ISSN 0973-1156

Yemaya

No. 17 ICSF'S NEWSLETTER ON GENDER AND FISHERIES DECEMBER 2004

From the Editor

Dear Friends,

This issue has articles from Asia, Latin America, Europe and Africa, touching on several concerns of women of fishing communities. It is well known, for instance, that in many countries around the world it is women who, by selling fish in fresh or processed forms, bring money from the fishery back to the family and the community. It is not surprising then that an important theme that runs across several of the articles in this issue is that of markets, and the constraints that women of fishing communities face in marketing their fish—constraints that include poor transport, lack of appropriate storage technology, poor access to credit, harassment by authorities, including at border checkposts, unduly stringent quality control regulations, inadequate market facilities and high market taxes.

It is encouraging to hear of how women of fishing communities are organizing to deal with some of these constraints. We learn about how women shrimp sellers in Mexico have organized and are beginning to have their voices heard, particularly by government officials. It is as encouraging to hear of the wonderful effort by women from a fishing community in the Netherlands to revive their local economy, with the support of local authorities, simply by selling fresh fish caught locally and by reviving consumer interest in traditional fish recipes and flavours. In an age where food is increasingly 'delinked' from where it is produced, and is often purchased off supermarket shelves in pre-cooked and highly processed forms, this initiative is surely worthy of emulation—especially as it also appears to make good business sense!

We also carry the Statement from the *Asian Regional Consultation on Women in Fisheries*, which was held in Medan, Sumatra, Indonesia from 11 to 14 August 2004. The statement, while drawing attention to the ongoing patriarchal paradigm of development that puts profit before life and is based on the exploitation of nature and the disrespect of life processes, stressed the importance of working with a feminist perspective in creating alternatives and putting into play processes that are just, that challenge caste, class and patriarchy, and that are based on the sustainable use of resources. The statement also unequivocally opposed the way in which poor women are being used as banks of cheap, unprotected labour in fish processing plants and other industries. The article from Pakistan illustrates this point by highlighting the poor working conditions of women working in *warrah*s—fish processing sheds—and the poor implementation of existing labour laws.

As always, we look forward to articles, news and views from you. Please send these in by 15 February 2005 for inclusion in the next issue of *Yemaya*. In the meantime, Season's Greetings and a Happy New Year!

Inside Pages

Latin America/ Mexico

Street of the Shrimp Ladies

Women shrimp traders in northwestern Mexico have organized to defend their interests, though problems persist

By Maria L. Cruz-Torres, Department of Anthropology, University of California

When one looks at travel brochures or web pages highlighting the tourist attractions of the Mexican port city of Mazatlán, located in the state of Sinaloa (in Mexico's northwest coast), one hears about ecotourism, gift shops, restaurants, nightlife and hotels. One also finds women shrimp traders included among these "attractions." At any time of year—but especially during the coolest months, December through May—tour buses packed with Canadian or American tourists stop by the Street of the Shrimp Ladies so they can look at the shrimp and talk to the women, even though few of these tourists speak Spanish.

Women shrimp traders are such a lively part of the local culture that a play depicting their work and their social life was staged at the Mazatlán Cultural Institute. Working people all over Mazatlán and nearby towns and rural communities are aware of their contribution to the fishing sector and the local economy. Yet for local fishing authorities and the government, they are nearly invisible.

When I started my research, I found an almost complete lack of statistics or written information about them. Besides scattered and limited information, there was no other documentation of the lives lived or jobs performed by these women. Much of the information that I am presenting here, therefore, comes from first-hand observation, oral interviews and a questionnaire that I designed and administered while conducting anthropological field research during the summer of 2004 in Mazatlán.

Here I will discuss the preliminary information elicited by the questionnaire and by oral interviews. The questionnaire's primary goal was to collect basic sociodemographic information that would allow me to draw a more detailed and accurate portrait of women shrimp traders. The questionnaire asked women their age, marital status, number of children, years working as a shrimp trader, and what immediate problems they face. Over a one-month period, I was able to orally administer the questionnaire to 22 out of the 40 women working in the Mazatlán marketplace.

After the completion of questionnaires, I conducted semi-structured oral interviews with the same women who answered the questionnaire. The purpose of these interviews was to collect information on the history and settlement of the fish market, economic and social networks, and household and family relations. The results obtained from the questionnaires and interviews follow.

The average age of the women I questioned is 41, the youngest being 18 and the oldest, 70. Most of the women begin selling shrimp when very young, usually while accompanying their mother or another female family member. Once they learn the trade, they usually start their own shrimp business, either at once or when they get married and start a family of their own.

Forty-five per cent of the women are married and 32 per cent are single mothers. Many of the married women said that they often feel like single mothers because their husbands refuse to help them sell shrimp, take care of the children, and perform domestic chores. Others said that they work not only to support themselves and their children but also their husbands. The lives of both single and married women are permeated by constant work, since when they finish at the marketplace they need to rush home to make dinner, do the laundry, and help their children with school homework.

