mainstreaming appears to be gaining momentum in international forums. At COFI 36, a side event spotlighted women's transformative roles in small-scale fisheries, underscoring their significance in building sustainable aquatic food systems. This aligns with FAO policies, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the Blue Transformation Roadmap, all of which emphasize gender equality as foundational for systemic progress.

Similarly, the GAF workshop organized during 8th Global Symposium on Gender in Aquaculture and Fisheries (GAF8), highlighted the persistent marginalization of women in fisheries, bringing attention to their often invisible and undervalued contributions. Recommendations from the seminar included integrating gender perspectives into research and policy, enhancing capacity-building initiatives, and fostering cross-sector collaboration. Improved data collection, dissemination of gender-sensitive knowledge, and inclusive governance practices are critical to achieving these objectives. Establishing training platforms for young researchers and fostering value-chain partnerships further bolsters the potential for systemic change.

Collectively, these initiatives highlight the interconnectedness of cultural preservation, gender equity, and sustainable development. Whether reframing the narrative of the *haenyeos* or advocating systemic reforms, strengthening the gender agenda remains a unifying thread. Advancing this agenda requires a commitment to inclusivity, transparency, and actionable frameworks that prioritize marginalized voices.

Adding to the significance of 2024, the year has seen recognition of the leadership of Meryl Williams in advancing research on gender and aquaculture. Williams' contributions, recognized with the prestigious Margarita Lizárraga Medal at COFI 36, highlight the vital yet frequently undervalued role of women, who make up nearly half of the fisheries workforce. Her work underscores the systemic inequities affecting fisherwomen, which in turn impact food security, financial stability, and community health. It also shows how addressing these inequities demands robust data collection, institutional support, and unwavering advocacy.

In conclusion, Yemaya wishes all its readers a very happy New Year! 🎉



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Deep dive

Recognition and understanding of *haenyeos* role as caretakers of the seascape is needed for multispecies justice

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A deep dive into the seas of Jeju Island, South Korea, brings the role of fisherwomen called '*haenyeos*' in sea harvesting and post-harvest to the shorelines. Fisheries is a trade where men work to catch in larger numbers and women's role has only recently been highlighted in the fish food systems. But a look at the '*haenyeos*', the '*sea women*' in Jeju, with their average age in mid-60s, reveals their role as caretakers of the ecology and diverse species, in what is termed, the seascape.

The government, recognizing the fading culture, has risen to support the social group by building a museum, schools, and having the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) recognize them as an '*Intangible Cultural Heritage*'. However, these interventions do not suffice in maintaining the identity of *haenyeos* and the more-than human relations they share with the seascape.

My research with the women was initiated seeing their rapidly decreasing numbers and simultaneous ageing. The research sought to find the inter-generational environment knowledge and the rooted identity of *haenyeos* using the feminist political ecology lens. Ethnographic tools namely, focus groups, storytelling, oral history, transect walks, participatory observations, and interviews, led to the understanding of reciprocal and care nurtured work of *haenyeos* with the sea and with each other. But how does this relationship evolve over generations and with the current developing identity of *haenyeos* on the island?

Haenyeos have existed in Jeju since the 17th century. Their work expanded to the waters of Russia, Japan, China, and mainland Korea during the hold of imperial Japan, and later the USA in Korea. The women traditionally never used breathing equipment to dive; they began wearing the diving gear only from the 1960s. With men enlisted in military and the massacre of April 3rd, 1948, the Jeju women had no alternative but to dive for harvest and become breadwinners for the families.

Historically the *haenyeos* learned the skills from women in their family or village making it

a part of their life since a young age. The way of living and embodiment of work is continued to this day by the *haenyeos* until they are physically incapable of working. As part of my observation, I went to work with women who were mostly above 70 years old. Part of their daily routine is to head to their village shorelines across the island where the *buldteok* is situated for every *haenyeo* group. At the *buldteok*, a structure made of stone and wood, the *haenyeos* gather, change into their gear, and go to work as an extended part of the sea itself. It is an important site for all types of knowledge, information, and care work to be shared amongst the women. They converse about the sea waves, weather, routine, sales, and personal life. These women gathering in their respective groups have known each other for years, and thus, share core bonds with each other.

While accompanying the women for the day where they caught urchins in the sea to clear the seas of their over-population, observations were made about their emotive, mutually respected, and reciprocal work. The urchins caught in this season were not for personal use or sale, but rather to help other lifeforms thrive in the sea. Their tasks are written in the harvest calendar that the *haenyeos* (re)reproduce annually for their harvest and the health of the seascape that they serve. Their knowledge of the waters they dive in, the seabed they explore, and the species they catch is sharpened by years of work in their seascapes. The *haenyeos* explained, "*the more delicious urchins are found in deeper waters in particular seasons, when the octopus are pregnant, baesam (sea cucumber) are found under rocks as they grow faster with sand they consume underneath*".

Their relationship doesn't just end at harvesting but extends to caring for the multiple species existing in the seascape. Some of the older *haenyeos* shared, "*we spotted dolphins in the sea and would make the sound 'bae allae, bae allae,' that would warn them to go underwater when the trader and war ships were passing*". I participated in the diving classes for the new *haenyeos* at *Hansupul* School where the women threw back whatever they caught during the lesson. Additionally, the older



Haenyeos are getting ready to go into the sea. Historically the *haenyeos* learned the skills from women in their family or village making it a part of their life since a young age

haenyeos taught the students how to poke and kill an urchin, and feed the urchin's 'uni' to a school of fish. They were taught that the catch is caught for sale as well as the fish. These important conditions to work reciprocally and respectfully co-exist occurs naturally in *haenyeos* way of working and living with the multiple species.

The last part in this seascape is the 'commoning' (close relations) that the *haenyeos* share with each other. *Buldteok* is an important site where the younger *haenyeos* care for the older *haenyeos* when preparing for the sea. While the older *haenyeos* lead the way through the rocks skillfully, the young march at the back to keep everyone moving carefully. These relations amongst the women go beyond the waters and emerge on land in the form of the *haenyeos* visiting each other, opening shops together, helping each other farm, and engage in 'pluriactivity'. Pluriactivity, an engagement in alternative forms of earning income has been used by *haenyeos* more recently. The move to these alternatives has been driven by the increasing opportunities in the market, and the younger generation moving to cities with

growing aspirations. The social reproduction of the group is therefore hindered by the development policies in the region. Research into the structures 'developing in the background of the *haenyeos* work' has sought to explain how the social reproduction is politicized and nurturing new identities amongst the younger *haenyeos*.

Over the years Jeju has seen the invasion and imperial hold of Japan, followed by control of the USA, with neoliberal policies now rooted in political and economic decisions. The politicization of the social group was inevitable with the village cooperatives taking shape in the island creating divisions in the waters. The older *haenyeos* narrated, "I worked in Yeonpyeong before marriage, then in the mainland, before moving to Sinsan-ri"; "I went with a group of 10 girls to Taeheung-ri to have better earnings and returned to their village". The creation of boundaries problematizes the *haenyeos* mobility and manifests a material obstacle in their relationship with the seascape. It causes fissures in the flexible work that was embodied by the older *haenyeos* and has culturally shifted meanings for new identity to emerge.

A look at the 'haenyeos', the 'sea women' in Jeju, with their average age in mid-60s, reveals their role as caretakers of the ecology

New identity is further explored through the 'outsider' role inherited by the younger *haenyeos*. The embodiment of becoming a *haenyeo* is hindered by their origin; thus those from outside Jeju, unable to speak 'Jejuan', have limitations to train and be accepted in a village. Women from outside of Jeju join the school to train in controlled sea environments lacking the information about the deeper seabed. They have a short three-month internship before seeking approval from all the *haenyeos* of a village. The *Jejuan*, recognized as a dialect by the state, is different from the language spoken by the people of Jeju. Lack of recognition of *Jejuan* language limits the inter-generational learning and communication.

The focus groups at *Hansupul* school with the younger *haenyeos* revealed why few are accepted in villages. "The village cooperatives get money that gets divided amongst the *haenyeos*. Increase in the number of *haenyeos* would mean more division of money within the group". The emergence of new identity is explained by these material interventions of political and economic processes. The pressure and limitations in time, origin, and language that is spoken by the older *haenyeos* prove to immobilize the younger *haenyeos*.

The new identity forming is attracted mostly by the UNESCO inscribing the *haenyeos* as 'Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity'. Eight out of 10 of the younger *haenyeos* that I worked with were from outside Jeju and had aspired to be a *haenyeo* after the policy shift. Narratives built from such institutional interventions lead to a spectacle view of the *haenyeos* and a legacy to remember rather than to survive. Commodification of the older *haenyeos* then manifests in their livelihoods creating a crisis in social reproduction.

