Yemaya

No. 1 ICSF's Newsletter on Gender and Fisheries April 1999

From the Editor

Greetings! We are happy to bring to you the first issue of YEMAYA, ICSF's newsletter on gender and fisheries. The idea for such a newsletter was first proposed at ICSF's General Body meeting in Trivandrum in February 1998. It was suggested that the newsletter carry news and views of organisations and individuals working on gender issues in fisheries in different parts of the world. Besides keeping people aware of what is happening, it should help sustain the links between those working on similar issues, and help them network. At present we hope to publish two issues each year.

This first issue brings to you the voices of women and men of fishing communities from different countries, representing their diverse realities. The work they do within the fisheries differs, as do the issues they confront and the level to which they have organized to deal with these. What they do have in common, though, is the will to defend and sustain their communities, the artisanal fisheries sector and their livelihoods.

This newsletter should help to build up a meaningful forum for sharing of experiences, views and strategies. At a time when women and men of artisanal fishing communities in several parts of the world are organising to defend their interests, we believe that such an effort is particularly vital.

Inside Pages

Why 'Yemaya'?

Afro-Brazilian in origin, 'Yemaya' is the shortened name for Yey Omo Eja, meaning "Mother Whose Children are the Fish", a mother whose children are so numerous that they are uncountable.

In the Umbanda, Candomble and Yoruba religions of Brazil and Cuba, Yemaya is not only the mother of the waters, she is the mother of all the *orixa*s (gods and goddesses). Often represented as a mermaid of white and blue hues and sporting long black hair, Yemaya, also called Yemalla, Yemanya, Iemanja, Iamanya, Imanje and La Balianne, represents fertility, and embodies all the characteristics of motherhood, caring and love.

Though Yemaya essentially epitomizes the maternal force of life and creation, she has many aspects, one of which is Yemaya Okute, a fierce warrior. In Brazil, on New Year's Eve, her devotees set up elaborate beachfront altars, offering food, flowers and candles to be washed away by Yemaya with the morning tides.

For us, pondering over issues of gender and fisheries, Yemaya seems to epitomize our concerns.

FROM AFRICA/Sénégal

Women as leaders

by Aliou Sall of CREDETIP, Sénégal

The CNPS (Collectif National des Pêcheurs Artisanaux du Sénégal), establsihed in 1987, is a movement born of the artisanal fishing communities in Sénégal. It comprises fishermen and women fishworkers—artisanal fish processors and fishmongers. Through an internal struggle in CNPS, women have today come to occupy roles and responsibilities they did not have at the beginning of the movement. The process of their empowerment and the strategies they used need to be acknowledged for two main reasons:

First, it highlights the fact that the women's representation in CNPS did not come from a strategy aimed at opportunistically 'feminising' the decision-making process. In many cases, in order to get funds more easily from their Northern partners, movements, organizations and, sometimes, governments, make a show of publicly 'involving' women but without really wanting them to participate in the decision-making process.

Secondly, in this way, women's actions can be considered as 'a movement inside a movement'. Since the beginning, CNPS has been internally revolutionised by women—a women's movement within a social movement of the fisheries sector. While at one level, women have struggled inside the movement to get access to decision-making processes, at another level, they have dynamised the movement and have facilitated a thematic evolution of CNPS, raising vital issues to be integrated into the national agenda of the movement.

The movement has become more political as a result of women's demands. CNPS has evolved thematically and now takes a wider view to include issues like the resource crisis, fisheries access agreements, the problems of tourism and the land law regime.

In an African context, still dominated by the idea of 'projects' and oriented towards short-term demands, this is an innovative approach. Unlike co-operatives and more recently GIEs (Economic Interests Groups) that have come up in the Senegalese fishery sector, CNPS has a longer-term political perspective, thanks to the women's movement. Since 1992, women have taken an active part in the debate on fisheries access agreements. This is a historical event in the sense that women, whose work is traditionally confined to tasks in the post-harvest fisheries sector, were not seen to have an interest in the debate on fisheries resources. For the Senegalese government and for a lot of Senegalese, this debate was seen to be a debate for intellectuals or ecologists only. The CNPS was often accused of being manipulated by environmental organizations like Greenpeace. This was a strategy used by the government to make CNPS lose its credibility. But it was also a way for public authorities to deny the existence of a resource problem.