Most of the women interviewed have children, the average being four. Women with small children (12

years or younger), 41 per cent of the total, must face the daily challenge of finding someone to help them with childcare while they are at the market. Mostly, they rely on relatives, friends or older children to help take care of the young ones. For all but one of the women questioned, shrimp selling is the only income-generating job they have, so they cannot afford to miss a day's work.

The average respondent has been selling shrimp for 19 years. Most of the women started selling shrimp young, as street peddlers going house-to-house and asking people if they wanted to buy shrimp. Sometimes they stationed themselves on a corner of a street and sold their shrimp from there. Neither approach was particularly stable or comfortable.

It was precisely because of this lack of a secure, comfortable space in which to sell shrimp that a number of women decided to get organized 25 years ago. They invaded the street now known as the Street of the Shrimp Ladies and set up shop. At first they faced opposition from government authorities who claimed that they were making the street crowded, dirty and smelly. But with the support of students from the Autonomous University of Sinaloa, they organized protests, sit-ins and hunger strikes until the authorities finally decided to leave them alone.

They later organized a shrimp-sellers' association that is still active. This association has a directorship composed of a president, a secretary and a treasurer. The main object of the association's members is to have more power within the overall political and economic structure of Mazatlán. The association also functions as a support group in which women share their daily challenges, problems, aspirations and accomplishments.

Despite the association's support, there are still many problems that the women must face, both at the marketplace and at home, in order to perform their jobs and attend to the needs of their families. Most of the women I spoke to talked very openly about their problems. The following were most commonly mentioned:

- Lack of government support (credits, facilities, etc.)
- A monthly fee for the use of space that must be paid to municipal authorities, plus an association membership fee.
- Too much competition—all the women are selling the same product to the same clients, which generates conflicts and rivalries.
- Commuting to Mazatlán takes time and energy—some must travel two hours by bus daily.
- Lots of time spent sitting or standing in the heat and sun.
- Long hours—the great majority of the women begin their workday at four in the morning, when the retailers and wholesalers come to supply the women with shrimp and other seafood products, and end around seven or eight at night.
- Haggling—clients do not want to pay the price women ask, and always look for a way of getting cheaper prices.
- Shrimp that are not sold must be beheaded so they do not go bad, but then sell for less because they weigh less.
- The income they obtain is never enough to cover the basic needs of their families.
- There are no economic alternatives—no other work. This is especially crucial during the offseason, because the only shrimp available for sale then are those produced on shrimp farms, which bring a lower price.

Most of these problems are difficult to deal with within the women's association. The pressure to sell shrimp on the same day that the suppliers bring them, lest they go bad, generates animosity and competition among women. Other conflicts, such as the lack of other income-generating activities and the low income obtained from shrimp sales, are related to the structure of the regional Mexican and global economies. Women also mentioned, however, that shrimp trading provides them with benefits that other occupations do not. Among these are freedom, independence, a source of income, and the ability to be their own bosses.

Last October, at least 1,000 people became intoxicated after eating shrimp in the southern Sinaloa region, including Mazatlán. The intoxication was initially attributed to the use of Purina pet food in shrimp fishing. In response, the government implemented a moratorium on the inshore shrimp fisheries until they could verify the cause of the intoxications. This had a tremendous impact upon the local economy; people stopped consuming shrimp. The shrimp traders feared that they were losing their livelihoods.

Women shrimp traders in Mazatlán and nearby rural communities organized a protest, demanding that the health authorities conduct a study to determine the source of the intoxication. Due to pressure from them and the fishermen, the local health department conducted a more rigorous study and discovered that the intoxications were caused by the presence of a bacterium, *Vibrio parahaemolyticus*, in the Huizache-Caimanero lagoon system, one of the most important sources of shrimp in the southern Sinaloa region. This discovery allowed women to take preventive measures, such as not selling shrimp caught in this lagoon.

This is not the first time that women shrimp traders in Mazatlán have organized around an issue that affected all equally, once again proving that Mexican women have the capacity and the knowledge required to generate collective action in defence of their livelihoods and the well-being of their families.

This is, however, the first time that women shrimp traders have appeared in the news—not for breaking the law, but for getting together to make their voices heard. At last, women shrimp traders are becoming visible in the eyes of government officials.

Maria L. Cruz-Torres can be contacted at maria.cruztorres@ucr.edu

Asia

A feminist perspective

This Statement was adopted at the* Asian Regional Consultation on Women in Fisheries, *held in Medan, Indonesia, from 11 to 14 August 2004

We are 53 women and men from the Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Nepal. We have met in Medan, Sumatra, Indonesia, from 11 to 14 August 2004, for the *Asian Regional Consultation on Women in Fisheries*, to analyze the impact of globalization on women in fisheries in the Asian region. This consultation takes forward the reflections and processes that were initiated at the *Asian Fisherfolk Conference: Cut Away the Net of Globalization* that took place in The Prince of Songkhla University, Hat Yai, Thailand from 25 to 29 January 2002.

