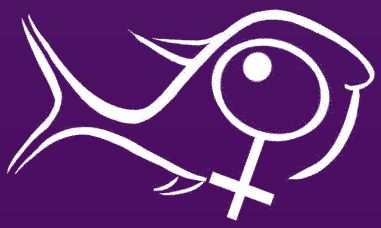
No.49 | July 2015 | ISSN 0973-1156

Yemaya

ICSF'S NEWSLETTER ON GENDER AND FISHERIES

29 Years in Support of Small-scale Fishworkers



From the Editor

Women make up nearly 90 per cent of the workforce that works in upstream activities in the fisheries—activities such as buying and selling, processing, and related marketing activities, collectively referred to as the 'post-harvest sector'. Traditionally, for years, in coastal areas across the world, women have been responsible for the selling of fish, whether in local fish markets or door-to-door. But while the labour of women fish traders helped to make fish accessible to millions of consumers, theirs has been a thorny path full of obstacles and challenges. Not surprisingly, some of the most vibrant struggles of women in the fishing sector, have been struggles for greater dignity, greater safety and hygiene, proper facilities, and adequate protections for fish trade. However, in the last three or four decades, the trade in fish has more or less been transformed by the globalization of the world economy. This has profoundly altered the relations of fish production, consumption, ownership and control, and the impact of these changes can be seen not just at the level of the stock exchange but equally in communities and households, impacting the relations between men and women in fisheries across the world.

This issue of Yemaya highlights some of the ways in which these changes are playing out in the lives and labour of women in the fish trade. We see in Tanzania's Lake Victoria thus, that if, on the one hand, the lucrative Nile Perch has fuelled an aggressive growth of export factories, it has also led to the rapid capitalization of traditional markets, changing the status of women in the fish trade from sellers to employers, albeit employers who operate an 'illegal' trade and remain vulnerable to exploitation by extortionists and private patrols. In the city of Patna in India, declining river catch has meant that women are, quite literally, losing their positions as fish sellers, being ousted from local markets onto the streets, where they are exposed to daily threats of extortion and bribe. While the effects of these changes are not uniform, fisherwomen everywhere, from Patna to the shores of Lake Victoria, are adapting their individual and collective strategies to survive these crises.

It would however require more than just the grit and resilience of women to tackle the severe crises gripping the small-scale fisheries sector today. The first step would no doubt call for the proper implementation, guided by adequate political will and supportive policy, of the recently adopted Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (the SSF Guidelines). Implementation measures must be sensitive to the question of gender, but make the mistake of viewing the role of women in the fisheries in isolation. As two articles, one on the fisheries in South Asia, and the other on octopus management in Tanzania show, management strategies of fisheries that are based on information and knowledge gathered from both women and men, and relying on community co-management practices, are associated with significantly higher levels of sustainability and productivity, while those taking a narrow view seem doomed to fail.

Women's contributions to the fisheries at all levels, as producers, traders, workers and organizers, must be brought to the centre stage of the planning and implementation process, if the small-scale fisheries and their natural resource base are to be protected.

Perched on the brink of survival

Extracted from the author's doctoral thesis on Lake Victoria's Nile Perch fishery, this article reveals how women are adapting capitalist strategies to beat the stranglehold of export markets

By **Modesta Medard** (modesta_medard@yahoo.co.uk), Social scientist, Mwanza, Tanzania

Lake Victoria is the largest freshwater lake in Africa and the second largest in the world, covering approximately 68,800 square kilometers. It is spread across three countries: Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. The lake contains many fish species and generates substantial income opportunities, food, employment and foreign exchange. Some four million of the 40 million people that live and work in the lake basin derive their livelihood directly from the lake.

Significantly, in the last three decades, the fishery sector has attracted many new entrants. An export oriented industrial processing and marketing infrastructure to industrially process fish for export has emerged along the major lakeshore towns of Kisumu in Kenya, Musoma and Mwanza in Tanzania, and Entebbe and Jinja in Uganda. By the mid-1990s, thousands of young men found employment as fishers, workers in the fish processing industry, and fish handlers. However, the main beneficiaries were the owners of the export processing factories. These owners are mostly of Asian origin.

Fishers have nicknamed the Nile perch '*mkombozi*' or 'the saviour'. The name highlights its regional economic significance, as the Nile Perch represents a significant portion of East Africa's export earnings, generating about $370 million per annum—68 per cent of the region's export earnings.

MODESTA MEDARD

A Bembe fisherman being helped by his son.
In Nile Perch fishing new organizational forms are continually emerging

The export industry is an aggressive market player, distributing the value added in highly unequal ways. The export factories control most of the Nile Perch catch through their control over the fishing investment, distribution and trading networks. More importantly, it controls credit arrangements in the form of cash and materials—given to fish collectors (middlemen) and fishing camp owners and operators. This tendency has resulted in high fishing intensity, notably for Nile Perch, which has triggered a range of controls by the export industry to streamline and improve production for export market and to safeguard food safety aspects.

