



39 Years in Support of  
Small-scale Fishworkers



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# Yemaya

ICSF'S NEWSLETTER ON GENDER AND FISHERIES

## From the Editor

A series of regional workshops were held through the years 2022 and 2023 in Europe, Africa, Latin America, and Asia to mark the International Year of Artisanal Fisheries and Aquaculture (IYAFA) 2022. The workshops raised several issues that were common across regions.

In these workshops, women fishers discussed the multiple roles they played. Women are active in primary fishing activities, including shore-based subsistence fishing and fishing on boats; they are the main producers of processed fish products; they contribute significantly to fish trade; they provide allied services in sales and transportation. Women in Africa and Asia also participate in fish exports through cross-border trade.

However, women's work is also largely invisible, and lacks recognition by policy makers. The discussions highlighted the need to make the roles of women more visible, through better research into their roles, and improved data collection by the government. The need for capacity building among women was stressed, so that they can gain the skills to be more competitive in the sector.

The workshop discussions also noted with concern the persistence of violence that women experienced at homes, in communities, and in their workplaces. The need to ensure greater gender sensitivity, through training, advocacy and positive policy measures was repeatedly stressed.

Arguably, the single most important takeaway from the IYAFA workshops was the need for women to organize to gain visibility and amplify their demands. A case study from Galicia showed among shellfish gatherers, while women made up 32.88 percent of all guild members, they have only 4.76 percent representation in leadership positions in fisheries associations. At the same time, the workshop discussions also recognized the fact of a growing number of women's organizations in the fisheries sector.

During this period, a cross-regional study brought out the impact of capitalist development on small-scale fishing communities and their livelihoods. Case studies highlighted several issues of concern: in Kenya, small-scale seaweed farmers experienced the adverse effects of steel, cement and other forms of factory production; In several parts of India, the growth of coastal aquaculture, tourism and port construction has adversely affected traditional fisheries; in Sri Lanka, both large scale development projects like the Port City as well as environmental disasters like the X-Press Pearl ship oil spill, have affected traditional fishing livelihoods already reeling under the economic crisis the country faces; in Cambodia, tourism development has taken over coastal lands, restricting women's access to near-sea fishing.

Women are often also the victims of the risks inherent in fishing activities that help poor communities eke out a livelihood. In the 24 Parganas region in India, several widows of fishers killed by tigers, have struggled for years to gain recognition of their status and the compensation due to them from the Government.

The struggles of women fishers across the world highlight the need for gender sensitive policy making, while also affirming the role of organization for women to access their rights within fishing communities. ■

# What women want

## Learnings from regional workshops held across the world to mark the 2022 International Year of Artisanal Fisheries and Aquaculture

By **Kyoko Kusakabe** (kyokok@ait.asia), Professor, Gender and Development Studies, Head Department of Development and Sustainability, School of Environment, Resources and Development, Asian Institute of Technology, Thailand

The invisibility of women in fisheries has been discussed for some time now, but was brought into sharp focus in a series of regional workshops that took place from 2022 to 2023 in Europe, Africa, Latin America, and Asia to mark the International Year of Artisanal Fisheries and Aquaculture (IYAFA) 2022. In these workshops, women fishers spoke out, shared their experiences, pointed out the issues they face and developed recommendations for gender equality.

More and more studies and reports are highlighting women's role in, and contributions to, the fisheries. The Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (the SSF Guidelines) have strong gender components. Many fisheries conferences, workshops, and meetings now include gender

sessions and discussions. There is greater official recognition of women in fisheries in some countries. For example, in Indonesia, women fishers used to be categorized as housewives in terms of their occupation and were therefore excluded from holding fisher identity cards; but now, they are officially registered as fishers, enabling them to access subsidies and other support targeted at fishers by the government.

The IYAFA workshops highlighted the various roles that women play in the fisheries. Women work as fishers on boats and as producers of post-harvest products, as porters and transporters, as large and small traders, and also in ancillary services such as selling food to fishers to take on boats. In both Africa and Asia, women fish traders export fish through border trade.

Women have always engaged in fishing. Across regions, women have songs for the ocean

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Group photo from Asia Workshop: IYAFA 2022-Celebrating Sustainable and Equitable Small-scale Fisheries, 5 to 8 May 2022, Bangkok, Thailand

During the *IYAF Asia Workshop: Celebrating Sustainable and Equitable Small-Scale Fisheries*, which took place in Bangkok, Thailand from 5-8 May 2022, one day was dedicated to a participatory exchange on women and gender in small-scale fisheries. The aims of the exchange were to reflect on the challenges women face in both harvest and post-harvest work; share inspiring examples of women's organizations and mobilization; amplify women's voices; and develop an Action Plan for the Asian region.

Participants in the workshop included representatives of small-scale fisher and fishworker associations, cooperatives, trade unions, community-based organizations, and non-governmental organizations from eleven South and Southeast Asian countries – namely Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam. Half of the workshop's 60 participants were women, with a wealth of experience in organizing and mobilizing other women in their communities to raise their voices and tackle the challenges they are facing in fisheries.

Women experience a range of diverse challenges across the Asian region. Despite different local and national contexts, they face many similar obstacles, including lack of access to fisheries resources, spaces to sell fish, participation in decision-making processes, opportunities to organize, education, training and technology. Women often experience a triple burden – trying to balance household responsibilities; harvest and pre- and post-harvest activities; and participating in community activities and organizations.

The women participating in the Asia workshop highlighted the importance of uniting their struggles and working together to find creative solutions to tackle the challenges they are facing. They collectively pinpointed several actions, listed below, that need to be taken in the Asian region:

- 1) **Women's labour must be more widely recognized** for its crucial contributions to the fisheries sector, including household responsibilities (caring for families and children); harvesting (fishing and mollusk gathering); and pre- and post-harvest work (preparing for fishing, mending gear, processing and selling). This work is too often invisible, and seen as a familial duty without economic compensation, failing to acknowledge the fundamental role this work plays in the functioning of the sector.
- 2) **Women's organizations and networks must be established** as spaces where women can discuss common challenges, support each other, collectively develop ways to address the issues they are facing, and amplify their voices. These organizations and networks should be established by women in fishing communities themselves, with the technical and logistical support of allied groups and organizations. This also helps to foster valuable alliances with like-minded groups. Existing women's organizations need to be supported and strengthened in order to continue to grow, become more visible, and provide spaces for the next generations of leaders.
- 3) **Family support must be encouraged** to facilitate women's participation in organizations, networks and community work. Many family members worry that women's participation in community activities will interfere with their household responsibilities or put them in danger for engaging in public activism. Women who are dependent on their husband's income are often not able to access funds to travel to mobilizations or other events. Efforts should be made at the community and family level to discuss these issues and find appropriate context-specific ways to address them.
- 4) **Training programmes must be set up** to provide support and guidance to the next generation of women leaders, including opportunities to learn from and be inspired by others in their communities. This is particularly important for empowering and building the confidence of young women and educating them about their rights as community members. Women-led organizations can establish their own networks to mentor and train women in their communities, while allied groups and organizations can provide support and resources (technical, information, funding) for such programmes.
- 5) **Access to capacity-building opportunities** for women at the community level must be facilitated and supported by governments and local organizations, including access to education and training programmes to build knowledge, skills and technology literacy. Support – such as transportation, child care and funding – should also be provided in order to facilitate women's participation in such programmes.
- 6) **Spaces must be opened up for women to participate** in fisheries governance and co-management processes. Women have the right to a say in programmes and processes that directly affect them. Their direct participation will ensure that their voices are heard, and that they can contribute their knowledge and experience to developing programmes for addressing the obstacles they face and enhancing their opportunities. Community committees should ensure equal participation of male and female representatives, and women's representation must be real and equitable, and not just tokenism.
- 7) **Data collection on women** working in fisheries must be expanded significantly in order to develop a better picture of the contributions they make to the sector, the challenges they face, and what is needed to address these challenges. More data on women working in inland fisheries is particularly important. Women themselves should be directly involved in the collection of this data, as they are best situated to connect with other women in their communities, while governments and fisheries departments should include gender disaggregated information in fisheries databases.
- 8) **Gender-sensitivity in fisheries policies must be improved** in order to ensure that differences in roles and responsibilities in the sector are not glossed over. Women are too often excluded from social security protection and become dependent on male family members to access government support, such as loans, healthcare, unemployment and life insurance, and childcare subsidies. Women should be able to register themselves and access services directly in order to facilitate empowerment and independence. 📌



Artisanal fishworkers' representatives from 16 Latin American and Caribbean countries convened on Ilha do Cardoso Island in the State of São Paulo, Brazil, for a regional workshop organized by ICSF in collaboration with CONFREM, as part of the International Year of Artisanal Fisheries and Aquaculture 2022 (IYAFA - 2022) to discuss the regional challenges and strategies for the sector.