We meet in Sumatra to express solidarity with the decades-old, yet still ongoing, struggles of coastal fishing communities against destructive fishing technologies, particularly trawling, that are destroying their coastal habitats and resources, their lives and their livelihoods.

This has been an occasion for women and men of fisherfolk organizations, mass-based women's organizations and non-governmental organizations to come together to reflect on, and highlight, the problems being faced by coastal fishing communities due to globalization processes.

It has been an occasion for us to reflect on the vital roles women play within the fisheries, within families and communities and within organizations—roles that need better recognition and valuation.

It has been an occasion for us to define strategies to counter the negative impacts of globalization, to define our vision of development, to draw strength from each other and to bring synergy between our struggles.

The negative impact of neoliberal processes and trends, particularly the liberalization of trade and investment; the promotion of exports; privatization of natural resources; the rollback of the State, and the privatization in the delivery of basic social services; among others, are evident to us.

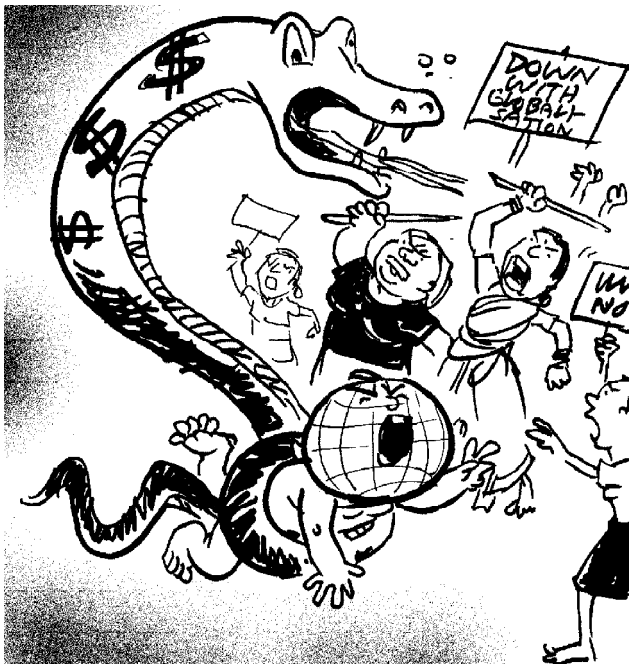
These processes have led to the proliferation of fishing technologies aimed at maximizing production with scant regard for resource sustainability, uncontrolled industrialization, urbanization, infrastructure and tourist development in coastal areas, and big 'development' projects such as mines and dams that negatively affect tail-end coastal ecosystems.

These developments have had devastating consequences for coastal fishing communities. They have led to the degradation and destruction of aquatic resources, loss of income and livelihood, break-up of communities, social problems, loss of traditional systems of knowledge and wisdom, dislocation from fishing grounds, denial of access rights, and violations of human rights.

We endorse fully the statement from the Thailand workshop that analyzed these processes and called for a halt to processes of economic globalization.

We further recognize that such neoliberal policies are experienced in very specific ways by women of fishing communities. As livelihoods from fisheries are rendered more vulnerable, women within fishing communities shoulder the additional burden of having to seek higher incomes.

In many countries, there is a transition from self-employment to wage labour, with no access to social security or decent conditions of work. We oppose the manner in which poor women are being used as banks of cheap, unprotected labour in fish processing plants and other industries.



The withdrawal of the State from provision of basic services such as health and education, and the degradation and privatization of natural resources, impose greater stress and workloads on women, who are responsible for the care and nurture of their families.

We oppose the withdrawal of the State from its role in protecting and promoting the welfare of its citizens while becoming mere agents of international capital. With higher levels of insecurity and stress within families and within communities, women of fishing communities are experiencing greater violence, sexual and otherwise, within and outside the family.

We are particularly concerned that the oceans are being seen not as living systems and sources of food for thousands in our regions, but more as sinks for dumping wastes and for the non-living resources, such as oil, that they are expected to yield.

Equally of concern to us is the projection of aquaculture as the future of fisheries. We have witnessed the negative social and ecological aspects of export-oriented and intensive forms of aquaculture. We are aware that the benefits from aquaculture are going to a few entrepreneurs and corporate houses, while the costs are being borne by our communities. We reject this form of aquaculture development.

While there are laudable efforts to conserve marine resources, without the recognition that fishing communities play an integral part in the marine space, these efforts are, at best, ineffective. Marine conservation efforts should involve fisherfolk and not seek to alienate the livelihoods of the traditional fishing communities. We further reject measures taken in the name of "marine conservation" that are merely disguised trade barriers.

