



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

# Yemaya

ICSF'S NEWSLETTER ON GENDER AND FISHERIES

## From the Editor

Another International Women's Day (March 8) has gone by, with significant achievements for women in the fisheries across the world. However, while we take stock of, and celebrate the achievements, we should also reflect on the long road of struggle ahead—a struggle for the rights of small-scale fisheries; for the rights of women engaged in fishing, fish trade and fish-work.

Women have always been the backbone of the small-scale fisheries sector across the world. However the contribution of women, both in economic and social terms, have been constantly undervalued. Their “informal” inputs, whether in gear repair, provisioning for fishing trips, maintaining accounts and various post-harvest activities are often unpaid labour and not accounted for while calculating the contribution of the sector. Even when women are compensated for their effort, their work is undervalued and paid less than the same work done by men. This “invisibilising” of women's work negatively affects their bargaining power, within the family, within the community, and even in state level institutions and policy making for the sector. This issue of *Yemaya* discusses the need for a more complex and comprehensive analysis that accounts for the role of women in fishing, the multiple benefits they bring to the fishing community, and therefore the need to bring their issues to centre-stage and empower them within the community and the state.

*Yemaya* also discusses the increasing role of women in aquaculture in Asia. This is more significant as it is happening in a period of climate change, and a situation of drought, flood and diseases, and while men are migrating out in search of alternative employment. However, despite the significance of their contribution, women are subordinate to men when it comes to technology or investment decisions, and dealing with government institutions. They are further faced with the additional responsibility of taking care of the family. In the context, their participation in fishing does not empower them or compensate them in any way, and often ends up as only an additional burden.

There is encouraging news regarding the recognition accorded to women's work in fisheries at the government and institutional level. The African Union has chosen to focus on women's empowerment and development, declaring 2016 as the “African Year of Human Rights with Particular Focus on the Rights of Women”. The new “European Maritime and Fisheries Fund: 2014-2020” included references to gender equality and making available funds to support projects for women in fisheries.

On 3 March 2016, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) endorsed the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines) as a standard for gender mainstreaming, calling on states to integrate and mainstream a gender perspective in all agricultural and rural development policies, strategies, plans and programmes. This is a big step forward. However, it is a measure that will require persistent and active struggle to become a reality.

We reiterate that the road ahead is long and difficult. However, as the folk couplet from Malwa in central India, quoted in this issue of *Yemaya*, goes:

*“Taste the waves of the ocean, friend  
Pearls aren't found by plunging into puddles!”*

Finally, we remember Chandrika Sharma, Executive Secretary, ICSF, who was on board the Malaysian Airlines MH370 that disappeared exactly two years ago on 8 March 2014. Chandrika is very much missed by all of us. ❧



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