The workshop titled "IYAFA 2022 Workshop in Latin America and the Caribbean: Celebrating Sustainable and Equitable Small-Scale Fisheries", witnessed fishers, both men and women, jointly crafting an action plan for gender equity in the region, following the provisions for the implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (the SSF Guidelines).

The participants acknowledged that public policies for gender equity are not at the same level of implementation across Latin America and the Caribbean. Where legal systems are lagging, efforts must be made to advance new legislation, projects, and actions to support women's rights to protect their mental, physical and occupational wellbeing. The importance of safeguarding women's traditional and customary knowledge and practices, vital to sustaining economic and social welfare as well as the way of life of traditional fishing communities, was repeatedly highlighted. The workshop emphasized the need for the full recognition of women's contribution to fisheries management and environmental governance as well as their role in safeguarding food security.

The participants highlighted the following strategies, to be further developed by fishermen and fisherwomen's organizations, supporters, and policymakers:

- Create and/or implement public policies for women, with efficient monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to ensure the effective implementation of these policies.
- Ensure that fisherwomen are aware of their legal rights; promote training on women's rights; ensure that these rights are well reflected in public policies in all spheres as well as in the functioning of artisanal fishing organizations;
- Ensure that governmental and non-governmental organizations gain capacity and are aware of the legal rights and protections due to fisherwomen; that these rights are fully implemented and that new regulation is enacted, as needed, to enable their full implementation;
- Promote and strengthen debates on the violations of women's rights in the region in order to foster pathways towards a new culture of respect and appreciation of women;
- Recognize as traditional rights the customary practices and rules established of communities and guarantee that customary and traditional tenure systems accommodate constitutional or legal reforms that strengthen the rights of women;
- Enhance projects and norms that promote women's participation and leadership in decision-making roles in fishers' organizations and other decision-making arenas;
- Make women's work in artisanal fisheries' value-chains more visible and valued, compensate their domestic services, and support their economic diversification if needed. All stages of the fisheries value chain should guarantee equal payment for women and men for the same work;
- Promote peer-to-peer learning among women with regard to their equitable integration in fisheries-related work and to support their economic activities.
- Develop strategies for valuing and developing the knowledge and skills of fisherwomen, who demonstrate competence both at the level of domestic finance management as well as the management of work in the fisheries value chain;
- Create and implement strategic plans for gender equality at all levels (community, organizations, and public authorities)
- Plan and implement community work routines and tasks in ways that do not burden fisherwomen with work overload;
- Provide economic instruments (programmes and projects) exclusively for women, to suit their interests and capabilities;
- Negotiate pro-women banking schemes with differentiated financing options that prioritize women and support women-led initiatives.
- Ensure gender equity as a fundamental criterion and priority in the design and support of all initiatives to be implemented in artisanal fishing territories across Latin America and the Caribbean.
- Promote education on gender equity across generations through family education programmes and school curricula.
- Build capacity and develop educational strategies directed towards men on sexual violence, drug abuse, alcoholism and conflict resolution, highlighting the impact of alcoholism on violence against women;
- Promote access to and adoption of new technologies, such as fishing craft and gear, personal safety equipment, and infrastructure, by women;
- Mobilize media to spread public awareness on women's participation in artisanal fisheries, and to end taboos and barriers with regard to women's participation in harvesting and other roles along fish value chains;
- Use communication tools to dispel myths, such as, for example, the myth that menstruating women cannot go fishing, and other stigmas that discriminate against women;
- Promote the sharing of information and learning in schools about the role of women in artisanal fisheries.

- Ensure the availability of specialized and humane services that recognize and address the occupational health hazards of women fishers;
- Combat water and air pollution to protect fisherwomen's health;
- Protect social security rights of all women fishers and fishworkers, whether documented or not;
- Denounce all forms of violence, and the culture of violence, against fisherwomen. Femicide must be firmly dealt with at all levels of society;
- Disseminate information about laws, psychological services, self-defence skills, and specialized legal protections to fisherwomen and their families, as well as to victims of violence, and put in place support networks for fisherwomen, with shelter, financial support, and protection for their children;
- Highlight the institutional violence that affects women fishers as well as the need to ensure the protection of children and the provisioning of maintenance to affected families of fishers;
- Ensure conflict resolution training for fisherwomen and create programmes for young women in conflict situations;
- Guarantee access to counselling services for fisherwomen, with the assurance of home- or community-based care;
- Ensure psychological care for women suffering all types of violence, as well as access to domestic services, labour participation and child care;
- Promote legal services in cases of violence against women;
- Facilitate access to organizations that provide preventive health and legal services to women;
- Promote gender training to governmental or civil society agencies that serve women;
- Promote educational programmes to advance sexual self-care and support in all artisanal fishing territories;
- Deepen discussions about women's bodies, violence, health, and reproductive rights;
- Preserve and value women's traditional knowledge on medicinal plants in public health policies;
- Create new laws and policies on gender equity in collaboration with fisherwomen;
- Establish the regular exchange of information and impart specific training to empower fisherwomen to exercise their rights, including through the sharing of lessons learned on the implementation of different national strategies in relation to gender equity for empowerment and capacity building. **■**

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Group photo from Latin America and the Caribbean Workshop: IYAFA 2022-Celebrating Sustainable and Equitable Small-scale Fisheries, Brazil, 2-5 November 2022

During the *IYAEA Africa Workshop: Celebrating Sustainable and Equitable Small-Scale Fisheries*, which took place in Accra, Ghana from 15-18 February 2023, one full day was devoted to participatory exchanges on women and gender in small-scale fisheries. The aims of the exchange were to reflect on the challenges women face in both harvest and post-harvest work; share inspiring examples of women's organizations and mobilization; amplify women's voices; and develop an Action Plan for the African region.

Participants in the workshop included representatives of small-scale fisher and fishworker associations, cooperatives, trade unions, community-based organizations, and non-governmental organizations from 16 African countries – namely Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Djibouti, The Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Mauritania, Nigeria, Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Tanzania, Togo, Tunisia, and Uganda. Half of the workshop's 51 participants were women, with a wealth of experience in organizing and mobilizing other women in their communities to raise their voices and collectively tackle the challenges they are facing in fisheries.