The region is predominantly rural, although migration to towns is increasing. Along the lakeshore, 'boom towns' with new markets, transport facilities, bars, guest houses and recreational facilities have sprung up in response to the demand for fish and services to sustain the fishing industry both economically and materially. Not all services are up to standard, and most 'boom towns' resemble shanty towns. Fishing camp or boat owners, boat crew members, fish agents and handlers, fish traders and processors, cooks, net mounters and repairers, and bait fishers and suppliers make a living directly from the exploitation of the lake's fish resources. In contrast to the vibrant fishing economy, the traditional agrarian economy is suffering from a downturn in the production of its major cash crops: rice and cotton.

Despite the control exercised by export oriented operations, there is still competition and contestation in the Nile Perch markets and business. One of the most notable changes along the Lake is the emerging diversity of fishing relations and networks.

MlegwaMbuto, who is a boat crew member, remarked how women strive to control fish production and the lakeside fish markets in Ntama at Kome Island: 'These women are very clever—they control us, the fishing activity and the trade arrangements!'

There are many fishing relations in Nile Perch fishery that are dependent on social systems, market networks and governance processes. In Nile Perch fishing, capitalist

and commercial relations of production have become predominant, and new organizational forms are continually emerging in local, national and regional markets.

One example of transformation in Nile Perch fishing relations is the change from subsistence fishing to a 'capitalist deal' in the form of partnerships, as local markets attempt to escape the relationships of dependency and the subjective and exploitative conditions that characterise the export oriented markets. It is insightful to look into these dynamics at local levels in relation to global processes that have reorganized production and changed patterns of ownership and control.

To give an example, the Bembe and the Ha are fishers from Lake Tanganyika who migrated to Lake Victoria during 1992-1993. Although they say they belong to the Kigoma Region of Tanzania, local residents claim that they are not only from Tanzania, but from Zaire and Burundi as well. The Bembe and Ha fishers are experts in using single nets, locally known as *makila*. These three-ply nets that, on average, are of 3.5 and 4.5 inches mesh size, 90 metres length and 25 or 26 mesh nets width, are labelled 'illegal' by fisheries regulators. The fishers use canoes that have three or four *wajeshi* (crew members). A canoe that carries three crew members would be eight feet or 2.4 m long; one that carries four crew members would be 12 feet or 3.6 m long. Each *wajeshi* has a small wooden box into which he packs 10-15 single nets. Each boat, therefore, carries 30-60 nets, depending on the number of crew. They set their nets in the evening, and haul them in early the following morning. They do not stay with their nets or organize patrol boats, so the risk of net theft is high. Investment in this fishery is facilitated by mainly female shore-bound traders who will rent a boat jointly with crew, hire the crew and provide gear, while retaining full control over the catch. If the crew, for whatever reason, is unable to contribute towards rent for the boat, the women step in and pay for them. In the words of Mustafa Ali, a fisher: 'Each of us is given fishing nets, and because the catch varies from each one's nets, we face different situations. Nets are stolen or frequently drift, and we end up in continuous debt. Moreover, each of us is frequently loaned cash independently by the women, to feed our families. If I catch 60 fish, for every three fish, I get TSh 1,000 (USD 0.67) while the women will sell them for TSh 2,000 (USD 1.3). But we are not interested in paying off all our debts. Where would we go? The lake is everything for us. We are here with our elderly parents, wives and children. The real challenge lies in the frequent bribes to officials so that they don't confiscate the nets and fish because we fish small size Nile Perch. We don't own fishing licenses and we use unregistered boats. The women traders are behind us and they handle all sorts of hurdles.'

Women play an important role in the Bembe and the Ha communities to gain access to the fishery operations. Decisions over net purchases, renting boats, buying fishing accessories and where to sell the catch, are all made by women. Women forge a relationship with one *mjeshi* (guarantor) who is not necessarily a boat captain but a trustworthy person, typically settled with his family along the shore, who is obliged to look for another two or three *wajeshi* for a complete fishing unit. Women use this strategy in order to allow freedom of choice in constituting *wajeshi*, who can work together with minimal conflict and risk. After landing the catch, the women organize the sale, keeping aside some fish for the *wajeshi's* food and for their own domestic needs.

The women in the fishery under study had a minimum of one and a maximum of three peddled fishing boats. It has been reported that before 2008, agents representing export processing factories would buy fish in the 0.5-1.5 kg range. But now they buy only fish of 1.5 kg and above, and only the remainder goes to female traders and processors, and bicycle traders.

The basic idea with this arrangement is that the women front the initial costs of startup, such as the nets and other fishing accessories, and also bear costs of replacement of worn-out or stolen nets. They identify a guarantor—who in effect guarantees the investment by agreeing to fish for the women—and the business can shift to a guarantor if he manages to pay the costs of the nets and other fishing accessories. The cost for renting a small boat, which is about TSh 35,000-40,000 (USD 23-27) per month, is shared by the crew but, often, women provide the crew with small credits if they have no cash. Eventually, the women control all fish sales, and the guarantor and his crew receive compensation by way of wages or fish. The guarantor also assumes the risk of his crew—if any of them were to make off with the nets, the guarantor is obliged to replace these. The same is true if the nets are lost on the lake, or stolen by someone else. He also reduces the women's administrative responsibilities by managing the crew, their complaints and their problems.