We realize that the nature of ongoing development itself is patriarchal—there is a systemic divide between the public and the private spheres in life and the systemic subjugation of women and of their sexuality, fertility and labour.

This patriarchal paradigm of development puts profit before life and is based on the exploitation of nature and disrespect of life processes. This kind of development jeopardizes the life and livelihoods of our people, while causing irreparable damage to sensitive ecosystems and the biodiversity on which life is sustained.

We understand that these trends need to be challenged and new priorities set. We see the importance of working with a feminist perspective in creating alternatives and putting into play processes that are just, that challenge caste, class and patriarchy, and that are based on the sustainable use of resources.

We call for a people-centred, gender-just, equitable and participatory development, based on the sustainable use and management of natural resources. We call for development that values the resources—human or natural—that go towards the sustenance and nurture of life. To achieve this, we will further our organizing and mobilizing work among women within our own organizations and movements. We stand united in our struggle to fight the systems and structures of globalization.

Asia/ Pakistan

Not a rosy picture

Conditions of work of women workers in warrahs, sheds for processing fish, leave much to be desired, highlighting problems in the implementation of existing labour laws

By Tayyaba Ahmed, a doctoral student at the University of Karachi

More and more women are stepping out to work to supplement the income of their men. This is a positive change in that finally women are also being viewed as providers, compared to their traditional roles as unpaid housekeepers. This may be a sign that women's empowerment is finally taking place, but the picture is not as rosy as it may seem. While within their homes they are under the control of their fathers, husbands or brothers, when they step out, their problems increase, as their employers and society, in general, exploit them. This exploitation may be physical, emotional or even sexual. It brings to the fore a sad picture of human rights violations, and of little effort towards implementing laws and bringing about social awareness to help the victims. An example of this gross negligence is the condition of women who work in Pakistan's *warrahs* (sheds for processing fish), where one can witness human misery and manipulation at its worst.

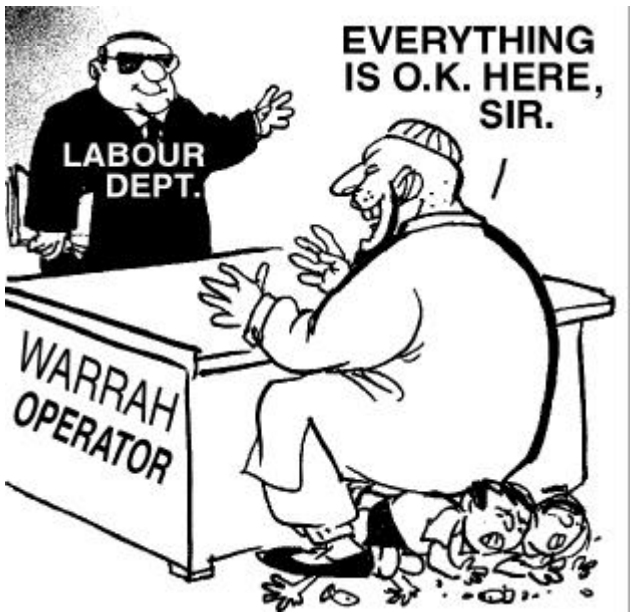
Warrahs are big halls or rooms, measuring 20 ft by 50 ft or more. The walls are typically bare, unplastered cement blocks, and the roofs are made of asbestos or iron sheets. Women workers sit on the floor with their backs towards the walls. The number of women workers (and their children) in each *warrah* ranges between a minimum of 40 and a maximum of 250, depending on its size. Workers employed are usually female, more often than not accompanied by their young children, who also lend a helping hand with their work.

In the fisheries sector, *warrahs* are used for peeling shrimp, cleaning and gutting fish, and extracting meat from crabs, shellfish, etc. The manager/ operator of a *warrah* could be the owner of the premises or the one who has rented it. Typically, the following activities are undertaken in *warrahs*:

- Supply of peeled shrimp, gutted fish, etc. to processing plants on terms and conditions agreed on by both parties. Arranging for raw materials (fish) is the sole responsibility of the operator.
- Peeling/cleaning of fish/ shellfish provided by the processing plants on terms and conditions mutually agreed on by both parties.

In both cases, the managers/operators of the *warrahs* are doing the job for processing plants or for some third party/firm exporting seafood. Hence, they are called contractors in the local fisheries industry.

In some situations, it may be absolutely necessary to give out certain tasks to a contractor. For instance, a small publisher who does not regularly handle bookbinding work, has no option but to get this task done by a professional binder. The binder, in turn, works for many publishers, employing his own labour. Thus, if there is exploitation of labour, it is the binder who is prosecuted, not the publisher who has subcontracted work to the binder.



It is the job of the employer to obtain work from the labour he employs. The job of the Labour Department is to ensure a fair deal for labour and due compliance with labour laws. The contractor has to be treated as an employer and has to be made to comply with labour laws.