Despite different local and national contexts, women across the African region face similar challenges and obstacles, including lack of access to fisheries resources; safe and clean spaces to process and sell fish; participation in decision-making processes; support for organizing and setting up cooperatives and associations; finance; education and training opportunities. However, the women participating in the Africa workshop also shared their experiences of agency and innovativeness, illustrating their capacities for resilience which can be emulated and shared. They highlighted the importance of uniting their struggles and working together to find creative solutions to tackle the challenges they are facing. Through collective discussions, they pinpointed several concrete actions, listed below, that need to be taken in the African region:

- 1) **Capacity-development, education and training opportunities** for women must be established, with facilitation and support from governments and local organizations. These opportunities should be centred upon strengthening women's voices and knowledge of their rights; educational support enabling girls to stay in school longer; capacity-development for women leaders (particularly youth) in small-scale fishing communities; and fish processing techniques that allow women to work more safely and hygienically. Financial, logistical and institutional support is crucial during such trainings and to follow-up on training outcomes.
- 2) **Women's participation in fisheries decision-making spaces** must be strengthened in order for women to be able to actively contribute to processes that directly affect them. Structures in fisheries must begin at the grassroots level to ensure decision-making is actually taking concrete community issues into account. There must be more deliberate action taken to achieve gender transformation, including creating spaces and platforms for women to voice the issues they are facing.
- 3) **Preferential access must be provided for women to access financial support**, such as grants, credit and loans, that support their activities in fisheries. This includes support for setting up their own harvesting, processing or selling businesses; investing in new harvesting gear or processing tools (including new technologies); paying membership fees to cooperatives or associations; or for enrolling in skills training programmes.
- 4) **The establishment of cooperatives, associations and other organizations** should be prioritized by women working in fisheries, with technical and financial support from governments and allied organizations. These organizations should remain independent from external influences and be properly registered according to national regulations. Existing organizations must also be supported in order to strengthen and expand capacities. Women's organizations should focus on providing spaces to discuss and develop strategies for addressing common challenges, while opportunities are created for organizations to network, share experiences and collaborate in order to facilitate unity and collective action.
- 5) **Mechanisms must be put in place to support grassroots women's organizations directly**, allowing them to access financial and other support independently, and to determine programmes and activities based on their community needs. External organizations should not determine what interventions and outcomes are needed without first taking community voices into account. Women's organizations should also receive leadership and skills training in order to strengthen their capacities in resource mobilization; democratic governance; conflict management; and advocacy.
- 6) **Awareness must be raised about the challenges women in fisheries are facing and their innovativeness**, highlighting the importance of their roles in addressing issues like climate change, pollution and declining resources in their communities. Women are often the first to take responsibility for working toward sustainable fisheries and resource use, and yet their crucial contributions are too often unrecognized. Scaling up advocacy work and information sharing on women's roles and emulating innovative and collaborative efforts being made that support women-led fish processing and trading activities should be prioritized.
- 7) **Action must be taken all along the fisheries value chain to prevent waste and food loss**, which have direct impacts on women's livelihoods. This includes investment in landing sites and infrastructure, smoking and processing facilities, storage and refrigeration, adequate packaging, hygiene and food safety training. Women's organizations should also be provided with financial support or insurance policies for their members to recoup losses when they lose a significant amount of their fisheries products due to adverse weather or breakdown of storage facilities.
- 8) **Governments should scale-up their support for women in fisheries**, including through the development of gender-sensitive policies and the establishment of gender departments or committees which are directly responsible for addressing gender-based challenges and obstacles in fishing communities. Such departments or committees should also be carefully trained on the crosscutting gender dimension of the *Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries* (the SSF Guidelines) and contribute to the development of national plan of action for implementing the SSF Guidelines. **■**

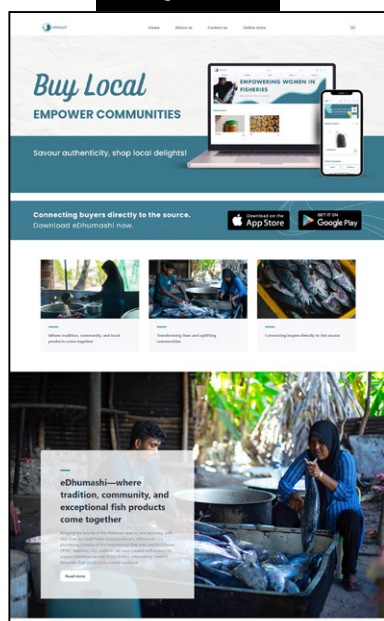




Group photo from Africa Workshop: IYAF 2022-Celebrating Sustainable and Equitable Small-scale Fisheries, 15-18 February 2023

## eDhumashi digital platform

What's New,  
Webby?



eDhumashi is a Maldivian online platform which connects women fishworkers and processors directly with consumers. The name of the platform comes from *dhumashi*, the Dhivehi word for fish rack, a symbol of the rich and diverse small-scale fisheries culture of the Maldives. eDhumashi allows small scale fishers to market their fishery and local home-based products to a wide audience by leveraging digital trade. The program has been developed by the International Pole and Line Foundation (IPNLF Maldives) with the support of the Ocean Innovation Challenge, a program of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

The platform is available on both Google Play Store and Apple App Store, in both Dhivehi and English, making the platform accessible to producers and consumers. The application itself is simple to navigate. It offers a variety of fishery products including smoked tuna, as well as home-based products, such as *bondji*, a sweet coconut delicacy, cookies, *laddoos* and masalas.

eDhumashi enables women in fisheries to boost their incomes and take ownership and control of their marketing and branding, all the while taking advantage of an expanded market. Earlier, women fish processors did not receive competitive pricing for their products, which were sent to larger centers like Malé; now however they are able to connect directly to buyers anywhere in the Maldives. In order to fully utilize the power of the platform, Maldivian women are being provided skill building and training in the operation of the platform as well as in food hygiene and safety, product standardisation, labelling and marketing, and general business development training.

eDhumashi promotes sustainable and traditional fish processing practices. Women use various methods of drying, salting and smoking fish, predominantly skipjack tuna as well as other reef fish. These traditional methods have been marginalized, primarily due to a gap in market access and lack of standardization, both of which eDhumashi addresses. 📺

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During the IYAFA Regional Workshop: *Getting the story straight and envisioning a fair future for small-scale fisheries in Europe* that was organized in Galicia, Spain from 13-16 November 2023, a session was conducted to discuss the concerns raised by female fishers and fishworkers. Half of the workshop's 50 participants were women and included representatives of small-scale fisher and fishworker associations, cooperatives, community-based organizations, nongovernmental organizations and academia.

The women highlighted the need for visibility of their labour and meaningful participation in decision making spaces. They collectively pinpointed several actions that need to be taken in the Europe region which are listed as the Women in Fisheries Action Plan for the Europe Region in the following section.

### Women in Fisheries Action Plan for the Europe Region

1. Women are constrained by traditional and cultural roles rooted in patriarchal norms, and their labour is invisible and undervalued. Women's labour, (including their informal labour) must be recognized for its crucial contributions to the economy, food security of the communities and sustainable fisheries.
2. Effective measures supported by all necessary legislative and social changes must be undertaken to enable women's equitable participation in fisheries governance, so that they can contribute their knowledge and experience to the processes and policies affecting their lives.
3. Women must have the opportunity to participate meaningfully in co-management processes for sustainable fisheries.
4. Women's voices must be heard. Existing and new women's organizations need to be supported and strengthened in order to continue to grow, become more visible, and provide spaces for the next generations of leaders and promote collective action.
5. Women's livelihoods must be protected by promoting the principles of decent work, including social security, health protection (including the recognition of occupational illnesses) and social benefit schemes such as maternity and paternity benefits.
6. Extensive research is necessary on women in fisheries to gather evidence on the invisible roles of women in fisheries in Europe. Better gender disaggregated data is needed for targeted policies in support of female fishers and fishworkers.
7. Capacity building programmes catering to the needs of women need to be designed to promote their participation in leadership roles and vocational skill development.
8. Gender-sensitive technologies must be developed and appropriate working conditions ensured to cater to the needs of women in fisheries. 🍷

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Group photo from IYAFA Regional workshop: *Getting the story straight and envisioning a fair future for small-scale fisheries in Europe*, 13-16 November 2023, Galicia, Spain



and pray for safety at sea. In some regions, it was a practice for both women and men to go out to fish. In the Gaelic language, which is spoken in Ireland, there was no term as fisherman; fishers were called “iascaire” – a person who fishes. Women fishers express their sense of freedom and joy, as well as pride in being able to raise and educate children through their fishing activities.