One example of transformation in the Nile Perch fishing relations is the change from subsistence fishing to a 'capitalist deal'.

The continuous struggle by women and men in these markets is also about escaping dependency and unfair relationships in export oriented markets.

The risks are many. On the lake, the fishers are wary of armed patrols from the big commercial fishing camps, which are liable to attack and chase them away from the fishing grounds. Their nets, too, are illegal and, if there is any trouble with the authorities, it is the crew—and not the women—who bear the responsibility of gear seizure, and the threat of court action.

According to MlegwaMbuto, 'If the woman doesn't like you personally or you are unlucky, she can hire someone else. There are those who have sexual relations with women just because they want to get power of ownership of the nets and the box for keeping the nets…We are the ones who go out fishing and are labelled as illegal fishers because the mesh nets are small in size. The truth is we are in a poverty cycle and lumbered with endless daily debts and an insecure life.'

The above example shows that apart from export markets, in local, national and regional markets too, capitalist arrangements characterized by employer-employee relationships are emerging. These markets are dynamic and provide substantial livelihood opportunities to local and regional communities. Much of the fish caught for these markets are labelled as 'illegal' because of their small size.

A range of Nile Perch fish sizes and other traditional fish species are caught as by-catch and also enter these markets. The competing markets do not just co-exist but also interact, so that the local, national, regional and export markets together impact the way fish resources are accessed and traded at the local level. They mutually transform each other and the socio-ecological spaces and networks that surround them. The continuous struggle by women and men in these markets is more than just about generating income. It is also about escaping dependency and unfair relationships in export oriented markets. Relationships of this nature have spread and shaped many relations in different fisheries, gear types and fishing camps.

It is evident that the strategies evolved in engaging in fish trade by these women, encompass the requirements to secure fish (capital) and power; they use individual influence and traits, social networks, local level alliances, sexual relations, and subordination of lower level actors—in this case, mainly crew members. The emerging relations of production and trade in the fishing sector in Lake Victoria are therefore a response to global and local forces, which have produced a very specific site of struggle, in the attempts to reap the benefits and escape the stranglehold of export markets.

By **Nilanjana Biswas** (nilanjanabiswas@yahoo.com), Independent researcher

What's New, Webby?

SSF Guidelines made easy

The FAO's Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries in the context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (the SSF Guidelines) is a historic document, adopted in 2015, that identifies globally applicable rights and responsibilities for the small-scale fisheries.

A new video on YouTube presents the main tenets of the SSF Guidelines through an interesting combination of media—animation and film—thus making the Guidelines clear and accessible to the lay person. Although the video is in Spanish (with English subtitles), and covers fishers from Central and South American countries, the work that these fishers do, the experiences they speak about, and their hopes and fears could represent the lived reality of small-scale fishers anywhere in the world.

The video is in several sections, each highlighting a main principle of the SSF Guidelines—for example, what the term SSF means and its critical importance in the lives of millions; the sustainable use of coastal and marine resources; the importance of participatory governance and co-management in the fisheries; and the relevance of the fisheries in guaranteeing food security. Every section begins with skilful animation and voiceover, that together explain the principle under discussion; then, interviews with small-scale fishers at work or in their homes reveal how and why the particular principle applies to their lives. The section on food security shows how important the role that women play in the fisheries, is in both production and in guaranteeing the health and well-being of their families and communities.

Brought out by a number of fisheries organizations and their support groups, including the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF), the video is a highly useful tool for disseminating awareness about the SSF Guidelines.

You can watch it at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W31XbKz8dmY

Receding waters, vanishing trades

With the decline of waters in the rivers surrounding the city of Patna in north India, women in fishing communities of the region are facing mounting hardships

By **Bibha Kumari** (bibhak136@gmail.com), committee member of Aquaculture without Frontiers (AwF) and Women's Network and Faculty member, Department of Environment and Water Management, A.N. College, Patna, India

Patna, the capital city of the state of Bihar in North India, is located on the southern bank of the Ganga river. The city is surrounded by the Ganga and its tributaries: the Sone and the Punpun. Inland fishing used to be an important traditional livelihood source in the city. However, as the waters in the rivers recede continuously, fish capture has declined by 70 per cent in just a decade. This has had a dire impact on the fishing communities of Patna and its surrounding areas. Today, traditional modes of fishing in the region have given way to contract systems, whereby annual fishing rights are auctioned to private contractors. The contractor hires fishermen for harvesting. This provides insecure work for a short period for the fishing community. The result has been that the young among the fishing community seek other forms of employment, often migrating out of their traditional localities.

BIBHA KUMARI

The Boring Road Crossing fish market in Patna, India. The number of women fish vendors has declined substantially

The daily demand for fish in Patna is 28,000 metric tonnes. With the decline in inland fishing on the Ganga, fish is brought into the city either from other regions within the state or from other states. Patna has its traditional wholesale market areas. From there, the fish goes into retail markets. Generally, the wholesale markets system has been run by men, while women have traditionally participated in retail fish vending—an activity they have relied on for a stable livelihood. However, over the past two decades, the proportion of women fish vendors has declined substantially. The basic reason for this state of affairs is the decline in fish catch, which, in turn, has increased the pressure on those dependent on retail fishing trade.