With this is mind, one must look at the status of the contractor/owner/operator of the *warrah*. It appears obvious that in the case of fisheries *warrahs* as well, the contractors must be seen as the 'employers', responsible for payment of wages, labour welfare, terms

and conditions of employment, discipline and compliance with labour laws. However, in practice, this does not happen. In general, workers are paid poor wages, made to work for long hours without overtime payment, are not entitled to leave, and have no social security, health or accident coverage, or access to welfare schemes. In other words, laws for the protection and welfare of labour are not adhered to. In fact, the fault is more with the poor enforcement machinery, which is the Labour and Manpower Division, and its failure to deal with such violations in a suitable manner.

There are several provisions in existing labour laws that should apply to the labour employed in the *warrahs*, namely:

- The West Pakistan Industrial and Commercial Employment (Standing Orders) Ordinance, 1968 (section 1 (4) (a)) explicitly covers those "Employed directly or through any other person". In Section 2(b), a commercial establishment is defined to include "the office establishment of a person who for the purpose of fulfilling a contract with the owner of any commercial establishment or industrial establishment, employs workmen" and "such other establishments or class thereof, as Government may, by notification in the official Gazette, declare to be commercial establishment for the purpose of this Ordinance."
- According to Section 2 (xxx) of the Industrial Relations Ordinance, "workman" means any person who is employed in an establishment or industry for hire or reward either directly or through a contractor …", and, according to Section 2(xiv), "industry means any business, trade, manufacture, calling, service, employment or occupation".
- The Workmen's Compensation Act, 1923 ((section2 (1) (n) and Schedule II) covers numerous types of work, including those of contractors.
- Section 2 (ii) (g) of the Payment of Wages Act, 1936 refers to "establishment of a contractor who directly or indirectly employs persons…."
- According to section 2(h) of the Factories Act, 1934, "worker" means a person employed directly or through an agency..." in work "connected with the subject of the manufacturing process."
- According to section 2 (9) of the Provincial Employees' Social Security Ordinance, 1965, "employer" means in the case of works executed or undertakings carried on by any contractor or licensee on behalf of the State, the contractor or licensee working for the State, and, in every other case, the owner of the industry, business, undertaking or establishment in which an employee works, and includes any agent, manager or representative of the owner."
- According to the West Pakistan Shops and Establishment Ordinance, 969 (section 2 (g)), an employee "means any person employed, whether directly or otherwise, about the business of an establishment." As per section 2(g), the Ordinance can be applied by Gazette notification to any other establishment not presently covered by the Ordinance.
- According to the Employees' Old-Age Benefits Act, 1976 (section 2 (b)), "employee" means any person employed, whether directly or through any other person, for wages or other-wise in any industry, and as per section 2 (g), "industry" means "any business, trade, undertaking, manufacture or calling of employers, and includes any calling, service, employment, handicraft, industrial occupation or avocation of workmen."
- According to Employees Cost of Living (Relief) Act, 1973 (section 2 (b)), "employee" means "any person employed, whether directly or through any other person . . . in any undertaking", and, as per section 2 (d), "undertaking" "includes any class of establishments which the Federal Government may, by notification in the official Gazette, declare to be undertakings for the purpose of this Act."
- According to the Minimum Wages Ordinance, 1961 (section 2 (9)), a "worker" means "any person including an apprentice employed in any industry…" and, as per section 2 (6), "industry" has been assigned the same meanings as in Industrial Relations Ordinance, *viz.* "any business, trade, manufacture, calling service, employment or occupation."

It is clear from the above that contractors, such as the owners/operators of *warrahs*, are already covered under most labour laws. If violation of labour laws and consequent exploitation continues to take place, the responsibility falls on those who fail to enforce the law. In order to make the law more effective, a provision could be added, making it mandatory to register

addresses of worksites and offices of contractors with the Labour Department. Regular inspection of such worksites, maintenance of proper records and submission of returns by them must be made compulsory, as for other employers. These measures can check the abuses of the contract system. There is no need for any fresh legislation. The laws are already there—it is only that the people in power need to set right their priorities. Only then can this gross exploitation of labour be stopped.

Tayyaba Ahmed can be contacted at sweetie2kewl@hotmail.com

European Union/ The Netherlands

Bouncing back

Women in the fishing community of Wieringen have revived the local economy by creating a local fresh-fish market

By Wilma Koster, a member of *VinVis*, the Women in Fisheries Network of the Netherlands

Our fishing community of Wieringen, a former island at the top of the Netherlands, has a long history of fishing. In the past, sailing boats were used, but today we have mechanized boats. Our community uses primarily small-scale boats (below 300 hp), and the main commercial species we catch are shrimp, plaice, sole, shellfish and nephrops.