With women’s growing visibility and their efforts at organizing themselves, now there are a number of women fishers’ organizations, for example, USCOFEP-CI (Union des sociétés coopératives des Femmes de la pêche et assimilées de Côte d’Ivoire) in Côte d’Ivoire, Kiyindi Women Fish Processors Association in Uganda, and CONFREM, the women’s secretariat for Bahia Network in Brazil. In Thailand, women fishers’ networks hold meetings once every three months. Despite persisting gender discrimination in fishers’ organizations, women are gaining voice. In Cambodia, a country where many women occupy government positions, women fishers report that they are able to discuss their issues with the government more easily. In Tanzania, the strength of the Tanzania Women Fishworkers Association is demonstrated by the fact that the Principal Secretary of Fisheries came forward to meet with them and discuss their problems. At the same time, while the need for women leaders was strongly advocated, whether all women leaders, merely on account of their being women, did actually represent women artisanal fishers was a point of debate. Caution was raised that establishing women’s groups or wings within larger fishers’ organizations could marginalize women leaders from the mainstream of women fishers.

In the workshops, it was repeatedly stressed that women are more organized, and women are the ones who are pushing the fisheries organizations forward. Women pool resources together for trade. They participate strongly to protect fishing resources and have proven themselves to be the stewards of the environment. The strong leadership and active engagement of women in fisheries shows that women are calling for support not because they are weak, but because they are entitled to it. As a participant from Sweden said, “Women knew what they wanted, they had a narrative and a vision for the future, and they wanted gender equality”.

Technology development is another unique area where women’s involvement is making a difference. Women are developing and using clean technologies for fish processing. For example, in Uganda, women use clean technology for smoking fish, free of polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAH). In Togo, women dry and smoke fish waste in ovens, and mill it into fine powder. This is sold as feed for poultry and cattle and for market gardening. Through this activity, fish waste is disposed, resulting in

a clean and dry environment. In India, women were engaged in developing fishing gears and processing equipment in collaboration with an external research agency, developing a prototype that is easier for women to use. Women are gaining ground in technology development, which will benefit not only themselves but the whole household, society, and the environment.

The internet has also provided women with a new marketing outlet. There have been cases reported on how women fishers use digital platforms to sell fish directly to consumers. Digital platforms also allow women fishers and groups to communicate widely about their concerns and issues, as well as their activities and contributions, thus raising awareness about issues and amplifying their demand for gender equality. The vibrant and energetic women fishers’ narratives reach a wider audience through these platforms.

An encouraging development is that women fishers’ organizations are moving beyond fishing issues to discuss gender-based violence, health, and human trafficking issues. Earlier, there was little or no collaboration between fishers’ groups/organizations and women’s organizations. Women’s organizations focused on issues of gender-based violence and discrimination in society; these were not often discussed in fishers’ organizations. The IYFAFA workshops demonstrated how the issues that women’s organizations are working on are major concerns for fisherwomen as well. This realization creates a wider solidarity around the need for gender equality in fisheries and in society at large. In the fisheries, issues such as sex for fish have long been raised, but to formulate such issues in terms of gender-based violence and the fight against patriarchy strengthens the alliance with women’s organizations.

For years, women fishers have articulated the need for diversification of economic activities. Alternative income-generating activities in the household often support the volatile earnings from fishing. Such non-fishing activities are carried out mainly by women. Recognizing their contribution towards sustaining fishing as an occupation and demanding recognition and support for these economic activities widens the scope of fisheries as a sector and as a profession.

Women fishers have pushed forward their agenda and have made impressive gains so far. These gains show how the inclusion of women benefits the fisheries sector as a whole. Gender equality in the fisheries sector is still, however, a distant dream. In order to articulate the concerns of women fishers in the sector and to discuss the gains from gender equality and the enhanced inclusion and well-being of women, all of the four regions formulated their own action plans. Some of the common agendas are discussed below:



Returning from fishing on Kribi beach, Cameroon. It is not enough to only recognize women's fisheries work but also acknowledge the larger contribution of women to supporting fisheries, including domestic services, and the economic diversification of these services. The role of media is important in advancing the recognition of women's roles in the sector

**“Women knew what they wanted, they had a narrative and a vision for the future, and they wanted gender equality”**

Women's work must be recognized and made visible. Even though progress has been made, references to women are still limited in certain forums. The recognition is still not translated into practice, and women do not always enjoy family/ community support and respect in their fishing activities. It is not enough to only recognize women's fisheries work but also acknowledge the larger contribution of women to supporting fisheries, including domestic services, and the economic diversification of these services. The role of media is important in advancing the recognition of women's roles in the sector.

Women's organizations and networks must be established. Forums for women to raise their voices and support for women's participation in fisheries governance are needed. Women's leadership capacities need to be strengthened. Cooperatives, associations, and grassroots women's organizations all need to be strengthened.

Capacity building is needed. Training programs in peer-to-peer learning on new technologies, and in conflict resolution are needed. Capacity building needs and access to technologies must be explored throughout the

fisheries value-chain, including in processing facilities, storage, refrigeration, packaging, hygiene, and food safety.

Data collection and research need to be strengthened for women in fisheries. Gender-disaggregated data is needed. The challenges that women in fisheries face, as well as their innovativeness need to be widely shared.

Access to services for women needs to be improved. For example, financial resources should be available for women to invest in fisheries. Health services should be accessible to address occupational health hazards among women, which are different from men. Water and sanitation services, as well as social security rights for women fishworkers, are needed.

There is a need to systematically address all forms of violence against women, including through providing improved legal protection and counseling services.

Gender-sensitive fisheries policies need to be put in place. Protection of women's rights should be included in the law. Gender equity needs to be included in all curriculums, and educational strategies towards men on sexual violence, drug abuse, and alcoholism need to be included. ■



# Advocating for justice

## Barbados' fisherfolk build capacity to advocate for climate, blue and social justice

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“Who is listening? When will they hear us, see us, listen to us, value our input and respect our opinions? Who will support us? We feed the country!”. These were some of the sentiments expressed by women fisherfolk in Barbados on 20 Feb 2024 – the World Day of Social Justice.

Fisherfolk in Barbados today experience growing marginalization. They are increasingly frustrated by the injustices they face from every quarter: their peers, the management authorities at fish landing sites and markets, national government policies and practices, as well as the general public. But what actions are they prepared to take, or capable of taking, and what will enable them to assert their right to justice? The low capacity and lack of empowerment of fisherfolk to respond to, or resist injustices, makes them uneasy. An initiative to build capacity in advocacy and interventions for social justice, blue justice and climate justice is necessary. The Centre for Resource Management and Environmental Studies (CERMES), at the University of the West Indies Cave Hill Campus in Barbados, is working with fisherfolk in Barbados to address these needs.

For decades, CERMES has focused on Caribbean small-scale fisheries (SSF). Recent sub-regional projects on topics such as stewardship, gender, youth, policy influence, intersectoral coordination, governance, leadership, and organisational capacity highlighted a need to pay more attention to climate justice, blue justice and social justice in small-scale fisheries. This is urgent and critical given the increasing rates of change in both social and ecological systems as a result of climate change and other factors impacting Small Island Developing States (SIDS). In response, CERMES co-developed a project on Amplifying Climate Justice for Fisherfolk in the Barbados Blue Economy (Just BE Fisherfolk) that is funded by the Open Societies Foundation (OSF). Just BE Fisherfolk aims in two years to build capacity among fisherfolk in Barbados as advocates and policy influencers, especially women and young people, for a proactive climate justice approach through empowerment in the context of climate change adaptation in Barbados blue economy initiatives.

Since social justice, climate justice and blue justice do not have a universal global

definition recognized by fisher communities, CERMES is determining how the terms are to be understood and used by local fisherfolk to frame associated injustices. As elsewhere, social justice incorporates the core values of equal rights, equal opportunities, and equal treatment. According to the United Nations, social justice aims for an inclusive, equitable and integrated society, concerned with how to allocate resources fairly. In Barbados, fisherfolk identify gender mainstreaming as an example of social justice. They also appreciate that an urgent global justice concern is that those who suffer most from climate change have done the least to cause it. Fisherfolk already attribute changes in the ocean environment to climate-related factors, the most conspicuous and serious being the massive influxes of sargassum seaweed since 2011. Barbados has had a ministry responsible for blue economy since 2018 with many policy initiatives, but blue justice is seldom mentioned. Fisherfolk in Barbados understand the concept, given their constant competition with other economic sectors for coastal and marine goods and services in sustainable development. Blue justice addresses how small-scale fisheries are affected by blue economy initiatives and, according to theorists, it is the ‘moral compass’ to the blue economy. These relational concepts recognize the realities of human dependency and address human vulnerability. One of the aims of Just BE Fisherfolk is to determine more deeply how applicable these concepts are to the practices and experiences of fisherfolk in Barbados.