The government of Bihar and the municipal authorities of Patna have earmarked a certain area for the selling of fish and also tried to regulate fish trade in the city. However, the measures are inadequate and have failed to address the issues of marketplace safety and hygiene. The lack of a properly demarcated area and of security, safety and proper sanitation, make it difficult for women to access these fish markets. The women are also afraid of harassment by administrative authorities and local people. Some women fish vendors have taken recourse to selling fish from door to door. Others have started roadside or neighbourhood fish sales.

This type of vending, outside delineated market areas, is illegal. It brings women face to face with demands for extortion and bribes. Women often have to depend on their menfolk to deal with these illegal systems, thus perpetuating their dependence on the men.

The role of the government in safeguarding both fishing and the access of women to traditional fishing vending operations, is important in the context of creating livelihood opportunities and empowering women in traditional fishing communities. Government intervention can help provide women safe and stable access to fish markets; it can promote hygienic conditions in these markets; and finally, it can make alternative livelihood options available through promoting culture fishing to compensate for the drop in capture fishing from the Ganga.

Banking on closure

An octopus bank on the island of KisiwaPanza in Tanzania witnesses a large return on investment after a three month no-take period

By **Lorna Slade** (lornaslade@mwambao.or.tz), Executive Director of Mwambao Coastal Community Network, Tanzania

Fishers of the island of KisiwaPanza in the region of Pemba in Tanzania, caught some very large octopus in the first week of July this year. It was a Thursday morning; the 2 of July. More than 600 fishers had converged on the reef flat known as Ngazi, and when the octopi were sighted, pandemonium broke out as people ran to reach the best octopus holes first. One woman pulled an 8 kg giant out from its den, an extremely rare find in KisiwaPanza, where on average 65 per cent of the catch is 600 g or less. The reason for the excitement, and for the big catch, was that this was the first day the Ngazi fishing ground had been opened after a three-month period of closure. The results of the trial closure have been hugely encouraging.

Octopus fishing is an important livelihood source for both women and men, with over 60 per cent of the inhabitants of KisiwaPanza considering the day octopus (*Octopus cyanea*) the most important income resource for the family. Actually, very few local people eat octopus; almost all of the catch is shipped internationally to Spain, Italy, France and Portugal, with some going to tourist hotels in Unguja, the main island of Zanzibar.

Fishers' lives in KisiwaPanza are dictated by the moon; there are two eight-day fishing seasons in a month referred to as *bamvua* in Kiswahili, which are linked to the spring tides of the new- and full-moon periods when the reef areas are the most exposed. The four or five days in between the spring tides are 'rest days' when other domestic tasks are taken care of. Traditionally, people walk the shallow reef at low tide and use sticks made from mangrove roots for digging the octopus out of their holes amongst the coral rubble.

MWAMBAO COASTAL COMMUNITY NETWORK

More than 600 fishers had converged on the reef flat known as Ngazi, and when the octopi were sighted, pandemonium broke out as people ran to reach the best octopus holes first

The day octopus has a short life cycle and rarely lives beyond 24 months. Both females and males breed only once in their lifetime. Once she has mated, the female barricades herself in a den amongst coral on the lower reaches of the reef. Here she lays her eggs and attaches them to the ceiling of the den. She stays there for a month without eating, protecting her eggs and gently aerating them with a flow of fresh seawater. She is very vulnerable at this time. The young hatch after 30 days and disperse with the ocean currents, before settling again on the reef flat where they subsist on small fish and crustaceans. The mother octopus, known as *koo* in Kiswahili, uses all her bodily resources when brooding eggs, and rarely survives for long after the young have hatched.

Many things have changed, however, in KisiwaPanza over the last 25 years and all is not well with the octopus population. Traditional sticks for hunting have now been replaced with more efficient hooked iron rods, and many men who fish now have access to masks and fins to fish for octopus in deeper waters. Some even use scuba gear. The fishing pressure has increased as the local village population has grown, together with the burgeoning demand for export. Today, fewer fishers take rest on the traditional days, continuing instead to fish throughout the month. The mature female octopus is being fished out of her breeding den and young octopus seldom get the chance to grow much beyond 500 grams, a size too small for breeding.

Fortunately, the day octopus is one species that can rebound relatively quickly with the right management regime. This is because they grow so fast—they are capable of doubling their size in just two months, and reaching 12 kg in 18 months. Thus if the fishing pressure is removed for just two to three months, the resulting catch is convincing and the females get a chance to breed undisturbed for the required length of time for the eggs to hatch. This management model has been adapted to good effect in recent years in Madagascar and Rodrigues in Mauritius.