Women have helped focus attention on fisheries access agreements. It was the CNPS' women's cell's meeting in Hann in 1992 that first proposed the idea of boycotting the funds available as financial compensation from fisheries access agreements between Senegal and third countries. The last agreement signed between Sénégal and the European Union has been an opportunity for women to demonstrate their militancy and their strong will to fight against the access of foreign fleets to Senagalese resources. Their protest against the content of this agreement reinforced CNPS' credibility and also widened the social visibility of CNPS, thanks to the public debate on the agreement. The campaign led by women against this agreement allowed the usually marginalized artisanal fisheries sector to become the focus of a wide public debate.

Similarly, the issues arising from the development of tourism in coastal areas have progressively found their place on the agenda of CNPS, as a result of the action of women. This debate on access to land for fishing communities, 'sandwiched' between tourist complexes and polluting industries in coastal areas, has also given to CNPS its political dimension. The fact that this issue was brought to the forefront by women in the movement surprised a lot of observers of Senegalese sociocultural realities. Even women, traditionally marginalized within the fishery sector, are often not aware of the importance of their role. Most of the time, women fish processors are considered as 'housewives' or 'unemployed' (these are the terms used on Senegalese identity cards).

Since the sexual division of labour in the artisanal fisheries sector has given to women the role of processing and selling fish, this makes them the 'natu-

ral enemies' of tourism. Women are the first to be exposed to the threats of tourism and the occupation of the coastal zone. The conflict between tourism and fisheries permanently exposes them to the threat of being thrown out of their working places on the beach.

The negative impacts of the development of tourist villages in the Petite Côte region in Sénégal and, more recently, tourist camps in the region of Saint Louis (see next write-up), make it imperative for women fish processors to go beyond their traditional issues of concern, such as access to credit or infrastructural needs for their activities. The fight is not only to defend their source of revenue. It is also a fight for their status. Fish processing is also a way of 'social survival'. Thanks to the revenue from their activities, they participate in social and economic life—in fishing villages, women actively share the family's financial responsibilities.

In 1990, for the first time, women from CNPS questioned the tax system that paralyses the processed fish trade. They requested that the issue be put on the CNPS Congress' agenda in 1991 and 1994. The commonly highlighted problems in fish trade were earlier restricted to access to credit or limits to trade due to transport difficulties. CNPS then began to realize that taxes constituted administrative barriers for the development of the processed fish trade. A study was made with ICSF support, followed by a seminar for fisherpeople in Kayar. Representatives from the administration, from the finance department and from the department of fisheries, were invited to this seminar. CNPS thought it important to associate public authorities because it was aware that this issue was also a political one. This was one of the more practical initiatives taken by CNPS. Today, most of these taxes do not exist any more.

All these issues have been put on CNPS' agenda as a result of women's requests, which shows that their level of mobilisation is higher than that of men. How can that be explained? I think that, being more exposed than men to the consequences of public policies, women feel the need to react more.

Women have been involved in CNPS right from the time it was created. This would be usual in a sector where women pre-finance fishing activities and where they play such an important role in post-harvest activities. But despite that, and the fact that they have politicised the movement through their requests, they were not involved in decision-making processes. For 7-8 years (from 1987 to 1994), there were women's cells in villages and a national executive committee of women. But during the CNPS Congress in 1994, they demanded to be part of the National Executive Committee of CNPS, where only fishermen were represented. That was made effective at the next general assembly in 1995.

Since then, they have taken an increasingly active role in campaigns and in lobbying outside the country. The general assembly held in 1998 brought together a larger number of women's representatives. Though they are now in the CNPS Executive Committee, they have decided to retain their local cells. If these cells were earlier seen as a way of putting women in a 'ghetto', this is not the case any more. On the contrary, the local cells have become a source of getting better empowered in the sense that the women can still discuss internal matters but, at the same time, are able to keep networking with a movement to which they have belonged for more than 11 years.