Just BE Fisherfolk group sessions have provided fisherfolk with opportunities to share the injustices they experience. It is apparent to them that all injustices - social, blue and climate - are deeply intertwined at all levels in the fisheries. State-run landing sites are sites of power dynamics. In some cases, all parties are women or all are men, so gender is not a clear factor. Some injustices seem to be passed down an economic hierarchy of occupations, in which fisherfolk form the base and hence are most vulnerable. There may be well-known fisheries management solutions to some of the perceived injustices, but most fisherfolk are not exposed to or engaged in fisheries management. In other cases, injustices arise from policies and practices estimated to contribute more to



Visit to Bridgetown Fisheries Complex to talk about climate justice, Barbados. A new approach to fisherfolk advocacy and empowerment in Barbados is the use of Popular Theatre to communicate problems and possible solutions or trade-offs to be considered in decisions

**An urgent global justice concern is that those who suffer most from climate change have done the least to cause it**

the national economy, introducing questions about distributive justice and societal wellbeing. Fisherfolk do not yet categorize and analyze injustices in ways that facilitate devising more just circumstances. A role of Just BE Fisherfolk is therefore to help fisherfolk leaders develop intersectoral and global perspectives in small-scale fisheries. This is not by workshops and other trainings, but by social media communications, landing site “drop-by” visits and other means of convenient interaction.

Of the three types of justice focused upon by this project, blue justice has the potential to become the most significant advocacy and intervention issue for fisherfolk in Barbados, incorporating climate and social justice. Fisherfolk in Barbados are becoming aware of its importance in ongoing national blue economy activities, such as the national ocean policy and marine spatial plan (MSP) processes, coastal zone policy and plan, tourism development, marine renewable energy, and draft legislation covering coastal, fisheries and other sectors. Just BE Fisherfolk aims to ensure that fisherfolk are included in Barbados blue economy processes. Recently fisherfolk were represented by a Just BE fisherfolk core group at a consultation on the draft Barbados national ocean policy. This

provided them with the chance to understand the rationale for the development of the policy and contribute to the section on the fisheries sector.

Advocacy is needed but few fisherfolk can afford to challenge state workers, institutions, and processes, whether because of earnings lost when participating in events, or opportunities denied in terms of retaliatory action. Many fisherfolk, both men and women, young and old, have come to accept and live with the injustices they perceive, creatively finding ways to work around and adapt to them rather than resolve them. Just BE Fisherfolk promotes networking and collective action to strongly support fisherfolk leaders developing clearly defined strategies within a social justice movement aimed at bringing forth change. Weak fisherfolk organizations with governance deficiencies and lack of cohesion perpetuate the muting of fisherfolk voices, agency and advocacy. Fisherfolk have identified the need to come together and have a common voice to bring about changes. That is, to propose informed solutions rather than just make complaints. The fishing industry is viewed as their opportunity to be their own bosses with the assurance of being able to provide for their families, and especially



the youth in fisherfolk households. They do not wish to leave behind their fisheries livelihoods but instead want to create a positive working environment. Cohesive groups with strong leaders can promote their interests and enhance their responses to planned and implemented initiatives. The project has a fisherfolk engagement group to guide it. Fisherfolk leading and engaged in justice movements can ensure that potentially inequitable or negative outcomes of national initiatives and projects on social protection, blue economy development, climate change adaptation and resilience building are limited or avoided.

A new approach to fisherfolk advocacy and empowerment in Barbados is the use of Popular Theatre to communicate problems and possible solutions or trade-offs to be considered in decisions. This technique for participatory action research makes use of individual and community participation to highlight social issues and promote transformation. The approach integrates entertainment - singing, dancing, storytelling, poetry, role-playing games and other cultural forms - with the examination of issues and attitudes, knowledge sharing, and ultimately initiating action for positive social change. This is the first time Popular Theatre is being applied in Barbados to the fishing industry. A core group of women small-scale processors who call themselves The Voices from The Shore Theatre Collective are building their capacity in Popular Theatre to perform for or with audiences including their peers, government officials, donors, academia, journalists, the general public and others to advocate for small-scale fisherfolk rights. The Just BE Fisherfolk project provides the opportunity for further capacity building and development of this group to create a foundation for justice advocacy outside more conventional information channels. The group and its participation techniques are important to Just BE Fisherfolk project activities. Fisherfolk are familiar with and respect the group's members, most of whom are women small-scale fish processors and members of fisherfolk organizations, and seem keen to engage with them in discussions about injustices in spaces where they are most comfortable and with people they trust. This is important to gaining a thorough understanding of local perspectives on justice in SSF.

Fisherfolk are responding well to Popular Theatre. The core group has grown in size and now includes youth who join their mothers and grandmothers at capacity building sessions. Just BE Fisherfolk has a focus on youth in fisheries and aims to engage schools and young



*Who Feels it Knows it* highlights various issues directly impacting female fisherfolk in Barbados but with significant relevance to multiple stakeholders in the industry (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bhmQZwKQkIM>)

environmentalists in the project as justice allies of fisherfolk. One school with students who are interested in the fishing industry, its occupations and practices, has indicated interest in joining the project and will be engaged over the next few months. Youth environmental networks are being recruited to build a youth for fisheries justice action group that can help bring attention to the injustices in small-scale fisheries, particularly regarding new, young people in the industry.

Just BE Fisherfolk is being noticed regionally and globally. It is taking advantage of opportunities and using different mediums to share perspectives on justice in small-scale fisheries. The Voices from the Shore Theatre Collective participated in a Caribbean Climate Justice Camp, 28 - 31 March 2024, Sint Maarten, during which the group facilitated a session on their approach to understanding justice in small-scale fisheries and shared their creative products with more than 120 climate justice activists from more than 25 Caribbean islands. Mainstream social media including TikTok, Instagram and YouTube videos are being used to share project ideas and findings by fisherfolk and for them. Locally a project WhatsApp group is growing in membership and fisherfolk are starting to communicate among themselves about justice issues in small-scale fisheries in Barbados and regionally.

There is much to be done to bring about justice in SSF and fisherfolk must take the lead to assert their rights supported by projects and initiatives like Just BE Fisherfolk. ■

**'Who feels it knows it' is an output of the Just BE Fisherfolk project supported by a grant from the Open Society Foundations and implemented by the Centre for Resource Management and Environmental studies (CERMES) of the University of the West Indies**

# Shrinking spaces

**Women in small-scale fishing communities bear the worst impacts as coastal space in the Indian Ocean region is increasingly encroached upon by state and private activities**

