



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

# Yemaya

ICSF'S NEWSLETTER ON GENDER AND FISHERIES

## From the Editor

If the contextually relevant implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (the SSF Guidelines) is a challenge facing the small-scale fisheries sector, an even bigger challenge is the gender equitable implementation of the SSF Guidelines. For women in the sector, this will involve struggling at two levels: one, at the level of the household and the community, and the second, at the level of the State and other stakeholders.

The home and the community, often sources of much needed strength and support for women, are also sites where women encounter the most crippling barriers to progress. Hidebound, patriarchal customs, beliefs and practices serve to keep women in their so-called place, away from autonomy, decision making and leadership, tied to invisible, underpaid and undervalued roles. Customary laws often deny women the right to step outside predetermined and restrictive boundaries, and as the articles from Africa in this issue demonstrate, the male leadership in community organizations is often the first obstacle to women's participation in community affairs and decision making.

However, the obstacles to women's progress in fisheries go far beyond the level of home and community. They are usually embedded in complex societal arrangements of laws, rights and entitlements that serve to privilege men simply by treating women's lives and work as invisible, whether it is the running of fishing households including—taking care of children, the sick and the elderly—or the whole range of pre-harvest, harvest and also post-harvest roles that women perform. The denial of their human rights is a basic everyday reality for women in small-scale fisheries.

The struggle for recognition of women's roles within the fish value chain is particularly important today as states and international institutions turn their attention to the question of implementation of the SSF Guidelines. This is a historic opportunity for women to make their voices and demands heard. However, democratic and gender equitable forms of community representation are a precondition if gender concerns are to find due space in dialogues on implementation. As Micheline Dion of African Confederation of Artisanal Fisheries Professional Organizations (CAOPA) has observed, "Non-elected, non-representative organizations which sometimes claim to speak on behalf of coastal communities, have a disproportionate influence on the decision making process. It is very important to be able to change this situation. It is also vital for women in the artisanal fisheries sector to participate actively in decision making processes. Women's legitimacy as professionals should be recognized by policy makers and professional organizations alike."

Women's struggles for gender justice are deeply linked to community struggles for survival and space. The article from Côte D'Ivoire shows how declining fish stocks and fisher incomes are playing havoc with the sustainability of the small-scale fisheries, and how unless regulatory mechanisms to protect the artisanal fisheries are urgently instituted, the future of small-scale fishers is rather bleak. In this context, it is vital for decision makers to appreciate the role of women in small-scale fisheries towards strengthening the local economy, local food security, the future sustainability of the sector, and even the broader struggle for the survival of this planet against the ravages of climate change. ❏



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