



25 Years in Support of
Small-scale Fishworkers

Yemaya

ICSF'S NEWSLETTER ON GENDER AND FISHERIES

From the Editor

For over a hundred years, the 8th of March has been celebrated as International Women's Day (IWD). The event has come a long way from being a day of militant street protests by poor working women for a fair wage to being recognized today by governments, corporations and global institutions alike. This year, the United Nations has declared its official theme for IWD to be "Empower Rural Women—End Hunger and Poverty". This is no doubt an important goal, one which potentially benefits not only women in fisheries but the majority of women worldwide.

The rural economy in most developing countries is built upon the paid and unpaid labour of women. Women make up nearly half the labour force in both agriculture and small-scale fisheries, globally, and more than half the labour force in inland fisheries. In addition to working as farmers, fishers and fish sellers, women in rural areas often have to also take on various types of waged work in order to make ends meet. Further, they bear a disproportionate share of the responsibility of housework and caring for children, the sick and the elderly. In small-scale fisheries, poverty may be so acute and widespread that, in order to cope, women in the sector have little choice but to invest ever-increasing hours of labour, at the cost of basic entitlements to education, nutrition, health and wellbeing. The dominant modes of fisheries development and management appear to be only further intensifying the overall vulnerability of women in the sector.

In the context of fisheries, the goal to empower women and end hunger and poverty would require multiple firm and enduring commitments. First, it would require a commitment to strengthening rights to the natural resource base that supports women in small-scale fisheries. This must necessarily involve checking and regulating the forces that weaken the rights of small-scale fishing communities to fisheries resources as well as to the lands which they have traditionally lived on or used. It must also necessarily involve redistributing ownership and rights over land and productive assets in ways that are equitable and gender-just. Second, keeping in mind that women in rural areas often put in weeks and months of waged work to supplement their incomes, this would also require a commitment to strengthening the rights of workers in the informal economy. Third, given that women in rural areas bear the dominant responsibility of running their families, the lack of essential services and social support greatly intensifies their vulnerability as well as the vulnerability of fishing households and the rural economy. This year, on the occasion of IWD, women in the fisheries in certain countries have demanded social security, insurance cover for work-related accidents and greater welfare measures for fisherwomen.

Government regulation and public spending on social security are essential to ensure inclusive and equitable economic growth, in which the poor do not become victims of a liberalized developmental paradigm. This is an important agenda for a global women's struggle for rights. **M**



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