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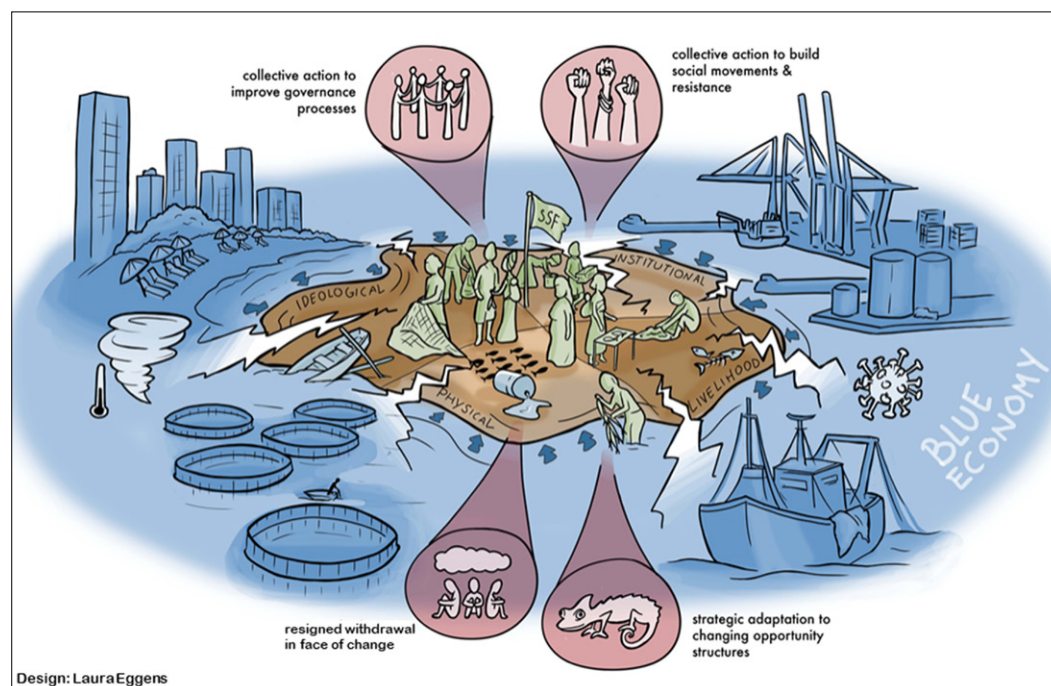
This article is based on a cross-regional study that focused on how ruptures in the form of environmental stress and political economic pressures impacted small-scale fishing communities and were especially mediated by the intersectional social relations of gender, ethnicity/race, caste, class, and place. Drawing upon the work of David Harvey, the research team investigated how capitalist accumulation physically, discursively, and institutionally constrained access by small-scale coastal actors to spaces for action. Our observation is that the space for action by small-scale actors and populations in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) is increasingly being encroached upon by state and private activities. We label these processes of dispossession as ‘shrinking space’.

We have taken a materialist feminist approach in our analysis to capture the gendered ruptures and adaptations to the phenomenon of shrinking space. This approach allows us to investigate the four dimensions that affect the material conditions of women and men’s lives. These are economic and environmental factors, political-legal-institutional (governance) relations, social structures, and cultural norms/ideologies and practices. We have applied this framework of

analysis to five case study locations: Kenya, India-west coast, India-east coast, Sri Lanka, and Cambodia.

The case of Kenya shows how the construction of factories (fish processing, steel making, cement, and seaweed storage and processing) has adversely affected the livelihoods of women seaweed farmers. These developments have not only reduced their income but also led to loss of working space and land for burial and shrines. The women seaweed farmers have collectively protested these developments and have sought stakeholder engagement and compensation.

In the state of Karnataka on the west coast of India, small-scale fishers are affected by commercial private port construction, tourism development, and coastal aquaculture expansion. Also, they are now in competition with the fishmeal industry for fish resources. Added to this, coastal erosion has displaced small-scale fishers, especially women who process fish. Small-scale fishers have been evicted from the use of accreted land for livelihoods and income with the loss of space to dry their fish or to dock their boats. They also face access restrictions due to tourism development. Small-scale fishers have collectively fought against port construction. Women who are reliant on



Design: Laura Eggens





Presentation at GAF8 by Gayathiri Lokuge. A common impact across the region is 'shrinking space' for small-scale fisheries and displacements in ways that are gendered. However, the specific form of these impacts varies as do local responses to them

land for fish drying and marketing activities are particularly affected. Employment created by port and road construction has benefited men more than women.

In Tamil Nadu on the east coast of India, spaces once available to small-scale fishers have shrunk due to aquaculture expansion. Aquaculture has also increased ground water salinity with adverse impacts on drinking water supply. Being primarily responsible for domestic water collection, women are acutely affected. In the transition from marine capture fishing to aquaculture, a shift in fisheries work from fishing to non-fishing caste groups is also observable.

In Sri Lanka, small-scale fishers, suffering the impacts of an ongoing socio-economic crisis, are affected by a reduction in fish catch and in fuel supplies for fishing. Large-scale development projects such as the Port City and environmental disasters such as the X-Press Pearl ship oil spill add to their woes. Women are worst affected since they are not recognized as fishers, and therefore excluded from any compensation drives. However, women fish sellers reliant on supplies from traditional, non-mechanised boats have been less affected, despite the fact that they face the threat of growing numbers of men from external communities entering fish trade. Women, with their proximity to traditional market spaces, have acted collectively to secure market spaces and livelihoods.

In Cambodia, tourism development has usurped coastal land. Women fishers are worst affected since they fish near shore while men use boats to fish in the deep seas. However, men too are affected by reductions in catch. Women have had to diversify their livelihood to supplement the diminishing household income. The collective struggles of the small-scale fishing communities were weakened by internal divisions and a growing sense of disempowerment, despite which, however, women are still resisting the tide.

Across the five case study sites, we see Blue Economy Growth initiatives generating both ecological and social-economic ruptures in the form of environmental degradation, economic dispossession, and marginalization. These exacerbate other climate-related effects, all of which disproportionately impact women fishers. A common impact across the region is 'shrinking space' for small-scale fisheries and displacements in ways that are gendered. However, the specific form of these impacts varies as do local responses to them.

These variations bring out how Blue Economy policies, their impacts, and the space for adaptation is geographically contingent. An intersectional materialist feminist approach and attention to gender reveals both diversity in place and diversity across places; this yields a more nuanced understanding of how Blue Economy development is impacting small-scale fishers across the Indian Ocean. 🌊

**We see Blue Economy Growth initiatives generating both ecological and social-economic ruptures in the form of environmental degradation, economic dispossession, and marginalization... all of which disproportionately impact women fishers**

# The Tiger Widows of the Sunderbans

**In the forests of the Sunderbans in West Bengal, India, limited livelihood options often drive male fishers literally into the jaws of death, with their widows left struggling for survival**

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The expression 'Byaghro Bidhoba', which literally translates to 'Tiger Widows', is a term used to refer to women who have lost their husbands to tiger attacks while hunting crabs and fish in the dense forests of the Sunderbans in the Indian state of West Bengal. These are women ostracized and rendered invisible by society, and most people in India are unaware of their plight. What's worse, these women are victimized and harassed by officials of the Forest and the Fisheries departments when they demand their rights and due compensation.

The struggle for the rights and recognition of the Tiger Widows was taken up in 2017 by the Dakshin Banga Matsyajibi Forum (DMF), a registered trade union body representing West Bengal's fishworkers. A survey by DMF showed that more than 3000 such women reside in the villages of Sudhangshupur, Shantigachi, Jawahar colony, Patharpara, Satjelia Bagmundi, Bidhan colony, Anandapur and Lahiripur in Gosaba block. The survey brought to public light the women's main demands: to be recognized as 'Tiger Widows' as well as to receive the compensation of Rs. 500,000 (approximately, USD 6000) per person, entitled to them by the Indian Wildlife Protection Act (WLPA), 1972. In addition, the women also demanded a monthly allowance of Rs. 3000 (USD 36) to sustain their livelihood.

During the COVID 19 pandemic, with the help of DMF, and with financial assistance from Direct Initiative for Social and Health Action (DISHA), the Sunderban Byaghro Bidhoba Samity (Tiger Widow

Association of Sunderban) was formed in 2020 under the leadership of Gita Mridha, herself a 'tiger widow'. This Association is a community-based body whose primary objective is to work for the betterment and socio-economic empowerment of Tiger Widows. It works to create awareness among women regarding their rights and has successfully mobilized the women to participate in meetings, make deputations at block and district level, and, with the help of DISHA, to also prepare a pond for fishing by the women members of this association.

Over time, the Association has been successful in amplifying the voices of the affected women, who have submitted their demands to the Forest and Fisheries departments at block and district level, and also to the State Commission for Women in West Bengal. It filed about 25 claims from Tiger Widows with the State Women's Commission, and submitted a writ petition in the High Court of West Bengal. As a result of these struggles, on 18th January 2024, the High Court ordered that a compensation amount of Rupees 500,000 (approximately, USD 6000) each be paid to two widows. Soon after that, in May 2024, two other widows were also awarded similar compensation.