While the narrative shaped by UNESCO seeks to preserve the culture, it has exaggeratingly commodified and romanticized the role and agency of *haenyeos*. Currently there are no set boundaries of the scale in which the cultural project expands. Further, there is lack of agency given to older *haenyeos* to shape their own narrative. At this critical juncture, capital production becomes a priority for not just the macro-institutions at play, but also for the *haenyeos* to sustain themselves. Further, the *haenyeos* want their children and grandchildren growing up in mainland Korea to succeed in mainstream careers. Social reproduction thus is no longer the goal for either party.

This creates a gap in the policy-decisions where the institutions do not realize the importance of *haenyeos* in sustaining the entire ecology of Jeju. For generations these women

have been the first to notice the changes taking place in their ecology that encompasses both their bodies, the sea, and the non-human beings. However, the underplay of gender and power dynamic in the policy-making and implementation is made worse with the immobile and ageing population, and limited ability to transfer their traditional knowledge.

When the current economic policies prioritize the national interests with neighboring Japan in terms of sea use, the most impacted agents are not taken into consideration. In an ecology, not only humans live, but the multiple species interacting in the sea also thrive. The release of waters from sewage treatment plants from Japan into the Jeju waters contributes to the rapid decline of these sea species. The waters are also quoted not to be safe for swimming by the *haenyeos*. However, these concerns are raised by the *haenyeos* in the village in an isolated manner, lacking the possibility of collective mobilization. Here the older *haenyeos* hold the key to inform the younger *haenyeos*, policymakers, and state narratives about the shifting ecology of the seascape. Instilling the rightful decision-making powers to the *haenyeos* can stall the degradation of the seascape and the ongoing multi-species injustice.

Opposing the capitalistic ambitions of the political and economic structures needs to be done by creating the counter-narrative of the resilient, reciprocal, caring role of *haenyeos*. Bridging the gaps of knowledge between the different generations of *haenyeos* calls for the recognition of the current ambitions of the younger *haenyeos*. Collective identity can only be formed by a collective action across generations. A shift in the narrative from the legacy of *haenyeos* to the current need for them to protect the seas is required. Acknowledgement of the failure to recognize the lack of power given to the *haenyeos*, the sea, and the non-human species within state policies is essential for this shift.

My research attempts to shed light on these structural failures that inhibit understanding of the entangled existence of inter-species in the seascape. Recognizing the traditional knowledge that takes form of food, prayers, spirit, relationships, and beyond brings the narrative of the *haenyeos* to the table for discussion. It is a voice that needs to be heard loud in the spaces where policies are reflected and formed, with involvement from academics, researchers, government agents, collaborating with older and, younger *haenyeos*, and independent fishworkers. ❏

To read the full paper, please visit:
<https://thesis.eur.nl/pub/75374>

Empowered Women, Inspiring Stories

A gender mainstreaming side event in the 36th edition of the Committee on Fisheries showcased inspiring success stories of women's empowerment

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July 2024 marked the unfolding of the 36th edition of the Committee on Fisheries (COFI) of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), held in FAO Headquarters in Rome, Italy, from 8-12 July. COFI 36 attracted delegates, observers, and experts from around the world who joined vibrant discussions and collectively paved the way for supporting aquatic food systems globally. Over the week, these representatives gathered to deliberate on critical issues affecting fisheries and aquaculture, focusing on key areas for intervention and support for countries and communities relying on aquatic food systems for their livelihoods.

A significant focus of COFI 36 was the role of gender equality in fisheries and aquaculture, highlighting challenges and opportunities for women who play crucial roles in these sectors. FAO has long emphasized gender equality as integral to sustainable development. Following

the provisions of the FAO Policy on Gender Equality 2020-2030 and in line with the targets of the Blue Transformation Roadmap, the Fisheries and Aquaculture Division is working to promote transformative actions that address the root causes of gender inequality, aligning these efforts with sustainable development goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 5 and 14.

On July 11th, the Sheikh Zayed Centre of the FAO Headquarters was at capacity with people joining the first side event in the history of COFI completely dedicated to gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment. During the discussions, panelists had the opportunity to showcase and discuss first-hand experiences from women engaged in small-scale fisheries (SSF) value chains, such as Korea's Jeju *haenyeo* traditional fisheries, coastal women in Costa Rica's SSF and women in the Gambia's oyster value chain. The event also highlighted experiences from establishing a Gender Desks in

FAO / ALESSANDRA BENEDETTI



The group photo after the closing of the side event at the Sheikh Zayed Centre, FAO. Women and men in fisheries and aquaculture value chains face specific constraints according to their gender identities and the resultant prescribed social norms, especially regarding expectations and opportunities

COFI 36's focus on gender mainstreaming in fisheries and aquaculture was a historic moment, amplifying voices that have long been overlooked

Tanzania to support fisheries and aquaculture and the most recent updates from women's empowerment and gender equality in small-scale fisheries, with a closer look at the EU Mediterranean.

Women and men in fisheries and aquaculture value chains face specific constraints according to their gender identities and the resultant prescribed social norms, especially regarding expectations and opportunities. The experiences of women and men engaging in the aquatic food sector therefore differentiate themselves in terms of perception and narration. This is why a dedicated side event on gender mainstreaming was organized during COFI 36. Women actively driving change through their actions and contributions had the opportunity to come together, claim their space, and raise their voices to discuss key gender issues in their countries and the solutions to address them. The event raised awareness about women's involvement in small-scale fisheries and aquaculture, highlighting how achieving gender equality is essential for reaching the goals of Blue Transformation.

Following the opening remarks of the Deputy Director General of FAO, Maria Helena Semedo, the event began by spotlighting the remote islands of Jeju, in the Republic of Korea, the co-organizing country for the event. Known as "sea women," the *haenyeo* have maintained a unique, traditional fishery on the island of Jeju for centuries. Recently recognized as a Globally Important Agricultural Heritage System (GIAHS), the *haenyeo* are emblematic of sustainable, culturally rich fishing practices. Unlike many fisheries that rely on mechanized tools, the *haenyeo* are skilled free divers, gathering marine resources without the aid of scuba gear. They rely on their breath-holding capacity, physical endurance, and resilience to withstand underwater pressures and cold temperatures. As Jeonghwa Kim explained, these skills are acquired over years of training and passed down through generations, rooted in values of cooperation, mutual support, and harmony with nature. The *haenyeo* practice is sustainable and minimally invasive to marine environments, with harvesting techniques that protect the seabed for future generations. However, the tradition faces a serious threat as nearly 90% of current *haenyeo* divers are aged 60 or older. The declining number of younger divers has prompted the Korean government to support schools and training programs and to provide financial incentives for youth participation in the *haenyeo* way of life, preserving this cultural and environmental legacy.

While social and cultural networks are essential for sharing knowledge and resources within fishery communities, they are often not

enough to protect women from the increased risks they face in value chain activities. Vivian Solis Rivera shared insights on the issues that women in Costa Rica's SSF face, particularly the lack of formal recognition for their labour, which in turn restricts their access to social protection measures. Women, mainly involved in the gathering of mollusks, are invisible and perceived as "poor" despite their traditional knowledge and fundamental contributions to the sector: "*The social protection system usually covers women in the sector, but because they are [perceived as] 'poor' – so there is a change in the narrative that we really need to do*". Their contributions are undervalued, and they receive little support, often balancing the physically demanding, and time-consuming, work of mollusk gathering with heavy household responsibilities. Vivienne emphasized that organizations like ICSF have advocated for these women, helping them gain visibility and recognition. However, she stressed that government intervention is crucial to tailor specific social protection measures that fit women's contributions in the sector and their related needs, based on incremented dialogue and collaboration between different institutions. Indeed, Vivienne explicitly urged governments to stimulate policy dialogue to strengthen the capacity of governments to implement the SSF Guidelines, emphasizing the need for a holistic approach that recognizes small-scale fisheries as a way of life for women. This shift would not only have an impact in terms of social protection, but also in terms of tenure and health rights, and women's economic perspectives.