FROM AFRICA/Sénégal

Saint Louis women organize

by Youssoupha Gueye of CNPS, Senegal

Today, in the context of the 'decentralisation' policies being implemented in Sénégal since January 1998, many local elected representatives are taking over the lands of fishing communities in order to develop infrastructure, such as city halls, houses and industries.

This process has aggravated the problems of local people, in particular, those of fishery-dependent coastal populations. Despite their prominent economic and social role and their vital contribution to food security, fishworkers are still confronted by serious difficulties, and women are the most affected. The absence of a social status for women explains their marginalization but does not justify it.

The development of an anti-social tourism, as a consequence of which women fish processors have to leave their workplaces on the beach, is a challenge for fishing communities and particularly for women

fish processors who need this space for their activity. There are several cases where such displacement has already taken place. For example, in Hann village, 15 km from Dakar, what was formerly a fish processing site is now used for housing rich people. In Mbour village, development of tourism in the Petite Côte region has affected women fish processors.

A similar problem is threatening to erupt in Saint Louis, which public authorities are eager to develop into a tourist town. The development of tourist infrastructure along this coast will imply that women fish processors are evicted because, in the eyes of authorities, cohabitation between the two sectors is not possible.

This has been actively and fiercely opposed by members of CNPS' Saint Louis women's cell, and its leader, Ndeye Sène. The members of the women's group have highlighted the fact that the land legally belongs to them. So far, they have been able to successfully prevent the takeover of their land by the local authorities. They are aware that to continue as fish processors, they must not give up their right to access the land. They must also be aware that this is only the first step in a long struggle for recognition.

FROM AFRICA/Ghana

Breaking through culture

by Lydia Sasu, Project Co-ordinator of the Food for Hunger Campaign, Ghana

In Ghana, while the men go fishing, their wives and daughters are the ones who process and market fish. Women also take up other income-generating activities like petty trading, preparation of oil, etc. to clothe, educate and feed the family. They work hard through the day.

Traditionally, men would never assist in smoking the fish and would spend their time mending their nets or resting after their fishing expeditions. Of late, however, the young men have been educated to break through this culture. They are entering into fish processing, marketing and distribution of processed fish to assist their wives and the family. This has come as a big relief to the women. At times, when the fish is landed land in the morning and the wife is away selling fish in the market, some men start the fish processing activity until the wife joins them later. These are positive signs of change.

FROM AFRICA/Ghana

Exchanging experiences

by David Eli of TESCOD, Ghana

In an exchange programme in December 1998, 13 women fishworkers from eight fishery co-operative societies in Benin visited Ghana. The exchange was facilitated by ID Pêche, Benin and TESCOD, Ghana. Both ID Pêche and TESCOD are NGOs working with artisanal fishing communities in Benin and Ghana respectively.

The main objective of the exchange was to enable women fish processors from Benin to learn more about the various fish processing techniques of their Ghanaian counterparts and to discuss other matters of mutual interest.

Among the places visited by the group was the Tema Fishing Harbour. Here they were able to observe the different levels of the fishery in operation — the artisanal, the semi-industrial and the industrial. They saw the operations of fresh-fish vendors, both at the wholesale and retail levels. The retailing activities of the vendors of imported frozen fish was another area they observed. What was amazing to them was the fact that it was primarily women who controlled fish marketing at the harbour. They saw the big cold rooms and the workers (mostly men) being managed by these women. In the fishing village of Prampram, where TESCOD had organized a *durbar* (meeting) of fishworkers for the celebration of the World Fisheries Day, they interacted with women representatives from 13 fishing communities.

Later the women of Prampram, Lekpongunor and Ningo joined hands to take their Beninese counterparts through the construction of the Chorkor Smoker. They were also taken through some rudiments of fish-tray construction. It was interesting to see these women handling carpentry tools to construct the trays. In Tsokomey, a fishing village some 30km west of Accra, the women met with members of local women's associations. They discussed issues relating to credit, organizational strategies and technical inputs. The issue of fish marketing came up strongly.

The women identified high tariffs and the intimidatory attitudes of custom officials as the major hindrances to cross-border fish trade, and stressed the need to resolve these problems. They sought the assistance of both TESCOD and ID Pêche on the matter.