The island of KisiwaPanza lies within the Marine Managed Area known as PECCA (Pemba Channel Conservation Area). Discussions among the Smartfish programme of the Indian Ocean Commission, the Mwambao Coastal Community Network, Fauna & Flora International, PECCA and KisiwaPanza community members began in November 2014, and the community decided to pilot this approach. These partners have also been working with communities and authorities to build the capacity of the local fisheries committees so that they may play an active and legitimate role in governance and management of all of their marine resources.

The villagers selected 60 hectares for closure, also known as a no-take zone (NTZ) and a sub-committee was formed to patrol the area for three months. As members of Mwambao, we trained monitors to record the catch and capture any increases in production. We also worked with the sub-committee and with PECCA staff to create by-laws and to carry out awareness-raising campaigns in neighbouring villages. Women had a major role in deciding on the timing of the NTZ; they suggested that lifting the closure in the expensive month of Ramadan would really help with all the additional costs at this time—in effect, the reserve would act as an octopus 'bank.' The closure began with village approval in mid-March and everything progressed according to plan, with only one minor poaching incident reported. The community decided that, at the opening, no hooked metal rods but only the traditional sticks would be used, giving the smaller immature octopus a greater chance of surviving.

This is the first pilot closure for octopus in the islands and it is a valuable demonstration of successful collaborative management for the Marine Conservation Unit and PECCA authorities. The Deputy Minister for the Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries Development officially cut the ribbon at Ngazi on the 2 of July and everyone was encouraged by the outcome.

Not all of the 600 or so fishers managed to catch an octopus but there were lively discussions about increasing the fishery closure area next time. Octopus 'banks' are an exciting first step towards building capacity and engagement at the village level to improve the management of their fisheries.

Mwambao hopes to expand this initiative to more villages in 2016 and to also increase the 'bank deposit', as it were, in KisiwaPanza, by helping them extend the area of the temporary no-take zone.

If the fishing pressure is removed for just two to three months, the resulting catch is convincing.

Milestones

By **Ramya Rajagopalan** (ramya.rajagopalan@gmail.com), Programme Associate, ICSF

Guatemala's comprehensive policy on gender equality

For the first time in its history, Guatemala's Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Food has a comprehensive Policy on Gender Equality.

Developed with the support of various international organizations, including the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the Institutional Policy for Gender Equality and Strategic Implementation Framework 2014-2023 is an attempt to systematically mainstream gender in all areas of the ministry's work, including its institutional mechanisms, with special emphasis on integrated rural development and food security and nutrition programmes and processes. The new policy also represents a key milestone in Guatemala's implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

The process began in September of 2013 when the Government of Guatemala requested technical assistance for the country's recently-established Special Cabinet for Women. Various offices of the FAO stepped in to support the policy formulation and worked with the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Food to revise the draft policy, ensuring that gender equality and women's empowerment could be factored into the implementation plan of the National Integrated Rural Development Policy; that a gender sensitive approach informed the provision of agricultural and rural extension services; and that strategic guidance was provided for gender sensitive food and nutrition programmes.

A three-pronged approach was adopted to create an institutional framework for policy implementation involving capacity building within ministries, multi-stakeholder workshops to discuss the unique challenges faced by rural women, and meetings with a key civil society organization representing rural indigenous Guatemalan women

According to FAO Gender and Development Officer Hajnalka Petrics, who has been involved in the process since its inception, while the approval of the policy is a major milestone, in many ways the work has only just begun. Much remains to be done by way of the policy's implementation, monitoring and evaluation plans.

A couple of champions!

In recognition of their dedication to the fisheries, Marja and Bert Bekendam receive the title 'Professional Fisher of the Year' in The Netherlands

By **Cornelie Quist** (cornelie.quist@gmail.com), member of ICSF and adviser to the Association of Inland and Inshore Fishers of The Netherlands

In 2007, the Association of Professional Inland and Inshore Fishers of The Netherlands (CvB) instituted the title 'Professional Fisher of the Year' to shine a spotlight on professional fishermen who play a vitally important role for the sustainable future of the fisheries sector and are an example for others. Then, as the important role of women in the sector became more visible. Some years back, the Association began to nominate for the title husband-and-wife couple, who were seen as the true champions of traditional inland fisheries in The Netherlands.

The Netherlands is a deltaic country where some of Europe's largest rivers flow into the sea. It has a wide system of rivers, fresh water lakes, polders, channels, ditches and enclosed salt water inshore waters. The inland fishers are part of the landscape. Professional inland fisheries in The Netherlands are traditionally household-based enterprises where family members work together, usually husband and wife or father and son or daughter. It is an old artisanal profession. Some families have been fishing for centuries in the same waters and have built up a fund of local ecological knowledge and sustainable management practices over generations. Many process their fish catch at home and sell directly to the consumer. Unfortunately, there has been a fast decline in the number of inland fishing enterprises—from around 3000 in 1945 to just about 150 today. Government policies have not protected the sector, which is struggling to survive.