Khadidja Diallo highlighted the experiences of women in Gambia's oyster sector, where gender-based constraints affect their participation and safety. Many women lack swimming skills, limiting their access to safer harvesting areas and increasing their risk of accidents, including drowning. In response, the FISH4ACP project, in partnership with the Gambia Navy, introduced a swimming program, aimed at equipping sixty women with essential safety skills. This program not only allows them to reach previously inaccessible areas but also creates opportunities for safer and more sustainable income generation. Diallo noted that the program's success hinged on the active involvement of the broader community, including family members and community leaders who helped overcome cultural biases against women learning to swim. This initiative demonstrated that women's empowerment is a community-wide effort, breaking down cultural barriers to provide these women with the skills they need to work more safely and confidently.

Women's empowerment is not only related to the development of skills and education.



The panelists. Gender mainstreaming is a fundamental tool that helps governments and fisheries authorities develop technical competencies, gather data and create coherent strategies for enacting interventions aimed at fostering gender-equitable small-scale fisheries value chains

Rosa Caggiano highlighted the work of the MEDAC (Mediterranean Advisory Council), an EU-created stakeholder platform aimed at establishing a focus group on equal opportunities to promote gender balance in the fisheries sector. This initiative, and a recently-launched national platform for women in fisheries in Spain, seek to strengthen networks and associations, promote women's leadership, and facilitate knowledge sharing. However, Caggiano pointed out that policy and institutional frameworks in the region often do not fully reflect the contributions of women's organizations. To address these gaps, she proposed several areas for improvement, including advocating for equal pay, improving workplace safety, providing tailored capacity development and ensuring social protections for women. Additionally, she emphasized the need for more gender-disaggregated data, allowing policymakers to tailor interventions to the specific challenges women face in the sector.

Gender mainstreaming is a fundamental tool that helps governments and fisheries authorities develop technical competencies, gather data and create coherent strategies for enacting interventions aimed at fostering gender-equitable small-scale fisheries value chains. Lilian J. Ibengwe pointed to the example

of the Gender Desk in Tanzania's Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries, which clearly shows how national institutions can effectively turn commitment into action by investing in gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment. This initiative brings together professionals from diverse backgrounds to address gender-specific challenges in fisheries. Despite facing initial difficulties due to a lack of gender expertise, the Gender Desk has made strides in building capacity and forming partnerships with organizations such as the Tanzania Women Fish Workers Association (TAWFA). Through advocacy and collaboration, the Gender Desk has integrated gender considerations into policy and practice, thereby supporting women's leadership and participation in SSF at both the grassroots and national levels.

As the event drew to a close, Margaret Nakato from Uganda's Katosi Development Trust posed a thought-provoking question to the audience: "*Is it time to move from gender mainstreaming to feminist approaches?*". Nakato highlighted that while policies supporting gender equality exist, they often fail to make a tangible difference in women's everyday work environments. She cited poor conditions in fish processing, including inadequate sanitation and dehydration, as persistent issues. Her question underscored the need for policies that not only exist in theory,

but also directly improve women's health, safety, and dignity in their work.

Vera Agostini, Deputy Director of FAO's Fisheries and Aquaculture Division, concluded the event by reflecting on key takeaways. She highlighted the importance of storytelling and networking in raising awareness of gender equality issues, not only among committed advocates but also across broader audiences, including governments and the private sector. Agostini also emphasized the role of male allies as essential partners in supporting women's empowerment and promoting gender equity within aquatic food systems. Finally, she stressed that systematic funding and support are necessary to move beyond discussions

and towards concrete actions. Only through targeted investments can the sector realize genuine gender equality, enabling intersectional and transformative initiatives that benefit both men and women in aquatic food systems.

In summary, COFI 36's focus on gender mainstreaming in fisheries and aquaculture was a historic moment, amplifying voices that have long been overlooked. The event underscored the critical role of women in SSF, highlighting how their empowerment and inclusion are essential to sustainable and equitable aquatic food systems and fostering further commitment to gender equality, as outlined by FAO's policies, the SDGs and the Blue Transformation Roadmap. 📌



Milestones

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<https://www.ilo.org/publications/flagship-reports/world-social-protection-report-2024-26-universal-social-protection-climate>

A glass half full

As the world heats up, it is evident that social protection must be strengthened to address the adverse impacts of climate change. It is fitting that the World Social Protection Report 2024-26 (WSPR) emphasizes universal social protection for climate action and a just transition. The report offers a global overview of progress made since 2015 in expanding social protection and developing rights-based social protection systems. It urges policymakers, social partners, and other stakeholders to intensify their efforts to close protection gaps and achieve climate goals simultaneously.

Encouragingly, for the first time, over half of the world's population is covered by some form of social protection. A closer look, however, reveals significant disparities. High-income countries are nearing universal coverage, and upper- and lower-middle-income countries are making rapid progress with various schemes. In contrast, low-income countries have seen stagnation in their coverage rates. The situation becomes even more concerning when viewed through a gender lens. For instance, 50.1 percent of women have effective coverage for at least one social protection benefit, compared to 54.6 percent of men. This gap may not seem drastic, but when examining the working-age population legally covered by comprehensive social security systems—calculated across seven of nine branches, including maternity, sickness, unemployment, disability, work injury, survivors', and old-age benefits—the disparity is stark. An estimated 66.2 percent of the global population, or nearly 3.9 billion people, remain unprotected or only partially protected. Among men, coverage stands at 39.3 percent, but for women, it drops significantly to 28.2 percent, a difference of 11.1 percentage points.

The report highlights the urgency of making social protection gender-responsive, noting that women are disproportionately affected by climate impacts. While men often migrate for livelihoods, women, particularly in rural areas, remain behind, working in agriculture or other resource-based livelihoods and caring for families. Programs like India's Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) have been beneficial but frequently face challenges and are often implemented as emergency responses to crises such as COVID-19, cyclones, or floods. Moreover, barriers like limited access to ATMs and banks, along with low financial literacy, often exclude women from these schemes, increasing their vulnerability. The scenario differs in urban areas, underscoring the need for a nuanced analysis of women's social security coverage.

Social protection is both a fundamental human right and a critical strategy for building climate resilience. With an ageing global population, ensuring old-age protection is an increasing challenge. The gender gap in mandatory pension schemes—32.6 percent for women versus 46.3 percent for men—reflects women's lower participation in the labour market and their overrepresentation in self-employment. Gender disparities are most acute in low- and lower-middle-income countries, where only 2.9 percent and 9.6 percent of working-age women, respectively, contribute to a pension scheme. The glass is only half full and the way forward is clear: universal social protection is essential to help people manage life-cycle risks exacerbated by climate change.

The World Social Protection Report 2024-26: Universal social protection for climate action and a just transition is available online: 📌

Gender & Fisheries

A report on the training workshop on the use of gender analysis in aquaculture and fisheries research organised by the Asian Fisheries Social Science Research Network

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The Asian Fisheries Social Science Research Network (AFSSRN) organized a panel session titled “GAF Training-Workshop: Gender Analysis in Aquaculture and Fisheries Social Science Research” during the 8th Global Symposium on Gender in Aquaculture and Fisheries (GAF8), held in a hybrid format on 22 November 2022 in Kerala, India. The session was attended by students and early-career researchers involved in, or planning, social science studies incorporating a gender perspective.

The GAF workshop aimed to immerse participants in the evolving field of gender analysis in aquaculture and fisheries social science research and development. Through this initiative and similar capacity-building programs, AFSSRN aspired to inspire researchers to explore innovative approaches to gender analysis within their academic disciplines and areas of expertise.

Specifically, GAF was designed to enhance participants’ understanding of the importance of integrating and mainstreaming gender in social science research. It also aimed to familiarize them with the process of developing gender-specific research questions and tools, as well as to provide guidance on the appropriate application of various gender analysis methodologies.

A range of country case studies on gender analysis were presented. These included studies on India by Neha Wajahat Qureshi and Nikita Gopal (with co-authors Naila Majid Bhat and Abhilash Thapa); the Philippines by Marieta Ba ez Sumagaysay, (with co-authors Harold M. Monteclaro, Rosario H. Asong, Ida M. Siason, Alice Prieto-Carolino, and Rowena Paz L. Gelvezon); Malaysia by Zumilah Zainalaludin; and Nigeria by Kafayat Adetoun Fakoya together with Ayodele Oloko and Ismot Olabamiji.

In her keynote lecture, Alice Joan Ferrer highlighted two key themes: the significance of social sciences in fisheries research and the necessity of integrating a gender perspective into social analysis in fisheries and aquaculture. She emphasized that, as fisheries is a sector grounded in the exploitation of natural resources, an interdisciplinary—or ideally, transdisciplinary—approach is essential to

addressing its challenges. Ferrer underscored the importance of integrating biological, ecological, and social dimensions into fisheries research and management, advocating for equal emphasis on all disciplines. She identified the pivotal role of social sciences, given that effective fisheries management ultimately seeks to influence human behaviour.