FROM EUROPE/France

Stressing their roles

by Sylvie Roux, vice president of the Comité local des pêche of Audierne (Southern Brittany), and member of FIFEL-Bretagne.

The role of women in fisheries is very important, but often not recognized. It seems this is somewhat characteristic of France. In some Nordic countries, the role of women is better recognized, probably because it is not rare to find women as crew members on board alongside their husbands. In France, women are active in shore-based activities—one man at sea means one woman working on shore. In the artisanal fisheries sector, one job at sea creates four jobs on shore.

Women in fisheries are involved in pre-harvest activities such as preparation of gear, boat management, liaisoning with the administrative services, and in processing and marketing fish.

In December 1994 (at the time of the crisis in the fisheries sector), in Brittany, women played an essential role in defending fishermen's rights. Formal and informal movements appeared and, at that time, a women's group was created, based on solidarity. From the start, women felt the need to be better informed and better trained about what was happening in the fisheries sector. This is why their first request was to obtain the status of "fisherman's wife" in order to benefit from social security (retirement) provisions, professional rights, and professional training.

This was achieved with the Fisheries Orientation Law (18 November 1997). Fishermen's wives were given the status of spouse with the rights to retirement benefits, to represent their husbands on economic councils, and to training sessions.

The eight regional organizations of women formed an inter-regional federation of coastal women (FIFEL) in May 1998. Through this association, women from coastal communities aim to underline their role as agents of economic development. More than the recognition of their role in coastal communities, women members of FIFEL want to promote the survival of livelihoods from the sea through a renewed and global vision of social, economic, cultural and environmental issues in the sector. The objectives are to defend their social rights, facilitate the training and integration of young people into coastal society, and participate in the review of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) in 2002.

This review is a major issue for the sector and it is crucial that women be involved in the process. Will the rights to the fisheries get privatized, as some in the European Parliament suggest? Or will the access to the sea remain free for artisanal fishermen? Will fishermen and their wives have any say in elaborating these policies?

On its side, FIFEL has already engaged in a reflection on these issues and has asked for: implementation of European rules (the same for everybody, which is not the case at the moment) and a system of sanctions if these rules are not respected; definition of artisanal fisheries based on length of boats and horsepower; harmonisation of fishing gear and fishing practices; European collective agreement; harmonisation of training and qualification at European level; and coherent resource management.

FROM EUROPE/Denmark

Democratizing the industry

by Eva Munk-Madsen, a Copenhagen-based consultant on fisheries and women's issues

In Denmark, as in the rest of Europe, the fish processing industry has replaced much human labour with technologically refined, but expensive, machinery. Although the overall production has increased—or, at any rate, not decreased—the number of fish processing workers has declined. Due to the sexual division of labour in the fish processing industry, women, in particular, have been sacked in the process of technological automation. Against this depressing background, three male researchers, with an in-

terest in action research, together with a group of uneducated fish processing workers from Esbjerg, one of the largest fishing ports in Denmark, have, since 1989, been working on a project called "Industrial Production and Happiness".

Through a series of workshops, the group of unemployed fish processing workers developed their own vision of a democratic and sustainable fish processing industry. That vision was personified as a flower with five petals and an ovary. The first petal represented socially useful products; the second indicated that the work would follow human rhythms and needs; the third showed that the work would be planned and organized democratically by the workers in common; the fourth petal signified that work education and research would be organized simultaneously; and finally, the fifth petal symbolised that the whole plant would be collectively owned, and that only a collective agreement between the workers and owners would secure human rights. The result—the ovary—would be a new common sense or societal reasoning.

In 1995, the experiment intensified as a closed fish plant became the centre where the vision would materialize. When an invitation to engage in a social experiment to achieve such a model industry was first sent out, only women responded positively. Thus the project became a women's project. The utopian vision of the project incorporated several experimental dimensions:

1. The women would establish an open fish kitchen where consumers would take part in the development and evaluation of products.