While Gita Mridha is the face of the community and has tirelessly worked to raise public awareness, the collective spirit of its women members is crucial for the Association. The women of the Association say: "Save us, save our community, and save our pride—India's National Animal, the tiger – but not at the cost of our husband's lives. We encroach into tiger territory because of hunger, poverty, and lack of livelihood options. We urge the government to think about our loss and pain, and to consider us as human beings, not only as 'tiger widows'."

Livelihood in the forests of the Sunderbans is full of danger. Women and men who collect crabs and fishes for a livelihood in these forests are vulnerable to attacks by tigers, snakes and crocodiles. This human-wildlife conflict is part of the lives of these communities and cannot be changed. However, change is certainly possible in terms of how society views these women, and whether state agencies are willing to recognize their rights, enabling them to lead well-supported lives, full of dignity.

## Acknowledgement:

Advocate Santanu Chakravorty and Advocate Atindriya Chakravorty for supporting the data and case reports. 🙏

TIGER WIDOW ASSOCIATION OF SUNDERBAN



Tiger Widows of Sunderban Byaghro Bidhoba Samity, Haldarpara, Gosaba



# Present but hardly represented

## Women who dominate the shellfish harvest sector in Galicia struggle for due representation and policy inclusion

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On the North-Western region of Galicia in Spain, shore-based shellfish harvesting is carried out mainly by women. With traditional and very simple tools that have remained virtually unchanged over time, women gather in beaches to collect bivalve molluscs, primarily species of clam (*japonica*, *babosa* and *finá*), cockles and razor clams. The strong presence of women in the trade has profound implications, both positive and negative, which determine its main characteristics.

According to the latest official data provided by the Galician regional government there are 3,529 people holding an official license for shore-based shellfish harvesting in the region, of which 2,633 are women and 896 men.

On the Arousa Bay, the main hotspot for shore-based mollusc harvesting, there are 1,544 licence holders, of which 306 are men and 1,238 women.

Even though the total number of shellfish harvesters in Galicia has decreased from 3,970 people in 2011 to 3,529 in 2023, in recent years the number of male licence holders has significantly increased, profoundly changing the male to female ratio. In 2011, women represented 90 percent of all licence holders but in 2023 only 75 percent. Despite the decline, the trade remains predominantly female, in sharp contrast to other fishing activities where women are practically absent, such as fishing, where, according to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. Government of Spain, they barely represent 6.15 percent of the total.

All small-scale fishing activities, such as fishing, and shore-based and vessel-based shellfish gathering (locally known as “on foot” and “on board” harvesting), are grouped together in *Cofradías de Pescadores* (Fishermen’s Guilds), non-profit legal entities consulted by and collaborating with the Galician administration in matters related to extractive fisheries and fishery management. The Xunta de Galicia (Regional Government) regulates the Guilds. There are currently 63 of these in Galicia, present in all three coastal provinces (Pontevedra, Coruña and Lugo). They all have the following legal governance structure vide Decree (8/2014):

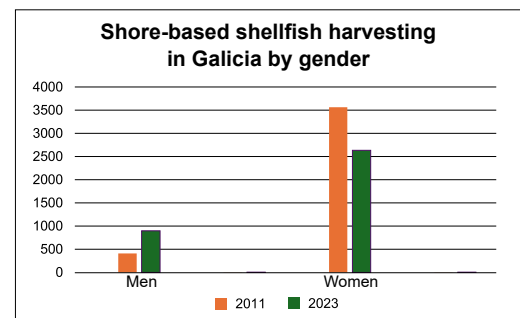
A General Board, which this is the main decision-making and governance body, overseeing all the others, and includes between 10 and 24 members (depending on the Guild’s number of partners) representing all production sectors.

A Council, which oversees general management, administration and government. It consists of the Chief Officer, the Secretary and 6 to 10 members (depending on the number of members of the General Board)

A Chief Officer who is the Guild’s representative and Chair of both the Council and the General Board.

The Chair and the members of the Executive Committee are elected from the General Board’s membership.

According to data from the Galician Federation of Fishing Guilds, women make up 32.88 percent of all guild members in the region. However, their presence and participation in the governing bodies is far from equal. After the last elections to leadership positions in October 2022, only three guilds have female Chief Officers. These are the *Cofradías* from Vigo (Vigo bay, Pontevedra Province), Lourizán



Source: Chart prepared by the author with data from the Galician Institute of Statistics (IGE)

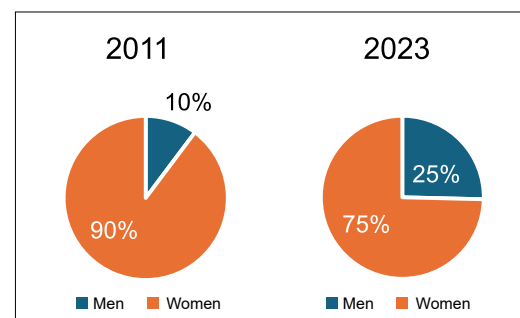


Chart: prepared by the author from IGE data

(Pontevedra bay, Pontevedra Province) and O Grove (Arousa bay, Pontevedra Province). In other words, women make up 32.88 percent of all guild members but are represented in only 4.76 percent of leadership positions in the main small-scale fisheries organisations in Galicia.

The sheer inequality between men and women becomes even more worrying when comparing those figures with the results of previous elections held by the guilds. In 2014 a total of 13 women were elected as their associations' Chief Officers. Four years later, that figure decreased to six until finally in the last elections, in October 2022, only three women were voted to occupy these senior posts.

On upper governance levels, there has never been a woman at the helm in the provincial or regional federations. Clearly, a strategy is needed to reverse this downward trend in terms of women's participation, not in fishing or shellfish harvesting where they continue to be present in large numbers but in decision-making. The lack of gender parity in fisheries governing bodies exacerbates fisherwomen's historically precarious work and living conditions. The traditional gender segregation of fishing activities leads to the acute vulnerability of female-dominated sectors, such as shore-based, "on foot", shellfish harvesting. Men run the fisheries in Galicia and, despite the economic and social importance of shellfish harvesting in the region, women are outside decision-making spaces where fisheries regulations are negotiated. For example, until last year, different reduction coefficients were used to calculate retirement pensions in shore-based and vessel-based shellfish harvesting. The Law on Sustainable Fisheries and Fisheries Research, adopted on 17 March 2023, finally aligned the two groups' reduction coefficient (0.15), while recognising the same entitlement to other trade categories, such as neskatillas – the female relatives of the fishermen, who help unloading, processing and marketing fish; net menders; empacadoras – the fish handlers; and professional divers. These newly included categories, except for professional divers, are made up mostly of women.