Ferrer also drew attention to the persistent marginalization of women in fisheries and aquaculture, noting that their work remains largely invisible and their contributions unacknowledged. She argued for prioritizing gender equality in policy, research, and practice within the sector. As part of her presentation, she shared a study illustrating how research can more effectively address gender issues in fisheries by employing a comprehensive framework that integrates social well-being, intersectionality, and value chain analysis. She concluded with a set of actionable recommendations for moving forward.

India

Gender inequalities are deeply entrenched in the fisheries and aquaculture sectors in India. Addressing these disparities through gender-focused research can significantly promote equity and empowerment. Studies show that incorporating a gender perspective in fisheries and aquaculture enhances outcomes such as increased productivity, better resource management, and more sustainable development.

In the Indian context, numerous studies have addressed gender issues in these sectors. A paper presented at GAF provided a comprehensive review of research conducted across India, identifying gaps in three broad areas: the application of methodological frameworks, data collection approaches, and sampling designs. While nine major frameworks for gender analysis have been documented, many Indian studies, though theoretically robust, lack an appropriate methodological focus on gender. Most of these studies primarily document women’s roles, their access to and control over resources, and the constraints they face in pre-harvest, post-harvest, and other value chain activities.



Women selling dried fish at the fishing harbour, Andhra Pradesh, India. Women are more active in processing and trading, performing complementary roles across all nodes of the value chain

A scientometric analysis of gender studies in India highlights the persistence of patriarchal norms, portraying fishing as a male-dominated occupation. Despite gender being a social construct, most studies fail to adopt an intersectional approach that considers the interplay of ethnicity, caste, religion, and other factors.

To strengthen gender studies in Indian fisheries and aquaculture, several key steps are essential:

1. Integrating Gender Perspectives in Research and Policy: Research and policy initiatives must explicitly incorporate gender dimensions to address systemic inequities.
2. Training and Capacity Building: Equipping researchers, policymakers, and practitioners with the skills to integrate gender perspectives into their work is vital.
3. Promoting Collaboration: Partnerships among academia, government, civil society, and the private sector are crucial to advancing gender studies in the sector.
4. Enhancing Data Collection and Analysis: Developing robust, gender-specific datasets will provide a clearer understanding of

the sector and support evidence-based policymaking.

5. Establishing Training Platforms for Young Researchers: Orientation and training programs should focus on the use of diverse methodological frameworks and participatory, gender-sensitive approaches to ensure holistic development.

The Philippines

In the Philippines, efforts to integrate and mainstream gender in fisheries research and extension have significant implications, particularly for sustainable fisheries management (SFM) and the ecosystem approach to fisheries management (EAFM). Given the traditionally male-dominated nature of this sector, gender mainstreaming across the tuna fisheries value chain is essential for fostering inclusive and sustainable development, in alignment with SDG 5.

In 2017, the National Network on Women in Fisheries of the Philippines (WINFISH) conducted an USAID-supported gender analysis of the tuna fisheries in General Santos City, the tuna capital of the Philippines. This

study employed a gender-responsive value chain analysis (GRVCA) framework alongside USAID's six gender dimensions: access to assets, beliefs and perceptions, practices and participation, time and space, legal rights and status, and power and decision-making. Both small-scale (municipal) and large-scale (handline and purse seine) value chain participants were included, along with value chain enablers.

The research involved a survey of 219 respondents (109 males and 110 females) representing producers, processors, and traders; 22 key informant interviews (5 males and 17 females); and eight focus group discussions (two all-male, three all-female, and three mixed-gender groups). The findings on existing gender disparities informed the development of strategic interventions aimed at reducing gender biases, enhancing women's engagement, and promoting equality. The study identified several gender-responsive interventions:

1. Capacity-building for both male and female participants and enablers in the value chain.
2. Development and dissemination of gender-sensitive knowledge products.
3. Strengthening partnerships with value chain enablers.
4. Promoting governance practices that are inclusive and gender-responsive.

These interventions have the potential to expand opportunities for women in the fisheries value chain, improve gender dynamics, and address both practical and strategic gender needs.

Malaysia

The study presented aimed to identify the types of vulnerability that predict the likelihood of respondents belonging to low-income households, using sex-disaggregated data. A total of 322 respondents were surveyed across Padang Terap, Kedah; Pekan, Pahang; Kuala Pilah, Negeri Sembilan; and Hulu Perak, Perak. All respondents reported experiencing at least one of six types of vulnerabilities included in the questionnaire.

The demographic profile of the respondents revealed that they were predominantly older adults, with an average age of approximately 66 years for both male and female participants. The analysis utilized a Binary Logistic Regression (BLR) model, which yielded significant findings. The model indicated that handicapped men and single fathers were 3.60 times more likely to fall into the poor income category compared to the average male respondent. For women, single mothers and handicapped individuals were

16.15 times more likely to experience poverty compared to the average female respondent.

In conclusion, the study highlighted that the most vulnerable members of freshwater fisheries communities are older adults. Moreover, women in vulnerable circumstances are disproportionately poorer than their male counterparts, with handicapped men and single mothers identified as the poorest groups within these communities.

Nigeria

In Nigeria, men and women engage in the fishery system in distinct ways shaped by cultural and traditional practices, religion, norms regarding resource access and control, mobility, technology, and the type of products involved. Factors such as access to resources, control, the accrual of benefits, wealth, family heritage, and social capital significantly influence gender participation across the value chain.

Men are predominantly involved in fishing activities and hold a monopoly on fisheries governance. In contrast, women are more active in processing and trading, performing complementary roles across all nodes of the value chain. However, the vast majority of these roles are unpaid. Women have limited influence in fisheries management, except in contexts where they traditionally harvest resources. Despite their critical roles, gender is often misunderstood and reduced to "women's issues," disregarding the broader dynamics of gender identities and power relations. This limited perspective also means that women's potential to participate meaningfully in harvesting and fisheries governance is largely overlooked in empowerment programs.

The 2019 National Policy on Gender in Agriculture seeks to address gender disparities in agriculture, including fisheries and aquaculture. However, the policy's success is threatened by challenges such as inadequate political will, insufficient resources, limited access to information, and a lack of capacity to support effective gender mainstreaming.

GAF featured a workshop that provided participants with hands-on experience in designing survey tools using a gender analysis framework tailored for fisheries and aquaculture. Paul Joseph Ramirez and Neha Qureshi facilitated an open forum, followed by a workshop conducted after the presentation of gender analysis case studies from India, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Nigeria. The panel highlights from GAF were presented by Zarirah Binti Mohamed Zulperi. ❏

As fisheries is a sector grounded in the exploitation of natural resources, an interdisciplinary—or ideally, transdisciplinary—approach is essential to addressing its challenges

Voices of fisheries leadership

This interview with **Josana Pinto da Costa** (josanaserrao@gmail.com), Member of the National Coordination Committee of the Movement of Artisanal Fishermen and Fisherwomen (Movimento de Pescadores e Pescadoras Artesanais -MPP), Óbidos, Pará, Brazil, was conducted by **N.Venugopalan** (icsf@icsf.net), Programme Manager, ICSF, on 18 October, 2024, with help from **Sofia Norton** (sofia.norton@sapo.pt), Translator and Interpreter, Lisbon, Portugal

Q. *It's noteworthy that the Movement of Artisanal Fishermen and Fisherwomen of Brazil (MPP) includes both men and women, unlike many other organizations. The MPP was created to amplify the voices of fishermen and draw attention to their struggles, including water and land contamination and human rights violations against displaced communities. Could you reflect on the origins of the MPP and share your concerns for the coming years?*

A: One of the movement's greatest concerns is grassroots political education. By focusing on this foundation, we aim to strengthen the movement and empower young people, both men and women. This empowerment enables us to continue denouncing the various forms of violence affecting our territories. Our goal is to address issues at the grassroots level, particularly around gender and youth inclusion.

Q. *Here's a question that may interest Yemaya readers. Female fishermen account for approximately 40–45% of all registered fishermen in Brazil. Yet, policies and legislation, such as Law No. 11.959 on fisheries management, seem to exhibit gender bias. These policies fail to recognize the crucial role of fisherwomen and lack adequate measures to support them or secure their labour rights. Could you pinpoint this gap? What are its main causes, and how does the organization plan to address it?*

A: Fisheries have historically been seen as male-dominated work. Even though there is legislation on small-scale fisheries, women are not adequately represented. Rights remain limited, and in some regions—particularly northeastern Brazil—women are the primary producers of fish. They sustain their households, children, and themselves through fishing activities.