2. The assembly belt would be replaced by a quality table where workers would be able to rotate places and talk amongst themselves. The processing technology would also optimize low-waste production and low-energy inputs, thus being a cleaner technology.

3. The waste water would be cleansed by the establishment of aquaculture so that nutrients could be used beneficially, instead of going to pollute the sea.
4. The educational aspect of the project sought to combine multipurpose fish processing and management training with general education.
5. The workplace would be run democratically by the workers in common.

The Women's Workers Union in Denmark, the national labour union of women fishworkers, embraced the project fully and paved the way for financial support. The women started work in 1995, focusing first on the open fish kitchen, education and democratic administration. They took decisions together after discussing all the relevant issues. The women began a self-teaching process with the help of the three affiliated researchers. The learning took place at workshops to which they invited experts in different fields related to the establishment of their model plant.

At these workshops, the experts did not offer "expert solutions" which defined the mode of production, but sought to serve the vision evolved by the women. The women also held several open kitchens to which consumers—ordinary people from Esbjerg—were invited. On the basis of the feedback they got, they decided to concentrate on two products: fish soup and fish meatballs. Both products were based on locally available fish species that were landed fresh almost throughout the year in Esbjerg.

Before the 'green' technology and the waste water treatment facility could be set up, the project ran into financial difficulties, since it was run entirely on public money. These components of the project were also the most expensive ones. The Women's Workers Union in Denmark had been a powerful ally in securing governmental support. Reduction of unemployment rates and development of sustainable production methods were of key concern to the social-democratic government.

However, for reasons unknown, scepticism towards the future prospects of the women-worker-run plant grew stronger than faith and, in mid-1997, "Dyndspringeren", as the plant had been named, had to close down. Nobody knows for sure who or what was behind the cessation of funding for the social experiment.

The women, who were unemployed fishworkers before the project began, have once more become unemployed. The lessons they have learned have now become of an individual, rather than a collective, character. They have personally gained experiences with democratic decision-making and non-hierarchi-

cal cooperation with experts and consumers, and with working together towards a shared vision.

While the Women's Workers Union in Denmark stressed the importance of the utopian fish plant, their support failed to see the experiment through to the end. The nature of the lessons the women can draw from the experience will depend on whether the plant's closure was due to the lack of sufficient political power of the social-democratic politicians or whether it was due to the lack of faith in the viability of the planned fish processing industry. The three researchers have summed up their lessons from the project in reports which will be publicly available, but which are not easily accessible to fishworkers in general.

The traditional fish processing industry has shown some interest in the educational aspect of the project. As technology is now highly automated and technological innovations are expected to grow at a fast pace, education of the remaining workforce is seen as a key factor in facing the competition. The experiences of the women at "Dyndspringeren" force us to ponder whether a participatory approach to management in production will lead to better quality products, or even higher efficiency.

The women's visions for the fishing industry— across the gamut of capture fisheries, aquaculture, processing, marketing and trade—are of concern to all of us interested in fisheries and respect for women and nature. Although the light of this project was ultimately snuffed out, it shone long enough to show us a sign of women's will and efforts to end abuse of human as well as natural resources in industrial fish processing.

FROM ASIA/India

Celebrating Fisheries Day

by Nalini Nayak, a social activist working with fishworkers in India, and a member of ICSF

The celebrations for the World Fisheries Day were launched in July with an all-India campaign to include women in the Famine-cum-Relief scheme of the government. This is a participatory welfare scheme whereby fishermen contribute a certain sum of money for nine months a year and then get it back in the three poor fishing months, with an equivalent amount contributed by the State (provincial) and Central governments.

In 1996, women fishworkers were barred from this scheme on the grounds that this was a scheme only for 'seagoing' fishermen. The National Fishworkers' Forum (NFF) decided to take up this issue as a national struggle, and launched a sit-in protest in all State capitals on 1 July.

This caused ripples even in States where the scheme did not exist, as the protesters refused to call off the struggle until their demands were met. The struggle went on from three to 15 days in different States. In West Bengal, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Kerala, the State governments agreed to give their share of the contribution to the women.

