



**28** Years in Support of  
Small-scale Fishworkers

# Yemaya

ICSF'S NEWSLETTER ON GENDER AND FISHERIES

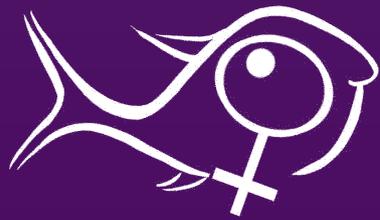
## From the Editor

The current year marked an important milestone for women in fisheries through the adoption of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Small-scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication—the SSF Guidelines. These provide an important opportunity for women to be able to come together, fight for their human rights and strengthen their access to decent livelihood and equal benefits in the sector. However, the formation and strengthening of effective organisations of women is critical for this process.

This issue of Yemaya brings out the complexities of the economic and social environment in which women continue to struggle in the fishing sector. We see from the examples of Kerala and Gujarat in India, and of Portugal, how globalisation and the economic crisis, as well as governmental interventions in the name of modernisation, are all impacting fishing in local areas. Women are left grappling with the ill-effects of these changes as their customary rights to fresh fish sources and to a safe and secure market place for their activities are increasingly eroded. Women in the sector are also faced with new internal challenges, whether in terms of being forced to leave traditional livelihoods in search of waged work, or of increasing numbers joining fish trade for lack of other livelihood opportunities. This forms the context in which women in the small-scale fisheries have to take up the struggle for both maintaining their existing rights, and for gaining new rights in the fresh occupations they seek.

A recurring theme in this issue is the absence of women from the process of negotiating the changes that affect their lives. The criticality of organising autonomously is stressed, while also highlighting difficulties in building effective organisations. However, the process of organising helps in both empowering women, and benefitting them in the long run in negotiating positive changes. A glimpse into a single woman's life, as we see from the interview of a leader of a women's cooperative in the Ivory Coast, powerfully illustrates how the process of collective action can lead to enormous gains; in her case, in terms of being able to negotiate patriarchy in the family and changing the outdated processing practices that had cost her mother her eyesight. The example from Portugal shows how a slow and inclusive process helps build a strong and participative network of women's collectives. In the case of Gujarat in India, the process of organising helped women question traditional, male dominated caste organisations within fishing communities, and to envisage collective action *vis-à-vis* local administration. In Kerala, India, membership of the SEWA union gave women the forum to question changes in trading practices that adversely affect their own livelihoods.

This brings us back to the criticality of regulation for safeguarding women's livelihood in the fisheries and promoting their human rights. While the SSF Guidelines are an important step in this direction, they alone cannot guarantee positive change. Without effective implementation, the Guidelines would remain an empty promise. And for effective implementation, a pre-requisite is no doubt the strong autonomous organization of women. **M**



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