Despite the existence of fisheries laws, these laws need to be improved to reflect the realities and contributions of fisherwomen. Public authorities often fail to recognize this. For instance, when a fisherwoman applies for support from government agencies, like social welfare offices, or seeks benefits such as maternity, sickness, or retirement aid, her credibility is often questioned based on appearance. If she appears well-groomed, civil servants may doubt her status as a fisherwoman. This prejudice effectively criminalizes fisherwomen, as if they must conform to a stereotypical image to validate their profession.

We in the fishermen's movement have consistently denounced this form of discrimination and prejudice within public institutions. Addressing this issue remains a critical challenge in Brazil.

With the return of a progressive government, the Ministry of Fisheries has been reinstated. The ministry is now collaborating with others, such as the Ministry of Health and the General Secretariat of the Presidency, to create protection mechanisms for fisherwomen. These include measures to enhance safety and well-being at work. For example, work protection kits are being planned, which include sunscreen to address the intensifying heat caused by climate change.

Fishing, whether in mangroves, coastal areas, or continental waters, comes with shared challenges, and these efforts aim to address them. The artisanal fishermen's movement is closely monitoring these developments and pushing for these plans to move from paper to practice.

Q: *Is the fishing situation in rural areas different from that in urban areas? Are there differences between freshwater fishing and sea fishing?*

A: Challenges exist everywhere—whether in continental areas, rural regions, or urban centres. Fishermen and fisherwomen alike face these difficulties, regardless of where they live or work.

Q: *There's been much news about violence against women and girls in fishing communities in Brazil. The Maria da Penha Law (Law No. 11,340 of August 7, 2006) was established to combat domestic and family violence against women, addressing five types: physical, psychological, moral, sexual, and patriarchal. Despite this law, has violence against women and girls increased? Is the situation worse in coastal communities compared to rural or urban areas? Has the MPP partnered with other organizations to help victims and survivors of violence in fishing communities?*

A: The Maria da Penha Law has been instrumental in combating various forms of violence against women in Brazil. However, violence has continued to escalate, becoming more frequent and extreme. We're not just witnessing psychological, physical, or verbal abuse anymore—there's also been an alarming rise in femicide, the most brutal form of male violence against women.

For example, a fisherwoman from Rio Grande do Sul was recently murdered by her partner, who couldn't accept the end of their relationship. The violence was horrific and deeply saddening.

The MPP, as a member of Via Campesina, collaborates with organizations like Via Campesina Brazil to run the *Enough Violence Against Women* campaign. This initiative raises awareness and denounces such violence. While the Maria da Penha Law helps prosecute offenders, it cannot prevent cases where women lose their lives to partners unwilling to accept a breakup.

Violence isn't confined to urban areas—it also affects rural regions, including rural workers and fisherwomen. Both urban and rural communities grapple with these challenges.

Q: *Did the fisherwoman who was murdered belong to the Movement? Did you know her personally?*

A: I didn't know her personally, but she was a militant in the Rio Grande do Sul movement. Members of our national leadership were familiar with her as she was active in the fishermen and fisherwomen's community in Rio Grande do Sul. She was a dedicated activist in the movement.

Q: *Assessing, reviewing, and synthesizing information on global fisheries is essential for developing better public policies. But can such issues truly be addressed without policies that promote gender equality, recognize women's roles in care and domestic work, and guarantee their participation in decision-making processes with access to social, economic, and natural resources? Are women still invisible in the system due to a lack of disaggregated data, even though some studies show they've been consistently involved in fishing activities? What is the current situation in Brazil, particularly on the ground?*

A: Your question highlights what we already know. Without representation, without gender guarantees, we can't have public policies that benefit everyone. Effective public policy depends on participation and gender inclusion.

Q: *Based on your extensive experience, what recommendations would you make to improve these aspects?*

A: From my experience as an activist, improving access to public policies requires ensuring participation. Gender representation is critical. Men, women, children, youth, and

LGBT+ individuals must all have a seat at the decision-making table.

We cannot continue to be the ones informed *after* decisions are made. We must be active collaborators—those who build, plan, and make decisions together. We, the grassroots, understand the realities of our territories better than anyone.

When public policies are created and implemented with the active participation of grassroots movements and a broad understanding of local realities, they are more equitable and respectful. This participatory approach is the key to meaningful and inclusive change.

Q: *Law No. 11,959 on Sustainable Development Policy for Fisheries and Aquaculture mentions repairing fishing gear and post-harvest activities but doesn't address gender issues. It overlooks the role of women as mothers, workers, and fisherwomen. It fails to respect fisherwomen's identities, ensure their participation in decision-*

making, or provide specialized healthcare programs for fisherwomen and shellfish gatherers. It also doesn't strengthen collectives of women in traditional communities. How does the MPP address these gaps, both within the movement and in discussions with the government?

A: The law is undeniably sexist and exclusionary, failing to represent women

in fisheries. However, there is currently a discussion underway about a new fisheries law in Brazil. Various fishermen's organizations are mobilizing to propose a new model that positions women as central figures—acknowledging them as food producers, fisherwomen, and workers in multiple roles across the fisheries sector. This includes not only shellfish gathering but also fishing, processing, storage, and commercialization.

In our advocacy efforts, we consistently highlight the leadership role of women in artisanal fisheries and emphasize the need to recognize their vital contributions.

Within the MPP, we prioritize gender inclusion. Each state-level coordination team includes a man, a woman, and a young person. This structure extends to our national leadership, ensuring balanced representation. Why? Because we believe that young people, men, and especially women all have critical roles in shaping fisheries policy. Women's



Josana Pinto da Costa

Gender parity must be ensured in all spaces—decision-making, planning, and action. Without gender inclusivity, progress will remain limited



National campaign seminar for fishing territories, Brazil. We continue to fight for the recognition of fishing, Quilombola, and Indigenous territories, as well as settlement areas for family farming

participation is essential for creating fair and inclusive policies.

Q: Looking back from 2009, how would you assess the MPP's journey, from the 2012 National Campaign for Fishing Territory to its mobilizations today?

A: The MPP was founded in 2010 with the goal of defending national fishing territories. In July 2012, we launched the popular initiative bill *PL 131/2020* during a major action in Brasília, where 2,000 fishermen gathered to kick off the national campaign to protect traditional fishing grounds. Today, this bill is under discussion in Congress.

We hope it will be approved, as it would provide legal recognition and security for traditional fishing territories. This bill is a vital tool in our fight against large-scale industrial projects, such as dams, mining, and agro-hydro-mining ventures, which threaten these areas.

Currently, MPP articulation is visible in 18 states across Brazil, though the level of organization varies. Our focus remains on strengthening the movement and securing legal protections for these territories.

Q: The SSF Guidelines, which you contributed to before 2014, address various fronts—including hydroelectric projects in Minas Gerais that have harmed rivers, fish habitats, and caused environmental disasters. These Guidelines also propose structuring a comprehensive fisheries policy that accounts for the diversity and socio-environmental roles of fishing communities. How has the National Campaign for the Regularization of Traditional Fishing Territories progressed?

A: The Small-Scale Fisheries (SSF) Guidelines are a crucial tool for defending fishing territories. However, their impact is limited because many fishermen, especially in rural areas, are unaware of their existence. Initially, the Guidelines were only available in English or Spanish, making them inaccessible to most Brazilian communities. It was only after the MPP pushed for a Portuguese translation that they became somewhat more accessible.

Even now, these materials are overly technical and lack simple, illustrated language that fishermen and fisherwomen can easily understand. This is a major barrier to their implementation.

The MPP has raised these concerns with the FAO in various meetings, urging improvements to make the Guidelines more practical and accessible. For the SSF Guidelines to have real impact, they need to be linked to Brazil's Convention 169 and Decree 6040. These frameworks guarantee the right of traditional communities to free, prior, and informed consultation before any projects are implemented in their territories.

Currently, companies often manipulate consultations by speaking to only one person in a community, sometimes someone they've co-opted. This practice ignores the collective voice and leads to territories being sold or exploited without true community consent.

Q: *Since 2022, has the situation on the ground changed? Has the government made progress in recognizing, demarcating, and providing titles for fishing territories to guarantee the security and rights of fishing communities?*

A: Unfortunately, not much has changed. The popular initiative bill is still under discussion in Congress, and even under President Lula's progressive government, there has been little progress in demarcating territories.

We continue to fight for the recognition of fishing, Quilombola, and Indigenous territories, as well as settlement areas for family farming. However, the lack of action has left many communities vulnerable.