The Central government vacillated and finally gave an assurance that it would include it in the annual budget for the following year. Meanwhile, the Women's Commission has also put pressure on the Agriculture Minister, pointing out that this is a blatant case of discrimination. For the State unions of the NFF this is an important step towards recognizing women as workers.

FROM ASIA/India

A surprise encounter

by Nalini Nayak, a social activist working with fishworkers in India, and a member of ICSF

Meenakshi Manna is the first seagoing fisherwoman I have met in India. Spurred by the fact that her family's debt burden from purchase of fishing implements was increasing, seven years ago she decided to make her fishing boat her home. Operated till then only by her husband, Meenakshi sold her small plot of land and started fishing with her husband and two sons. Today she navigates the 25 HP motorized 35-foot plank boat, uses a variety of nets and directly sells the catch in the wholesale market.

At 37 years of age, Meenakshi looks so small and frail—just a little over four feet tall—but she is full of energy, bubbling with life, and she enjoys her life on the boat. The little, open-deck vessel has a bare

minimum of facilities but is used for three- to four-day voyages on the open sea.

Since Meenakshi started fishing seven years ago, her family has been able to repay the loan on their fishing equipment and has bought a small plot of land. For the last three years, they have been growing a winter crop of vegetables on the land. Meenakshi hopes that eventually they will have enough savings to build a house. One of her three sons goes to school and lives with relatives.

Meenakshi was made a member of the national committee of the National Fishworkers' Forum (NFF). This 22-member committee, elected in December 1998, has eight women on it.

FROM NORTH AMERICA/Canada

Coming together

by Chantal Abord-Hugon, co-ordinator, Oxfam Canada/Projet Acadie, and supporter, New Brunswick Coastal Women

Women in the fisheries sector are, for the most part, involved in fish processing. They are seasonal workers working between 10 to 20 weeks a year, depending on the species. In the past, the government's "unemployment insurance" programme did provide an income for the rest of the year, filling the gap when the fishing season and the fish plants were closed. Many people received more than half of their annual income from this government aid programme. (This is perhaps why until today fish plant workers seem less concerned with the decline of the fisheries resource than with the shrinking of the government aid programme).

In 1994, the government engaged in a programme of social reform, listing criteria to qualify for what came to be called "employment insurance". These criteria made it more difficult to access government aid, reducing benefits and reducing the period during which people could benefit, leaving most workers with a gap ranging between a few weeks to a few months when benefits ran out and work had still not started and they were left with no income at all.

When the changes were first announced, a huge protest movement developed, with demonstrations, public meetings, etc. in which women were most often the leaders. During the two years that followed, there was a big mobilization motivated by the fear of losing income security, of losing homes and not being able to feed families. A group of women from coastal communities started organizing conferences for women, to break their isolation and to keep themselves informed on subjects identified as critical, such as the changes to employment insurance, potential for employment and stress management.

Status of Women Canada, a government agency, offered funding. This helped organize more conferences to bring women together. In 1998, funding was provided for an action-research programme to assess the status of women in coastal communities and to see how the social programme reforms had affected their social and economic situation. The results were to be used by women to help influence decision-makers and to bring about changes to government programmes.

Research was conducted by three women from within coastal communities who met with other women on an individual basis. They did an impressive job and a detailed report was prepared. Since the fall of 1998, we have been going back to the women with these results, which clearly show the negative impact of changes to employment insurance and also highlight the need for better training. However, while there are tools to engage in action, and a few leaders have developed skills and are eager to work toward social change, an important demobilization of the majority of women is being faced. What is heard most often is: "Women are afraid"; "Women have adjusted"; "There is a feeling of resignation"; "People do not believe they can influence the government"; and so on.

Among the women leaders in the communities and their supporters, there is much reflection on what is going wrong and on how women can be brought together again. Four years ago, there were spontaneous protests against the reform of social programmes. We seemed to have the potential for a social movement aimed at social change but fear that we are losing it now. Why ?

This summer, in Ghana during a training programme on fisheries, social analysis and organizational strategies, we discussed the subject of movements, how they are born and sustained. Using the analysis de-

veloped there, we can perhaps try and understand why the momentum is not being sustained as well as it could. As we discussed there, to sustain a movement, the following are important criteria:

- The process moves step by step/issue to issue: we have not moved from the issue of employment insurance.