This year, the title 'Professional Fisher of the Year' went to the couple Marja and Bert Bekendam, bringing much needed public attention the lives of professional inland fishers and the issues they face. It highlighted, as the association hoped it would, that good cooperation between husband and wife is of great importance for the future of the sector. Marja and Bert Bekendam received this title for being true ambassadors of the traditional inland fisheries, who continue to follow their profession despite being hit hard by dioxin pollution in their fishing waters as well as a government fishing ban that forced them to downsize considerably.

Bert Bekendam is a fourth generation professional inland fisher**.** He has been active in the local Fishery Management Council and actively participated in the making of a

CORNELIE QUIST

Bert and Marja Bekendam on a fishing trip.

regional fishing plan in collaboration with the region's recreational anglers. While he provides all the data on his own catches for the fishing plan, he also points the recreational anglers to their responsibilities. He welcomes anyone who wants an overview of his fishing practices, and willingly describes his fishing and fish stock management methods. Together with his wife Marja, Bert Bekendam has regularly received Members of the Parliament and representatives of the national organization of recreational fishers, patiently answering all their critical questions.

Marja Bekendam is a major driving force behind the couples' inland fishing enterprise. She collaborates well with the board of the Association of Professional Inland and Inshore Fishers of The Netherlands. She has been part of a delegation that met with the European Commission and members of the Fisheries Committee of the European Parliament, bringing the issues of traditional inland fisheries to the attention of the European policy makers. She is a core member of the Associations' Working Group on the Promotion of Inland Fisheries and Freshwater Fish. Apart from this, Marja is also the president of AKTEA—the European Network of Women in Fisheries—and holds regular presentations for organizations throughout the country, particularly women's organizations, on the traditional inland fisheries of The Netherlands and on women's role in fisheries.

Says Marja: "Our struggle is never over but until now we have survived. Fishing is no longer what it used to be but we have confidence that it will become better again. And although my husband does not fish every day of the week any more, nor every week of the month, and indeed, not even every month of the year, he is still a fisherman and I am still a fisherman's wife!"

PROFILE

Fisher of the Year—Anna Ramirez

A role model for future generations of fishers

This is an abridged version of an article featured in the following website: http://www.crfm.net/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=447:anna-ramirez-fisher-lady-of-punta-gorda-recognized-as-fisher-of-the-year&Itemid=179

Since she was seven, Anna Ramirez, now 63, has been fishing with her family off the coast of Belize's southernmost district—Toledo. Never has being a woman stopped her from working just as hard as the men do while at sea.

Her most challenging moments have involved braving the rough seas, even under the threat of hurricanes. "It's not easy. You have to be brave and willing to take chances—big chances too!" she says.

As a young girl, Anna Ramirez, like her brothers, took up fishing for a living. The area where they traditionally fished was declared the Port Honduras Marine Reserve Area in 2000, and today, the introduction of a managed access programme there by the Belize Fisheries Department has helped to reduce illegal fishing in the area, thus improving their fish catch. Notably, Anna Ramirez was instrumental in the establishment of the reserve.

Anna and her husband, also a fisher, have taught their nine children to fish. In fact, she says that her biggest reward is having been able to teach her children what she knows. Although Anna herself no longer fishes, her children do, and she markets their produce at the Punta Gorda Town market in Toledo thrice a week. Fishing, says Anna, made her an independent woman, and she never fails to urge young people to learn the trade so that they too can become independent.

Recently, Anna was chosen for special recognition as the winner of the 'Punta Fuego Outstanding Fisher of the Year' award for her commitment and dedication to hard work, and for consistently encouraging young people to take up fishing in sustainable ways. The award was presented on the occasion of the first ever Fisherman's Day festivities in Belize on Monday, 29 June 2015.

Speaking on the occasion, Marla Ramirez of the Fisheries Department, described Anna as, "not only a responsible fisher and advocate but a Belizean sustainable fisher … She has always taught her children to take out what is necessary and put back what is small."

While Anna Ramirez is hopeful about the prospect of her grandchildren being able to earn a decent living from fishing, she feels illegal fishing is currently the greatest threat to the sector and must be decisively tackled by the government.

Making women matter

Examples from coastal countries in South Asia illustrate how fisheries management is doomed to fail if it ignores the importance and diversity of women's work in the fisheries

By **Nilanjana Biswas** (nilanjanabiswas@yahoo.com), Independent researcher

Fishing was long considered a male occupation, and women were thought to be involved only in post-harvest activities. However, there is a growing recognition of women's contribution in capture fisheries in all activity spheres.

This article is based on a report by Kyoko Kusakabe titled 'Gender Issues in small-scale Inland Fisheries in Asia: Women as an important source of information'. Although the report was written more than a decade ago, its findings continue to have relevance for policy makers and community-based organizations aiming to address the gender question in the fisheries.

Kusakabe found that South Asia heavily employed women in the small-scale inland fisheries sector. In China, rural labour force statistics for 1991 showed that women accounted for 26.3 per cent of the rural labour force in fisheries. In parts of India, women netted prawns from backwaters; in Lao PDR, they fished in canals; in the Philippines, they fished from canoes in coastal lagoons. In areas where male migration was prevalent, women were bearing heavier responsibility in fisheries. Even as far back as a decade ago, some estimates showed that at least 50 million women from developing countries were employed in the fishing industry.