In particular, small-scale fishing territories are increasingly being exploited for shrimp farming and tilapia aquaculture. These industries have caused widespread environmental damage and undermined artisanal fishing practices. This exploitation violates the principles of artisanal fisheries and threatens the livelihoods of traditional fishing communities.

Q: *What mechanisms, forums, and channels does the movement use to maintain dialogue with social movements and address their demands,*



PROFILE

Fishing against odds

Fisherwomen of Lake Kivu fight against social stigma and discrimination with Mama Cynthia at the helm

By **Alessandro Musetta** (alliancevie.rdc@gmail.com), staff member, Alliance pour la Vie and **Rosine Nsimire Hamuli** (alliancevie.rdc@gmail.com), Executive Director, Alliance pour la Vie, North and South Kivu Provinces of the DR Congo



Mama Cynthia

Mama Cynthia serves as the resilient leader of the fisherwomen at Bagira landing site, located on the eastern shores of Lake Kivu in South Kivu Province, DR Congo. For 25 years, she has worked as a fisher, braving the waters in a journey that began when her late husband, a fisherman who tragically died in an accident, taught her the ancestral fishing traditions of the Mashi

but fraught with obstacles. Equipment and pirogues must be rented per trip, and when financial resources are scarce, a portion of their catch is often exchanged to secure these vital tools. The continuity of Mama Cynthia's fishing activities relies on her ability to afford or acquire nets and boats, an economic hurdle she confronts regularly.

The challenges extend beyond financial constraints. The region is plagued by severe insecurity, exacerbating the difficulties fisherwomen face. Gender-based violence, theft, and extrajudicial seizures of nets and equipment are common, both at landing sites and in fish markets. Additionally, fisherwomen often struggle to comply with stringent legal regulations regarding their gear, which can result in further penalties.

Despite these adversities, Mama Cynthia stands out as a figure of extraordinary courage. She has become a mentor, training other women at the landing site and encouraging them to take up fishing as a means to support their families. Alongside the Alliance pour la Vie, a nonprofit organization, she advocates for safer landing sites across the southern Lake Kivu basin, championing efforts to eliminate physical, economic, and psychological violence against women in the region.

Through her persistence and leadership, Mama Cynthia continues to inspire her community, proving that strength and resilience can challenge even the most deeply rooted barriers. ❏

people. This heritage now sustains her and her fourteen children, who depend entirely on her fishing endeavours for their livelihood.

However, Mama Cynthia faces immense challenges in her profession. In a society where fishing is traditionally deemed unsuitable for women, she defies customs that claim fish avoid the bait of menstruating women. These beliefs, combined with the male-dominated fishing communities and maritime authorities, subject her to social stigma and frequent harassment as she navigates the southern Lake Kivu basin.

Undeterred, Mama Cynthia takes to the lake at dawn, casting her nets alongside other fisherwomen affiliated with the Association for the Development of Illiterate Fishers of South Kivu. The group's work is essential

ensuring the rights and needs of artisanal fishermen and fisherwomen are heard? Are you able to participate in the Permanent Fisheries Management Committees (CPG), and what are the criteria for participation?

A: We are represented in international spaces such as *Via Campesina* and the *World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP)*, where we bring forward our demands. We have also engaged with the FAO on numerous occasions. In Brazil, we are part of the National Fisheries Council (CONAP), the National Artisanal Fisheries Forum, and the Standing Committee for Small-Scale Fisheries Management (CPG).

However, we face challenges. During the Bolsonaro administration, a decree was issued that weakened civil society's participation in these forums. This decree continues to limit grassroots movements' access to these spaces, prioritizing academia and industrial fisheries, which have financial resources to cover travel and participation costs. Grassroots organizations like ours lack the means to send representatives consistently, creating a barrier to effective participation.

Despite this, we are active in other spaces like the National Fisheries Council and the new social participation forums established by President Lula's government. These platforms allow us to voice our demands and advocate for the needs of artisanal fishermen and fisherwomen.

Q: *What support do fishermen and fisherwomen receive to address challenges such as drought, climate change, and declining fish stocks?*

A: Climate change has severely impacted Brazil, particularly in the southern region, which experiences flooding, and the northern region, which suffers from droughts.

In the south, government assistance has been minimal, leaving many fishing families in dire situations. In the north, several Amazonian municipalities declared a state of public calamity last year. Artisanal fishermen who had an active registration (RGP) and received unemployment benefits in the prior year were granted two minimum wages in a single payment.

This year, with worsening conditions and more states declaring emergencies, the government has issued a decree allowing affected fishermen in the north to receive two payments, each equivalent to one minimum wage.

However, accessing essential resources like food and water remains a significant challenge, especially in isolated communities. Many families lack even basic necessities like drinking water, and some cannot even access water for

bathing. In my community, the tributary that once sustained us has dried up completely. We are directly experiencing the devastating effects of climate change.

Q: *Brazil has a constitutional obligation to preserve cultural heritage and owes a debt to its fishing communities. Articles 215 and 216 of the Constitution guarantee cultural rights and emphasize the protection of traditional practices, beliefs, and livelihoods. What progress have fishworkers' organizations made in this regard?*

A: While the Constitution explicitly guarantees these rights, they are rarely upheld in practice. This gap drives our fight to ensure the provisions on paper are realized in our communities. The *Popular Initiative Bill 131/2020* is a key part of this effort, as it aims to secure fishing territories and protect the cultural and material heritage of artisanal fishing communities.

Culture, tradition, beliefs, and ways of life are invaluable. We want to preserve the religiosity, customs, and freedoms of traditional peoples, ensuring their territories are legally recognized and respected. This includes Indigenous territories, Afro-descendant communities, and traditional fishing grounds.

Our goal is for these laws to move beyond bureaucratic delays and be implemented effectively. Communities should not be displaced—whether by water scarcity, flooding, or the encroachment of industrial ventures like agro-hydro-mineral businesses. People must have the freedom to remain in their territories, living according to their culture and choices.

We have also fought for *TAUs* (Terms of Authorization for Use of Territories) through the SPU (Brazilian Heritage Management Secretariat). Through lobbying efforts in Brasília, we've made progress in securing these authorizations, which allow families to stay on their lands while working toward full territorial regularization.

Q: *Congratulations on your leadership within the MPP. Would you like to leave a message for those working on gender and fisheries issues worldwide?*

A: My message to small-scale fishing communities worldwide is this: we cannot fight alone. Gender parity must be ensured in all spaces—decision-making, planning, and action. Without gender inclusivity, progress will remain limited.

Our struggles are strengthened by unity and collective vision. Together, we must fight for the common good, always keeping in mind the well-being of all. Whether on rivers or at sea, we will stand firm in our fight for justice and equity. 🌊

Gender in biodiversity governance

A compilation by Women4Biodiversity and SwedBio highlights the rising role of gender equality in biodiversity, culminating in the 2022 Kunming–Montreal Framework

By **Vishakha Gupta**
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The Conference of the Parties (COP) is the governing body of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). It assesses and advances implementation of the CBD through the decisions it takes at its periodic meetings. To date the Conference of the Parties has held 14 ordinary meetings, and one extraordinary meeting since its first meeting in 1994. At every single one of those meetings women and gender has been an important theme of discussion.

Women4Biodiversity, a prominent global advocacy organization, has taken the initiative to compile a comprehensive resource which highlights the evolution through these COPs of the decisions and efforts that have been made to mainstream gender equality in biodiversity conservation efforts. This compilation not only highlights the CBD's recognition of the pivotal role of gender in biodiversity governance but also serves as a comprehensive resource for policymakers, practitioners, and stakeholders seeking to integrate gender perspectives into their policies, planning and initiatives. By consolidating decisions that promote women's rights, empowering women as key actors in conservation, and addressing gender disparities in biodiversity management, this compilation underscores the interconnectedness of gender equality and environmental sustainability.

Reading through the compilation, it becomes evident how gender has increasingly become a central and intrinsic part of the discussions and decisions at the COPs. From simply encouraging Parties to promote the mobilisation of women in biodiversity conservation in the agricultural sector in 1996, to the adoption of the Kunming – Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KM-GBF) and the Post 2020- Gender Plan of Action (GPA) in the 2022 meeting, the actions show the commitment to mainstream gender equality throughout biodiversity policies and actions, ensuring that women's voices are heard and their contributions valued in the pursuit of biodiversity conservation and sustainable development goals.