- Purpose and objective are sharpened: this has not been achieved.

- The base is expanded through education: this has not been achieved because of lack of funding or lack of committed volunteers to engage in education.

- Facts are researched, studied and documented; policy makers are lobbied and alternatives are proposed: we received government funding for a research-action project which was to be used to influence decision-makers. Though it was necessary, it should have been done before or at least at the same time as education. Here we see that our agenda was set by the type of funding available; it made us maybe move too fast and not address the basic need of women which was simply to meet once in a while to break out of their isolation. They have now a tool—the action-research report—but no political awareness or the will to use it to engage in more political actions.

- Links are built with supportive allies: this is being done by joining a coalition of women's organizations. It is very important that the specific situation of women seasonal workers from the coastal communities be brought to the attention of women's groups which are generally more aware of the issues of middle-class working women. For example, their main focus is job equality whereas for seasonal workers the issue is simply "having a job".

- Members are kept involved: this has been a weakness but we have to find means to get women interested enough to remain involved. There is a need to understand why there is a loss of interest in being involved.

- People speak for themselves, develop diverse leadership.
- Structures are developed—useful to guide and stabilize the movement, but caution is required since structures can also kill it: this is a big question - here in New Brunswick, no formal structure was developed to organize women in coastal communities. There were just a few advisory committees in three different regions working more or less as a collective and on an ad hoc basis. Would a more formal structure have helped sustain a movement? Or harm it more?

We are now at a stage of much questioning! But we see achievements and try to learn from mistakes. In February 1999, more than 25 women have shown interest in participating not only at the annual convention of the Maritime Fishermen's Union, but also in preparatory meetings, for which 10 women will be selected to attend. They will be bringing to the fore not only women's issues and concerns but also the concerns of their families and communities for the survival of a healthy fisheries to sustain healthy coastal communities.

FROM NORTH AMERICA/Canada

Women in the shellfishery

by Donna Lewis, a fisher/aquaculturist from Prince Edward Island, Canada

I am a 40-year old mother of three, a fisher/aquaculturist and Director of the Prince County Shellfish Association in Mill River, Prince Edward Island (PEI), Canada. Of all the fisheries in our area, the shellfishery is one in which women have been the most involved.

My family and I have leased 34 acres of water in which we cultivate oysters and soft-shell clams. We specialize in top quality Choice Malpeque Oysters and take great pride in the success of culturing soft-shell clams -— these same clams were in danger of becoming extinct in public waterways due to overfishing and contamination.

There is a public fishery (in the open seas) here which boasts many grades of oysters and mussels, and various species of clams. It is a seasonal fishery -— closed for the majority of harvesters from December to April, both months inclusive. There is also a growing interest in a certain sector of the population in developing aquaculture in all of these areas to create some sense of sustainable economy within the shellfishery.

Along with this comes the risks we are now facing with large corporations investing heavily and driving down the prices to the individual harvesters. These corporations are buying up large leased areas of water (not in their own names) and collecting their own seed stock.

When the stock reaches marketable size, there will be a glut of shellfish. They will control the price and the established markets, and they will no longer have to purchase the product from the public fishers. We suspect that the price will drop dramatically even for those who do manage to grow a top quality product for which demand is high, while the rest will be forced to work for these same buyers for a minimum wage or on a commission basis.

At another level, the lack of access to timely, accurate information is causing a rift between the recreational fishers and the public, and the people who earn their living from the sea. This is because there are many misconceptions about methods of harvest now used, i.e. mechanized harvesters, and about whether they are depleting the fishery or enhancing it.

The general public is overwhelmed with myth and rumour and has only recently begun to accept and acknowledge that the new methods of mechanized harvesting are positive, and actually nurture and help to re-establish fishing grounds previously depleted.

Women play an increasingly vital role in the public fishery, in aquaculture and in protecting shellfish environments, not only with their physical contribution, but also through advocacy for changes to legislation and education of the general population on the potential of this industry.

While the role women play is critical, this does not imply that they have not had, or that they will not continue to face, many obstacles in the path they have chosen.