SUMANA NARAYANAN / ICSF

A fish vendor at Kampong Phluk, Cambodia. Women dominated the retail trade of small fish from the Tonle Sap Lake and from rice fields

In Yunnan, in rapidly-developing China, when the Trans-Watershed Water Supply Project flooded the Lashi watershed, neither women nor men could carry out their farming activities and became increasingly dependent on fishing. To quote a woman fisher: "Before the dam was built, we had land and women practiced agriculture. Women's income was better and more stable than men's income … Though our culture does not allow women to go fishing, about 50 per cent of the wives now go fishing with their husbands. Women work to support the family. Staying home will lead to a decline in their position."

Kusakabe discussed the research of a social scientist named Yu Xiaogang who in 2001 attempted to juxtapose the different areas of knowledge of women and men and come up with sustainable fisheries management of the Lashi reservoir. Discussions with the men revealed that the highest fish yield was from March to June and the lowest from October to February. Discussions with women revealed that fish prices were lowest from March to September and highest from December to February. Farm work, done mainly by women, was heaviest from April to June. This led to an understanding that the newly introduced fishing ban from April to June could be beneficial if men helped women in agricultural activities during this time. This would protect fish during the spawning season, and thus higher yields could be expected during winter when prices were highest. By combining both women's and men's knowledge and by adjusting their activities, this case showed that higher benefit and more sustainable use of natural resources could be realized.

Another example of leveraging women's knowledge was from Guinea in West Africa. Here, under an arrangement known as *kostamente*, women could buy catch from fishermen—either their husbands or unrelated men—or they could repay a share of the profits after processing and selling fish. Under a United Nations project aimed at empowering women, at fostering solidarity, and improving productivity, income and working conditions, women were organized into groups and trained in better techniques for treatment and storage. The project however failed, and an analysis revealed that a number of inappropriate assumptions had been made.

First, the project assumed a sharply dualistic division of labour. Because women undertook the fish smoking activities, it was assumed that men had no role to play, whereas in fact, all production involved interdependent activities between men and women. In targeting women alone, the project threatened

this interdependence. Some men raised their prices because they perceived the women as part of an externally funded project. By assuming that all women had the same interests, diversities in age, conjugal rank, class and religion, which were real obstacles to solidarity building were ignored. Further, the project imposed regular hours for attendance and work that conflicted with the many other claims on women's time.

Another example from Lao PDR illustrated the challenges facing women fish traders. In the Nam Ngum Reservoir in Lao PDR, fish marketing is controlled by a fish dealer company, and small fishers and small fish traders, mostly women, are not able to sell directly in the market. A certain community in the region received external support in credit and equipment to improve their fish processing activities. However, the lack of access to markets nullified the benefits of this support. Women, being responsible for household financial management and no longer being able to rely on income from fish processing, sought cash income from other activities like banana planting, home gardens and raising livestock. This increased their workloads. Women in fishing groups therefore worked, on average, 12 hours for productive work, of which seven hours were for fishing. In contrast, men spent an average of 6 hours of concentrated time in fishing. Thus, restricted access to markets affected both women and men, but women were affected more severely.

In Cambodia, Kusakabe found that fish from Tonle Sap Lake served the domestic markets and were exported to Thailand and Vietnam. Large fish from the Tonle Sap were bought by licensed fish traders under the supervision of a formerly state-owned fish export company. This market route was dominated by men and most of the fish exported to Thailand. Women dominated the retail trade of small fish from the Tonle Sap Lake and from rice fields. These were sold in domestic markets or smuggled into Thailand on a smal-scale and sold to smaller middlemen on the Thai side. However, the women's market route was more significant than the formal trading route in terms of providing the poor with protein. It also employed many independent traders and created employment for low-income women.

These examples showed the diverse nature of women's engagement with fisheries, in addition to various other responsibilities necessary to maintain their families. They also showed how a detailed and nuanced understanding of the role of women in fisheries is critical to ensure effectiveness of any intervention to empower and benefit fishing communities.

(This article is based on a thematic report by Kyoko Kusakabe, titled 'Gender Issues in Small-scale Inland Fisheries in Asia: Women as an important sources of information', Asian Institute of Technology, 2003.)

Q & A

Interview with Lakshmi Murthy, seaweed harvester, from Chinnapalam, a village close to the Gulf of Mannar (Marine) National Park, Tamil Nadu, India, member of the Ramnad Traditional Fishworkers Trade Union (RFTU), and recipient of the 2015 Seacology Prize for Leadership

By **Ramya Rajagopalan** (icsf@icsf.net), Programme Associate, ICSF

Can you describe some of the activities of the women harvesters of the Gulf of Mannar?

In June 2014, women from around 21 villages, who harvest seaweed in the Gulf of Mannar, organized themselves into an association. We are also already members of existing co-operatives. The association decided to stop seaweed harvesting for 45 days every year as a conservation measure. A year ago we also decided to stop harvesting during community events, such as a marriage or a death. We had asked the Fisheries Department to issue us identity cards so that our right to harvest seaweed was officially recognized but this has not yet been granted. Our documents are pending with the Department. We have now many more restrictions than before, including not taking children to the islands to harvest seaweed.