We sell our fish and shrimps through the auction, which is obligatory in our country, and every day, have to wait and watch for the price the commercial agent will bid. Most of the time, we do not receive a good or fair price for fish that is first-class and caught the day before. The reason is that it is sold in the same market alongside the catches of the big boats.

Since we are wives of fishermen, we know how important it is to get a good price for our fish. We raise our children, do a lot of work ashore for our fishing enterprise, and sometimes also have to join our husbands on fishing trips when they need an extra hand. It is, therefore, not very encouraging that despite so much hard work, the prices for our fish are low. This was one of the major reasons why the business in our community was dying and the fisheries was no longer an attractive proposition for the younger generation.

When our mayor called a meeting to discuss what could be done to revive our local economy, we seized the opportunity to talk about the need to create a local fish market where we could sell our best fresh fish. As this proposal was accepted, we took the challenge and set to work to see that it would be a success. It was very important that the whole community got involved. Through our involvement with *VinVis* (the Women in Fisheries Network of the Netherlands), we particularly encouraged other women of our community to join us in this initiative.

A local working group was formed and its first task was to make a detailed study of the needs and the possibilities. Based on the outcome of this study, we made a plan. The aim of the fresh-fish market was to promote the consumption of fresh fish caught by our local fishing boats, and also to promote our local economy to make sure that the whole community would benefit. Since we were confident that our plan would work, the mayor gave us the investment money from Provincial and European Union (EU) funds to organize the market. This was a loan to the local working group.

In the summer of 2004, when the tourists came to our village—which is a very beautiful area in the north of the Netherlands—we launched the fresh-fish market, to be held every Saturday. In order not to violate government regulations, we obeyed the rules, and our fishermen took their fish first to the regulated auction. There, our group bought the fish, always bidding higher than the rest. In this way, our fisher husbands got more money than they usually would get in the auction. We then brought the fish to our market and sold it for a price that was acceptable for the consumer as well.

Besides selling fresh fish, we also informed the public about how and where the fish are caught. We also organized cooking demonstrations. Nowadays, consumers mostly buy fish in the big supermarkets, already processed into ready-to-eat products, which only have to be put in the microwave. If we want to make the consumer buy more of our local fresh fish, we must teach them how to clean and prepare the fish. We, therefore, held cooking demonstrations, let the people taste our seafood dishes, and distributed flyers with the recipes of the fish that we cooked that day. We also launched a website where we gave weekly updates about the catch of the day to be sold in the market, fish recipes, cultural programmes, and so on.

And, mind you, it worked wonderfully! The word spread and every Saturday we had many tourists, locals and buyers from restaurants coming to our village. People bought our fish, ate and enjoyed it. People visited our fishing boats and met with the fishermen. They listened to our songs and folk stories. They also visited our local shops and restaurants and some of those that were otherwise closing down, bounced back to life. The whole community benefited from the fresh-fish market.

In the first year, our work for the fresh-fish market had been voluntary. The extra money we earned was used to pay back our investment loan. Now that the market has proved its success and has come to stay, some of us will earn some money for the work in the market. We also plan to expand the market with other local products from our region, such as ecologically friendly farm products.

While we are very happy and proud of our achievement, we must say it has been hard but collective work. It brought us together in the community, and if things continue to go the way they do at present, then our children will also be proud to continue to fish, and, more than ever, our community will continue to survive.

But we also want to tell you that EU marketing regulations are not there to help small producers like us. They are there only to strangle us to death. The sanitary regulations that they impose upon us are unreal and even unnecessary. They make us feel guilty of poisoning the customer. Why should we, who live off the fishing, want to kill our customers? And why do customers believe that fish that comes in a packet from a big company is 'pure'? Such packaged fish is often cleaned by workers in Third World countries, who are paid really low wages. So it is 'pure' and cheap.

We think such marketing regulations are made only to benefit the big companies, which are interested only in maximizing profits, while our governments should actually be concerned about safeguarding the livelihoods of the coastal fishers and small communities here at home.

Wilma Koster can be contacted at W.kosterw@quicknet.nl

European Union/ United Kingdom

Get on with it…?

The future of the fishing communities of Shetland Islands is threatened by government regulations

By Donna Polson, who is with the fishermen's wives association, FISHING SOS SHETLAND

In 2002-2003, Shetland's fishing industry was reduced in size due to the de-commissioning scheme; some other boats were sold or lost. The result of this was that the Shetlands whitefish fleet was slashed by 40 per cent in just two years. Shetland is now left with an ageing whitefish fleet of only 20 boats, barely enough to keep the whole infrastructure going.

On top of this, the worst yet fisheries deal possible for the Shetland fleet, was enforced in December 2003. A haddock permit scheme was introduced with the intention of protecting cod stocks and ultimately limiting fishing opportunities in certain areas. The areas most affected are where our local fleet works. In order to fish legally and remain viable, Shetland's whitefish boats must now buy days and quota—not only does this increase overheads but it also diminishes profits.