Article 8 (j) of the COP proceedings underscores the importance of women and especially indigenous women in the conservation of biodiversity. It states that all Parties, subject to national legislation - respect, preserve and maintain knowledge, innovations and

practices of indigenous and local communities, embodying traditional lifestyles relevant for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity; promote their wider application with the approval and involvement of the holders of such knowledge; and encourage the equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the utilization of such knowledge innovations and practices. These decisions require capacity building, education and training for women and encourage participatory methods of consultation and involvement of women from traditional communities in decision making processes for the utilisation of traditional knowledge.

The 2002 COP decisions included the introduction of the Global Strategy for Plant Conservation, sustainable use, access and benefit sharing of genetic resources and the recognition that “Unless [the world's poor] are fully involved in decision-making and benefit-sharing, it is unlikely that long-term solutions to the problem of biodiversity loss can be found. In developing mechanisms to ensure such involvement, it is vital that issues of gender and social structure are properly addressed”.

The 2004 COP introduced the ecosystem approach. It emphasises the importance of women in decision making processes and supports the decentralisation of power and management to the lowest appropriate group, keeping in mind women and indigenous communities. The next few meetings focussed on the implementation of the decisions already made and the assessment of the progress made on ground.

Following six years of intense negotiations, the Nagoya Protocols on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable sharing of Benefits Arising from the Utilisation of Genetic Resources of the CBD, was adopted in 2010. This protocol was the first international instrument of particular relevance to indigenous and local communities, since the adoption of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007); it represented a significant step in mainstreaming indigenous rights as a cross-cutting issue in international negotiations.

The 2010 COP also formulated the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020, the Aichi Biodiversity Targets “Living in harmony with nature” and Tkarihwaí:ri code of ethical

Women4Biodiversity

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Gender Equality and the Convention on Biological Diversity

A COMPILATION OF DECISION TEXT
COP 1 - COP 15

This compilation
underscores the
interconnectedness
of gender equality
and environmental
sustainability



The Gender Equality and the Convention on Biological Diversity: A Compilation of Decision Texts from COP1 to COP15 by Women4Biodiversity and SwedBio, 2024

Source: <https://icsf.net/resources/gender-equality-and-the-convention-on-biological-diversity-a-compilation-of-decision-texts-from-cop1-to-cop15-by-women4biodiversity-and-swedbio-2024/>

conduct to ensure respect for cultural and intellectual heritage of indigenous and local communities.

In 2014, the theme of biodiversity for poverty eradication and sustainable development was further expounded upon. The integration of biodiversity conservation and poverty eradication sought to take into account the differences in national circumstances, goals and priorities, as well as cross cutting issues related

to gender. It focussed on capacity building, creating enabling environments and generating funding support.

Crafting appropriate policy frameworks for the mainstreaming of gender within the implementation of the convention was a significant topic of discussion included in the 2015-2020 Gender Plan of Action. The objectives were to mainstream gender in the implementation of the convention, to

Gender Equality in Biodiversity: Limited Progress at COP16

By Vivienne Solis, CoopeSOLIDAR R.L. Costa Rica

The parties of the CBD convened for COP16 in Cali, Colombia. A key topic of discussion was the implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, particularly Target 23, which includes one of the most robust and inclusive commitments approved by the Convention parties:

“Ensure gender equality in the implementation of the framework through a gender-responsive approach where all women and girls have equal opportunity and capacity to contribute to the three objectives of the Convention, including by recognizing their equal rights and access to land and natural resources and their full, equitable, meaningful, and informed participation and leadership at all levels of action, engagement, policy, and decision-making related to biodiversity.”

Implementing this target implies not only compliance with the Gender Plan of Action approved during COP15 but also the development of clear indicators for effectively monitoring its progress and ensuring the equitable allocation of financial resources for this purpose. However, both issues were postponed for future discussions among the parties, creating a sense of progress but limited commitment until a follow-up meeting is held.

promote gender equality in achieving objectives and to demonstrate the benefits of gender mainstreaming for biodiversity conservation and development. The discussions listed out a number of possible actions that Parties could take, including mainstreaming gender into national biodiversity strategies and action plans, while identifying policy obstacles to gender mainstreaming. The decisions taken included a framework for actions by the Secretariat in order to make these possibilities a reality.

The 2016 COP discussed biodiversity and climate change; ecosystem restoration in the short term, biodiversity and human health; marine and coastal biodiversity: ecologically or biologically significant marine areas and technical and scientific cooperation as well as technology transfers. In all these facets, the importance of mainstreaming gender and participation of indigenous communities was stressed upon.

The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) is a landmark agreement that was adopted in December 2022 to address biodiversity loss. The GBF aims to halt and reverse biodiversity loss by 2030 and achieve the Convention’s vision of living in harmony with nature by 2050. It consists of 23 action-oriented targets for 2030 and 4 goals for 2050. The goals are to reduce the extinction risk of threatened species and increase the abundance of native species; ensure that nature’s contributions to people are maintained and enhanced; share the benefits of genetic resources, digital sequence information, and traditional knowledge with local communities and Indigenous people; and to ensure that all parties have the means to implement the GBF, including financial resources, capacity building, and access to technology. The decisions also included a

monitoring framework for the GBF, as well as an agreement on digital sequence information on genetic resources.

Several of the 23 action-oriented targets of GBF are focussed on gender. These include target 22 to ensure the full, equitable, inclusive, effective and gender-responsive representation and participation in decision-making, and access to justice and information related to biodiversity by indigenous peoples and local communities; and target 23 to ensure Gender Equality and a Gender-Responsive Approach for Biodiversity Action. At the same time, however, there have been few gains made in terms of advancing gender concerns using the GBF Framework. [See box “Gender Equality in Biodiversity: Limited Progress at COP16”.]

2022 also saw the introduction of the Post 2020 – Gender Plan of Action (GPA) - a strategy document that aims to mainstream gender equality and support the implementation of the global biodiversity framework. The GPA is intended to be implemented in a gender-responsive way. Its goals include gender equality: ensuring that women and girls rights are upheld in decision-making and implementation of the GBF; synergy: maximizing synergies between gender equality and environmental concerns; coordination: ensuring coherence and coordination with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and monitoring: serving as a mechanism for monitoring and reporting on progress.

This comprehensive compilation of CBD decisions on gender through COP1 to COP15 by Women4Biodiversity is a critical resource for mainstreaming gender in biodiversity conservation. **■**

Championing Gender in Fisheries

In honour of Meryl Williams who received the Margarita Lizárraga Medal, at the 36th Session of the Committee on Fisheries (COFI)

By **Nikita Gopal** (nikiajith@gmail.com), Principal Scientist & Head, Extension, Information & Statistics Division, ICAR-CIFT, Kochi, India and Chair, Gender in Aquaculture & Fisheries Section of the Asian Fisheries Society

The latest addition to the long list of awards received by Meryl J. Williams, is the Margarita Lizárraga Medal, presented during the opening of the 36th Session of the Committee on Fisheries (COFI) at the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) headquarters. In the award announcement, the Committee noted:

“Meryl is a tireless, substantive, and globally well-respected advocate for matters of gender, globalization, and development in the fisheries and aquaculture arena, sharing science-based knowledge and experiences on the ground, in academic dialogues, and in local and global fora. Her inspirational leadership and mentorship—both first-hand and through the various platforms she has created—are heralding a new generation of leaders in gender in fisheries and aquaculture firmly on the global fisheries, aquaculture, and development agenda.”

Awards often reinforce what is already known about a person. Meryl Williams has dedicated over 45 years to Australian and international fisheries, aquaculture, aquatic resource conservation, and agricultural research and development. She began her career as a secondary school teacher in Queensland in 1973 after earning a Diploma in Education. She later returned to university, earning a First-Class Honours degree in Science and a PhD in Zoology. Her entry into fisheries began as a Fisheries Biometrician with the Queensland Fisheries Service (1977–1981) and as a Fisheries Statistician for the Tuna and Billfish Assessment Program at the South Pacific Commission in Noumea, New Caledonia (1981–1984).

She has held senior positions including Director of the Fisheries Resources Branch at the Bureau of Rural Resources, Department of Primary Industries and Energy, Canberra, Australia (1986–1990), Executive Director of the Bureau (1990–1993), and Director of the Australian Institute of Marine Science, Townsville, Australia (1993–1994).

Meryl became Director General of WorldFish in 1994, then known as the International Centre for Living Aquatic Resources Management (ICLARM), headquartered in Manila, Philippines. She oversaw its relocation to a new campus in Penang, Malaysia, in 2000.