What challenges do you face?

Though we are entitled to harvest seaweed for 12 days a month, usually we can harvest for only about ten days. And since we have no other source of income, we often face a financial crunch. Earlier, our kids didn't go to school—but now they do, which means more money is needed. Our challenges are mainly related to education and employment. Our generation has been dependent on the sea's resources but we hope our children will have more options. Another ongoing struggle is to get a better price for our harvest.

How will the award you received help your struggles?

The award gives international recognition to all the women seaweed harvesters of Gulf of Mannar. We hope we can use this recognition to gain our legal rights to access seaweed resources there.

What are your future plans?

We have had two rounds of discussion with the State Government of Tamil Nadu, demanding that our rights be recognized: once in June 2014 and later in March 2015. We have asked for identity cards but these have not yet been issued. If our traditional livelihoods are to be protected then our rights need to be protected first. We have generations of traditional knowledge regarding seaweed resources. We are confident that we will be able to manage these resources through proper community measures.

YEMAYA MAMA

Mama's octopus bank yields returns!

DOCUMENT

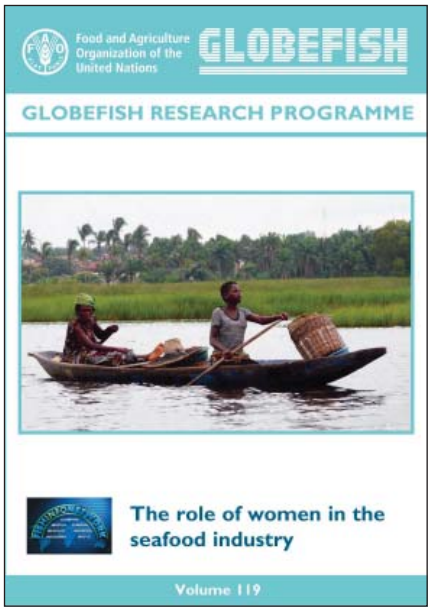
THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE SEAFOOD INDUSTRY

Marie Christine Monfort, GLOBEFISH consultant. GLOBEFISH Research Programme, Vol. 119, Rome, FAO 2015. 67 pp.

By **Nilanjana Biswas** (nilanjanabiswas@yahoo.com), Independent researcher

Women represent nearly half the working population in fisheries worldwide. The World Bank estimates that 47 per cent of the around 120 million people working in the sector, including those in capture fishing and post-harvest occupations, are women. In aquaculture alone, the sector of fisheries that is growing the fastest, nearly 70 per cent of the total workforce is women. Their importance is therefore critical.

However, when we consider participation in the sector, women are excluded from positions of power and influence, often by cultural norms, societal conventions and sometimes by discriminatory laws. Women are generally barred from specific 'male' jobs like going to sea on fishing vessels, deprived of ownership rights, and have limited access to finance and insurance services, and to modern fishing technology. They do not generally occupy positions of leadership within organizations of fisherpeople and fishworkers.



There is also sparse research interest and reliable data available on participation of women in the industry, their access to resources and decision making processes. Women receive low priority in any planning process to do with economic development or regulatory measures in the sector. Consequently, it is the case that the lower the remuneration and the lower the gain generated along the value chain, the greater is the participation of women. The largest numbers are employed in jobs involving maximum drudgery and the least security and remuneration.

The present report tries to analyse precisely these aspects of the fishing sector. Based on secondary data, it covers an extensive bibliography of published and unpublished information sources. A detailed and well argued background note is followed by specific case studies of fisheries in Croatia, Egypt, France, Iceland, India and Senegal, covering different cultural contexts, and diverse development models from artisanal to industrial, from commercial to subsistence oriented, from import substituting industrialization to market led export oriented growth.

The report stresses how women in fisheries are worst affected by adversities, highlighting the impact of climate change on women in fisheries. Noteworthy is a London School of Economics study based on analysing disasters in 141 countries, which concludes that "when women's rights are not protected, more women than men will die from disasters". It examines institutional efforts to improve the conditions of women in the sector, including the UN Millennium Summit initiative, the SSF Guidelines, and gender mainstreaming efforts, and finds significant failures.

This report is important for all audiences, in particular for policy makers in charge of developing new projects and policies for fisheries sector to be sensitized to the needs of women. The case studies and the extensive bibliography make it a valuable document for researchers and those seeking a better understanding of the gender divide in fishing.

ICSF

Published by
the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers
27 College Road
Chennai 600 006
India
Tel: (91) 44 2827 5303
Fax: (91) 44 2825 4457
E-mail: icsf@icsf.net

Web site: www.icsf.net

Edited by
Nilanjana Biswas

Illustrations by
Sandesh
(sandeshcartoonist@gmail.com)

Designed by
P. Sivasakthivel

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.

Please do send us comments and suggestions to make the newsletter more relevant. We look forward to hearing from you and to receiving regular write-ups for the newsletter.