There is much prejudice in almost all government Ministries involved in regulation and licensing about the physical ability and 'knowhow' of women to participate in the harvesting of shellfish and the operation of such basic equipment as a dory and motor.

While most seafood processors and buyers recognize the ability of these same women, they are continually challenged and harassed by government officials when income is declared. In PEI, when income is below a certain level established by the government, fishers are entitled to income supplements called Employment Insurance Benefits during the months when it is impossible to fish or find other work.

Sexist attitudes allow prejudice and assumptions to enter into the determination of applications for these benefits, which are only 50 per cent of earned income.

The government has also decided that marriage does not constitute a legal partnership—spouses must operate "within arms length" of each other and show no special favouritism when sharing equipment, fishing ground, etc.

Logistically, this makes fishing an expensive proposition for families who have to have two sets of gear, or separate leased sites, etc. Everything has a fee. While the cost of licenses has gone up over the last couple of years, the cost of leases are expected to rise by about 600 per cent soon.

There is a generation of shellfishers in PEI who were forced to work at a very early age, giving up all opportunities for formal education and learning—earning their degrees from the school of life instead.

Many women now take leadership roles here in protecting the habitat of shellfish, creating partnerships with those who can affect change, starting local newsletters and workshops to invoke a greater understanding and appreciation of the industry, all the while participating physically and in most cases being responsible for all of the bookkeeping and reporting requirements that come with the job.

I am one such woman, but I am not alone by any means. We are very lucky here on PEI to have come to identify and realize the resources available to women in the industry.

These include resources like Cooper Institute, a non-profit research group, as well as invaluable publications, such as the Atlantic Women's Fishnet, which is written by women for women and which deals specifically with gender issues in the fishery and the accomplishment of women of fishing communities.

FROM LATIN AMERICA/Brazil

A gender workshop

by Gustava Bezerril of the Instituto Terramar. (Translated from the Portuguese by Rène Schärer)

Profound changes are taking place in fishing communities in the state of Ceara in northeastern Brazil. And the pivot of these changes lies in a small community with the romantic name of Prainha do Canto Verde (Little Beach at the Green Corner) and in the creation in 1994 of the NGO, Instituto Terramar.

Abandoned for decades and plagued by high levels of illiteracy, lack of organization and participatory citizenship, the state of Ceara is being shook awake, thanks to the women who are playing a prominent role in the changes taking place.

Inspired by ICSF's Women in Fisheries programme and a meeting of women from fishing communities that took place during the International Seminar on Responsible Fishing in Ceara in 1997, the first gender workshop took place in the community centre of Prainha do Canto Verde on 28 and 29 November 1998. The aim was to discuss the role of men and women as partners in the pursuit of improving living conditions. The 16 participants included fishermen, women, community leaders, teachers and adolescents.

Given the total absence of women's organizations in fishing communities as well as the multiplicity of women's occupations, there was some difficulty in attracting a great number of women to the two-day workshop. The strategy was to awaken their interest in the issue and to create an awareness of the importance of discussing certain taboos in the presence of men. The proposal was understood and the challenge accepted by both men and women. This contributed to a rich and profound discussion, both in group work sessions, plenary sessions and in role plays.

The following themes were discussed, with the active participation of everyone :

- the identity of women and men;
- sexuality and equality in gender relations;
- the differences between men and women, and the social aspects of these differences;
- the necessity for women to assert their own identities and discuss their anxieties openly, instead of adhering to their traditional roles of submission; and
- the need to strengthen the participation of women beyond their household and communities.

At the suggestion of the participants, it was decided to explore the possibility of holding further workshops to discuss these issues, initially with the participation of community leaders from 11 villages of the region, who are already in regular contact through the monthly meetings of the Fishermen's Forum against Predatory Fishing. Subsequently, we plan to hold several more workshops. These will include three preparatory meetings in the municipality of Centre, one in the municipality of Fortim, and finally, a regional workshop on gender relations in Prainha do Canto Verde.

We hope that these workshops will become one more instrument in the struggle of fisher populations to influence the social and democratic changes taking place in Brazil.

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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.