During a visit to WorldFish in July 2024, she vividly recounted how each building had been constructed—20 years after she left the organization. As Director General (1994–2004), she focused WorldFish’s efforts on eradicating poverty, improving nutrition, and reducing environmental pressures. Her leadership supported transformative work by her deputy, Modadugu Vijay Gupta, whose innovations in low-cost freshwater fish farming earned him the World Food Prize in 2005.

Meryl credits her deep interest in women and gender in fisheries to initiatives by M.V. Gupta and the late Prof. M.C. Nandeesh. Prof.

Nandeesh organized the first Women in Fisheries Workshop in India during the 2nd Indian Fisheries Forum in 1990. Gender-focused events like *Women in Cambodian Fisheries* in 1994 and the Women in Fisheries photo competition at the 4th Asian Fisheries Forum (AFF) followed. Later, the 6th AFF in Taiwan and the 7th AFF in Penang hosted global symposia on women in fisheries. WorldFish supported publications from these events.

In 2008, on the sidelines of the 8th Asian Fisheries and Aquaculture Forum (AFAF)

in Kochi, India, Meryl organized an informal networking meeting to discuss advancing gender in aquaculture and fisheries. Despite a modest turnout, the discussions were profound, highlighting challenges and charting a path forward. A small team under her leadership continued to organise the GAF Global Conferences (e.g., GAF3 in Shanghai, GAF4 in Korea, GAF5 in India, GAF6 in Thailand) during the AFAFs, where the network meetings also continued, distilling the need for a Section. Meryl’s sustained efforts in the AFS Council culminated in the formation of the Gender in Aquaculture & Fisheries Section (GAFS) of the Asian Fisheries Society, which was officially inaugurated in 2017. Meryl served as its founding Chair (2017–2022).

GAFS has since developed initiatives, including the *GAFS Statement on Gender Equality - From Catch to Consumer: Why Gender Equality Matters in Aquaculture and Fisheries*. This statement underscores the significance of gender equality for fisheries and aquaculture, where women comprise about half



Meryl J. Williams

Meryl continues to lead research on gender and aquaculture, focusing on equitable fish production systems for food security

the workforce. It also highlights the systemic injustices faced by fisherwomen and the need for data and advocacy to address these inequalities. Gender inequality negatively impacts food and financial security, family nutrition, and community stability.

Meryl continues to lead research on gender and aquaculture, focusing on equitable fish production for food security. She serves as Vice Chair of the Scientific Advisory Committee of the International Seafood Sustainability

Foundation and a board member of Aquaculture without Frontiers (Australia).

On a personal note, my acquaintance with her began at the 2008 Kochi gender networks meeting, which sparked an enduring friendship. She is a mentor, philosopher, and guide to many, touching our lives uniquely. She inspires and encourages people to excel, and generously shares valuable insights from her vast knowledge and experience. Meryl is a true champion for ALL WOMEN in fisheries. **M**

SPC Bulletin: Empowering women in fisheries

The Pacific Community's (SPC) Women in Fisheries Information Bulletin offers a wealth of resources for anyone supporting small-scale fisheries globally, with a particular focus on the Pacific and Global South. The bulletin, now celebrating its 40th edition with its September issue, is accessible through the SPC website under the "Resources" section of the "Newsletter and Information Bulletins" archive. The bulletin is published biannually in March and September, free to access, and readers can subscribe for updates to ensure they receive each new edition promptly.

Produced by SPC's Fisheries, Aquaculture, and Marine Ecosystems Division, the bulletin is made possible through support from the Australian Government, the EU, and the New Zealand Aid Programme. Edited by Sangeeta Mangubhai, each issue begins with an editor's note summarizing the articles and contributors featured in that edition. The bulletin spans a broad array of thematic areas related to women and gender in fisheries. Topics include women's roles across fisheries; livelihood enhancements; training and capacity building; traditional knowledge; co-management and governance of small-scale fisheries (SSF); women's collectivization efforts; gender mainstreaming; gender-based violence in the sector; conservation and climate resilience; food security; and governmental initiatives aimed at supporting women in fisheries.

Recent editions have spotlighted the diverse roles women play in various fisheries and the challenges they face, along with innovative ways they are overcoming these hurdles. For instance, articles highlight Fiji's octopus harvesters and moci (small brackish shrimp) fishers learning improved processing techniques, as well as sea urchin harvesters in Navakavu benefiting from the provision of ice boxes to enhance their catch's quality. Collectivization also features prominently, with insights into the Fiji National Women in Fisheries Forum and women's involvement in the Lakeba Fishers Cooperative.

Projects supporting women's livelihoods in fisheries are frequently explored, with developmental organizations and government initiatives playing critical roles. Highlights include strengthening women's roles in Fiji's fisheries value chains, improving seafood safety in Kiriritimati, and social enhancements in Fiji's tuna longline industry. A noteworthy initiative by the Fiji Women in Fisheries Forum involved organizing a women fishers' market day in October 2022, where fishers displayed their catch and connected with markets.

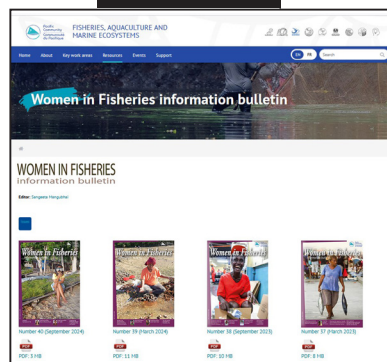
Traditional knowledge, often safeguarded by women, is another recurring theme. These articles emphasize how integrating women's expertise into co-management and governance of SSF enhances sustainability, despite the constraints of restrictive gender norms. Examples include Fiji, Timor-Leste, Kiribati, the Lau Islands, and Tabonibara.

Gender mainstreaming efforts are also well-documented, covering the application of tools like the Social Responsibility Assessment to Fiji's domestic longline fishery, equity initiatives in SSF management across the Pacific Islands, and strategies to advance gender equality through partnerships with developmental organizations. Other contributions explore gender-based violence, such as the exploitation of men on foreign trawlers and women's forced participation in exploitative fish-for-sex transactions in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Additionally, the bulletin covers conservation efforts, climate resilience, and the critical role of SSF in ensuring food and nutrition security. Articles highlight how fisher communities are adapting to climate challenges and preserving marine habitats.

Overall, the SPC Women in Fisheries Information Bulletin is an invaluable resource. Each edition offers a compelling mix of articles, profiles of extraordinary women in fisheries, and insightful discussions on advancing gender equity and sustainability in this vital sector. **M**

What's New, Webby?



By **Vishakha Gupta**
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Women in Fisheries
information bulletin
[https://fame.spc.int/
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women-in-fisheries](https://fame.spc.int/publications/bulletins/women-in-fisheries)

FILM

Against the Tide: One Tale, Two Versions

Direction: Sarvnik Kaur | Duration: 97 mins | Language: English subtitles

By **Indu MG**
(indumg@yahoo.com), Independent Researcher based in Mumbai, India

The documentary *Against the Tide* explores the intertwined lives of two fishermen, illustrating how climate change and globalized corporate greed impact their contrasting fishing practices. The film follows Rakesh and Ganesh, two friends from

Mumbai's traditional Koli fishing community, one of the city's few original inhabitants.

Rakesh adheres to ancestral, sustainable fishing practices but struggles to provide a decent life for his family. In contrast, Ganesh thrives by employing modern deep-sea fishing techniques, using large vessels and employing a sizable crew. Despite Ganesh's encouragement for Rakesh to transition from shallow-water subsistence fishing to deep-sea operations, Rakesh remains steadfast in his traditional approach.

The camera captures candid moments between the friends, revealing the economic and social divide between them. Despite their differing lifestyles and methods, both men face the harsh realities of dwindling fish stocks, driven by climate change and human exploitation. As the film progresses, it becomes clear that both are at the mercy of the same depleted sea. Rakesh is eventually forced to sell his boat, while Ganesh grapples with mounting debts to sustain his increasingly unviable operations.

Although Rakesh's mother provides some perspective, the film lacks vocal contributions from other women, which could have added depth to its themes. Women are primarily portrayed as custodians of traditions, preserving rituals, songs, dances, and social bonds. Additionally, at times, the personal narratives and interpersonal drama between the two friends overshadow the core environmental and economic issues the documentary seeks to address.

Against the Tide is a highly engaging film, marked by commendable direction, cinematography, and editing. It delivers powerful messages about overfishing, climate change, and the threats to sustainable traditional occupations in the face of globalized economic activities across the oceans. 🌊



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Writers and potential contributors to YEMAYA, please note that write-ups should be brief, about 2000 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.