With the demise of the fleet, job losses were inevitable. In Shetland's most fishery-dependent community, the island of Whalsay, the young who had set their hearts on being fishermen, now leave the isle to train as sea cadets. Experienced fishermen, now made unemployed through the decommissioning scheme, have found there

are no jobs for them on board the remaining whitefish vessels—some have retrained, a few found alternative employment, and others remain unemployed.

Losing boats has hit the community hard—the effect is profoundly felt. Remaining fishermen and families now feel disillusioned about the future of the industry. One fisherman left with his family to find alternative training in England.

The result of all this has been a dramatic drop in births in Whalsay—from an average of 16 to 17 babies each year, only 2 babies were born in 2004. Island midwives are finding they can no longer maintain their qualification at such a level and have to do their training elsewhere.

It has been said that we have not yet felt the full effects of the downturn in our industry. However, the knock-on effects are slowly but surely making themselves felt by all sectors of the community, from shopkeepers to nurses.

Due to the fishing restrictions placed on the local boats and their need to buy days and quota, there is less money for boats to spend. This, along with the fact the fleet has been reduced, has affected all ancillary businesses such as engineering companies, net menders and shops, to name but a few. And, of course, the uncertainty of wages affects families too. Many fishermen's wives find there is now a need to work in order to supplement the income from fishing. The uncertainty of whether there will be a wage to pay household bills, including the mortgage, places a great amount of stress upon families.

Every year, fishing families wonder if there will be a job for them the following year. These yearly negotiations are a cruel way to treat our fishermen. Many fishermen and their families would gladly see the back of these December fishing councils. They are held at a time when many fishermen are at home for a break. But instead of getting away from all the pressures of work, they find insurmountable stress put on them as they wait to see what deal is made. This detracts from what Christmas should be—time spent with family.

Furthermore, after Christmas, fishermen must take the time to find out what the new regulations are, how they are implemented and what effect they will have on fishing activities. And behind every fisherman, there is a family and community anxiously waiting to see if they can survive the next 12 months.

The restrictions placed upon the fleet last year have had a devastating effect upon Shetland's communities, with places such as Whalsay depopulating. If more constraints are placed upon the Shetland fleet, they undoubtedly will have to move away. Families will have to leave too—and that would mean an end for Shetland's fishing communities.

Our community needs a boost; it needs to know that there is a future in the whitefish sector and ultimately a future for our coastal fishing communities. Jobs need to be created to give the young who wish to stay at home an opportunity to do so. Training and job opportunities must also be created for those men forced out of the fishing.

Furthermore, after Christmas, fishermen must take the time to find out what the new regulations are, how they are implemented and what effect they will have on fishing activities. And behind every fisherman, there is a family and community anxiously waiting to see if they can survive the next 12 months.

The restrictions placed upon the fleet last year have had a devastating effect upon Shetland's communities, with places such as Whalsay depopulating. If more constraints are placed upon the Shetland fleet, they undoubtedly will have to move away. Families will have to leave too—and that would mean an end for Shetland's fishing communities.

Our community needs a boost; it needs to know that there is a future in the whitefish sector and ultimately a future for our coastal fishing communities. Jobs need to be created to give the young who wish to stay at home an opportunity to do so. Training and job opportunities must also be created for those men forced out of the fishing.

Fisheries policymakers must realize that there is more at stake than fish stocks. Many of Shetland's communities are dependent upon the fishing industry—it is their livelihood. More thought must be given to our coastal communities and the effect fishing policy has upon them; they cannot simply be left, as we have been, to "get on with it".

Donna Polson can be contacted at donnappolson05@aol.com

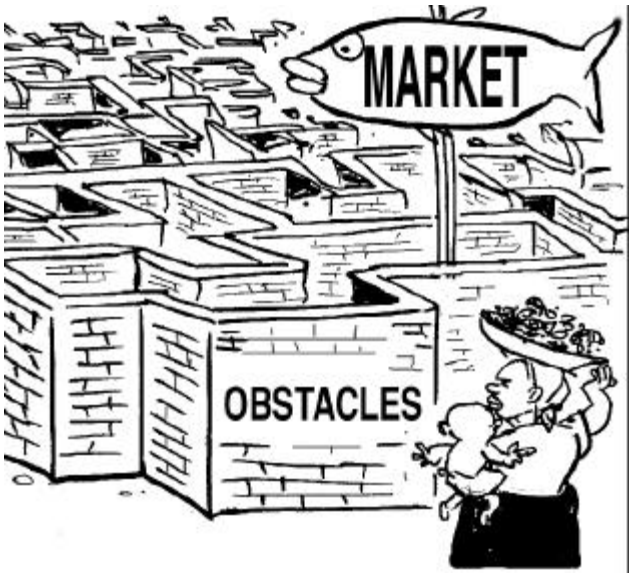
Film/ Africa

Keeping people poor…

Excerpted from a report by Susan Ellis, Washington File Staff Writer, on the Uhuru Policy Group website (http://www.uhurugroup.com/news/041204.htm)

During a recent 5,000-mile, six-week, soul-searching journey across the length of Africa—through Egypt, Sudan, Congo, Angola, Namibia and South Africa—Kenyan June Arunga found a reason why so many of her African neighbours are mired in poverty: boundaries and the law raise barriers to free trade.

At a March 30 showing of excerpts of her documentary, "The Devils' Footpath," at the CATO Institute, a think-tank in Washington, D.C., she described an epiphany she had on the road to South Africa: "I met women in Namibia who were fishing in one part of a river and they couldn't sell their fish 10 minutes away where a market was located. They had to sneak around and dodge the immigration officials."



Her voice broke before she was able to continue. "I just couldn't understand why boundaries that were drawn in some European capital 100 years ago are so stringently enforced and it's made so hard for people," she said.

This total inability to travel throughout Africa, great distances or small, she saw as key to why the continent languishes behind the rest of the world in commerce. On the plight of the Namibian fisherwomen, she added bitterly, "And then their leaders in the capital, in the meantime, are writing poverty reduction strategy papers to try to put more food on their tables!"

Arunga shared the podium with Ghanaian-born scholar George Ayittey, a professor in American University's economics department, who noted that today's African leaders "all condemn the artificial colonial borders, yet they have been very vigorous and aggressive in enforcing these borders. Why? Because they use these borders to collect revenue."

"In traditional Africa," he said, "there weren't these impediments. There was free flow of goods and people across Africa. Pre-colonial Africa was full of free trade routes—the trans-Saharan route was one notable example. Timbuktu, for example, was one great big market town. So, traditionally, Africans have always engaged in trade and always moved from one place to another to engage in trade. But the governments that we've had since independence have been so anti-market and so anti-trade, these governments have literally built walls around their various economies."

While her trek through Africa demonstrated the wrenching difficulties many Africans face just to survive and earn a living, Arunga said, "it also exposed to me just how much people can take care of themselves."

"In an internally displaced people's camp in the Congo, where there were 17,000 survivors of the Congolese war," she said, "these people living there were selling soap from Kenya, cooking oil from Uganda; and I kept on wondering, how did they get this stuff? They risk their lives to go through war zones to get this stuff and get it [to the camp] and sell it to their fellow countrymen who live inside this camp where they have to be protected by the UN."

When she showed the BBC documentary to an audience of newspeople in England, she was stunned when a very prominent journalist asked, "Is there any entrepreneurship in Africa?" "These people in this camp came immediately to mind," she said, "and I looked at her and I didn't know where to start!"

Arunga's voice broke as she exclaimed, "All there is in Africa is entrepreneurship! If it wasn't for entrepreneurship, I think I wouldn't be standing here today! It was because of my mother and her friends starting their own financial system to bypass [Kenya's]

financial system they couldn't get access to, and saving money and loaning it to each other and investing it ... so that I've become what I've become; and so these and more [examples] are why I believe in the human person, the individuals' capability to take care of themselves; that people are rational; that people don't like suffering; that people don't like begging."

Arunga is only 22 and a law student now. She remembers that her parents, as well as those of her friends, encouraged their children to work very hard so they wouldn't end up on the street. "So to see all the legal obstacles that stand in the way of people becoming everything that they have in them to become just gets me in this state and has basically got me trying to expose some of these things," she said.

The sad fact, she says, is that "many of [the legal obstacles] can be changed by the stroke of a pen. It's not somebody outside who will change them. I think some of our leaders just need to be held to account so that they do these things. Most Africans don't need to be convinced about private enterprise working, about the benefits of markets, because they're already doing it. Most of them just have to do it on the black market because most of the stuff they're doing is not legal [according to the unjust laws]."

Asked what she plans for the future, Arunga said, "Basically, my experience making this film just illustrated lots of ridiculous things which I subsequently am planning to [use as a basis to] make satirical films because I think that's the only way to expose how you can legally impoverish people."

After all, she said with just a hint of irony, "It's such a full-time job to keep people poor; you need such resources, you need armies."

YEMAYA
ICSF's Newsletter on Gender and Fisheries

Published by
International Collective in Support of Fishworkers
27 College Road, Chennai 600 006
India
Tel: (91) 44 2827 5303
Fax: (91) 44 2825 4457
Email: icsf@vsnl.com
Web site: http://www.icsf.net

Edited by
Chandrika Sharma

Printed at
Sri Venkatesa Printing House, Chennai

Please do send us comments and suggestions to make the newsletter more relevant. We would also like names of other people who could be interested in being part of this initiative. We look forward to hearing from you and to receiving regular write-ups for the newsletter.

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