The federations of fishing guilds, represented by their Chairs, have been designated necessary partners by the Regional Government of Galicia to negotiate regulatory frameworks, state aids or labour-related matters. If women are not present at decision-making levels, the issues and challenges they face are neglected by policy. As an example, the annual renewal of licenses in shore-based shellfish harvesting, a female-dominated activity, is conditional on the licence

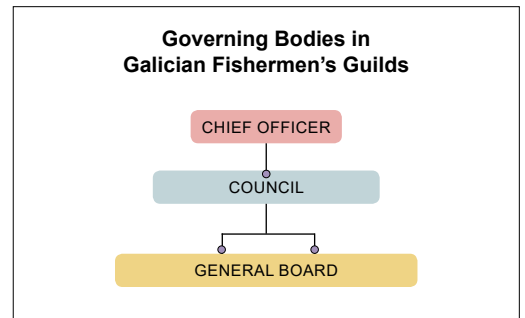
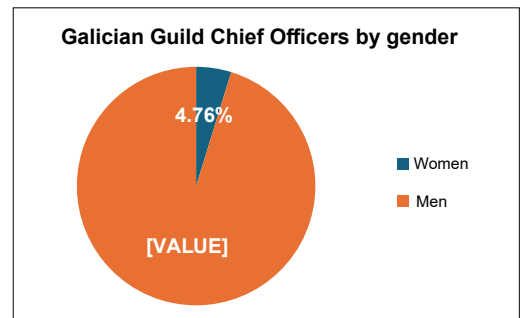


Chart: prepared by the author with data from Decree 8/2014



Chart: prepared by the author with data from Decree 8/2014



Pie Chart: own elaboration

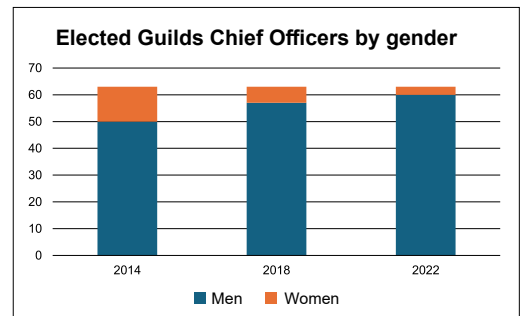


Chart: prepared by the author

Guild membership in Galicia by gender			
Men	percent	Women	percent
8,162	67.12 percent	3,998	32.88 percent

Table: prepared by author with data from the Galician Federation of Fishing Guilds

holder's participation in seaweed removal and surveillance against illegal harvesting. This contrasts with the renewal of licenses for vessel-based licences, a traditionally male-dominated activity. "On foot" women shellfish collectors





Shellfish harvesting activities in Galicia underwent a much-lauded professionalization process in the last years of the 20th century, hailed as an example of good planning and governance

are the only workers in the guilds required to remove seaweed to keep healthy mollusc beds and prevent shellfish mortality. This is hard and unpaid work involving waste disposal techniques for which this category of workers does not necessarily have the proper tools and resources. If this sector was male-dominated or if women shellfish collectors were equitably present on guilds and federations management bodies and involved in social, economic and political dialogue, it is a moot question if the issue would be dealt with in the same way. In my opinion, the answer is not. Women are seen as cheap or free labour, as they have been frequently in the past.

Shellfish harvesting activities in Galicia underwent a much-lauded professionalization process in the last years of the 20th century, hailed as an example of good planning and governance. The relevance of women being finally admitted as workers in the guilds, the success of their organisational model and, above all, the significance of their inclusion in the Special Social Security System for Sea Workers, granting them social protection benefits, should not be underestimated. However, 30 years later, it may be time to objectively analyse and assess the progress made from that point to the present day. Recent massive mortality events in

the Galician shellfish beds, leading to a complete stop to harvesting in numerous areas, highlight the weaknesses of this type of fishery and the need to reorganise “on foot” activities. A new management system is necessary that can adapt to the current impact of global warming and climate change. Interruption of activity events made it clear that current social protection is not adequate and does not provide coverage to all shellfish harvesters. Furthermore, low levels of income from shellfish harvesting hinders the necessary generational renewal of a sustainable profession that helps to protect the marine environment and resources.

Equal representation of women in the guilds is a matter of social justice, but it also supports environmental protection and sustainable governance of the Galician coast. The Law 9/1993 on Fishermen’s Guilds in Galicia has become obsolete in this regard, as it favours certain economic groups and penalises women’s participation. No political party in the Galician Parliament seems willing to amend this law; even though women’s associations in the fisheries sector have long called for reform, a proposal that the Guilds and Federations are against. The transformation of shore-based shellfish harvesting and progress towards greater equity and inclusivity necessarily requires a review of

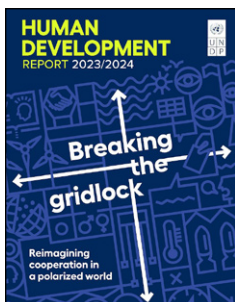
current leadership models both in fisheries and in society. As is the case of women workers in other sectors, women shellfish gatherers, are the main caregivers in the household. Many still hold the view that the professional activity of these women is a mere “supplement” to the family economy, a job that provides a little income on the side while they look after their children and other dependent adults and the house. The enormous weight of reproductive jobs drives women further away from full and equal participation in representation and leadership roles. Public policies theoretically geared towards achieving equality in the

sector are often patronising, ineffective and, in many cases, replicate and cement existing stereotypes, treating women as children, unfit for management roles. Gender equality remains a highly sensitive issue in a fishing sector that still resists even minimal changes, such as using a more inclusive name for the guilds (officially known as Fishermen’s guilds) or offering gender-equality training to members and leaders. Lack of transparency also represents a burden when trying to obtain sex-disaggregated statistics and other data elements necessary to better analyse the problems of fisheries from a gender perspective, as required by law. ❏



## Milestones

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## Urgent Collective Action to Break the Gridlock

**H**uman Development Report 2023-24: Breaking the gridlock: Reimagining cooperation in a polarized world

The Human Development Index, or HDI, is probably the second most-used measure of a country’s development, after GDP. It uses a variety of indicators and gauges progress in terms of societal outcomes, including a healthy life (life expectancy index), knowledge (education index) and a decent standard of living (GNI index). Released by the UNDP every two years, the Human Development Report (HDR) benchmarks gains made by countries in terms of HDI. The 2024 edition of the report shows that while the global HDI is rising again, inequalities are growing between the countries at the top and bottom of the index. Mismanagement of cross-border dependencies has been shown to be at the root of many contemporary challenges.

The Gender Inequality Index (GII) shows that Iceland continues to occupy top position, with the lowest levels of gender-based inequality. A small group of countries continue to be in the red but in other countries too, even if they have improved secondary education and labour force participation, the gender gap in the share of seats in parliament continues to be high. The Gender Social Norms Index was introduced in 2019 comprising four dimensions: political, educational, economic and physical integrity. The 2023 Gender Social Norms Index shows that gender equality is being constrained by social norms biased against women. Belief that men make better leaders than women is so entrenched that women leaders tend to be judged more harshly;

limiting the effectiveness of policies and curbing women’s agency even when policies for gender equality are in place.

Applying a gender lens in all actions is crucial, especially in identifying potential gendered impacts of response measures. An example from the pandemic is given but can be applied to the fishing community. Fishermen are often the focus of relief measures, for example, during disasters and seasonal closures, as they are presumed to be the breadwinners; as a result, women who also suffer livelihood and income losses and may experience increased domestic violence and reduced wellbeing, are hardest hit.

World-wide discourse on the ocean is reflected in the HDR 2024 as well in a separate section titled ‘The Global Commons of Ocean Fisheries’, drawing attention to the problems of overfishing and property rights at various levels, and proposing radical solutions such as extending the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) to its maximum extent while eliminating the idea of high seas or closing the high seas to fishing. But will such proposals work?

Overall, the report calls for strong actions to improve the HDI, the first being a 21st century architecture for global public goods such as a clean environment, public health, property rights, peace and security. It also calls for collective action across groups through public reasoning and deliberation, to reverse social polarization and enhance cooperation. ❏

<https://hdr.undp.org/system/files/documents/global-report-document/hdr2023-24reporten.pdf>



# Net Working

## Atalaia exemplifies the power of community and the enduring value of traditional craft in modern times

By **Akila Veena**  
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(Courtesy: The following text is based on the article “Women repairing fish nets is an old tradition”, which appeared in Eurofish April 2024/2 and is available at <https://eurofish.dk/magazine-issues/em-2-2024/>)

In the picturesque region of Galicia in northwest Spain, the tradition of netmaking and repair is deeply intertwined with the local fishing industry. This craft, historically carried out by women, has seen a resurgence thanks to the efforts of organized associations. Among these associations is Atalaia, a key member of the Galician Federation of Artisanal Netmakers, O Peiran.

Atalaia was established in 2005 in A Guarda, a small town where fishing is a vital part of the economy. Initially, the women of Atalaia worked from their homes, crafting and repairing nets for large fishing vessels operating in the Grand Sole Bank, a region in the Celtic Sea between Ireland and Spain. These vessels target species such as hake and anglerfish, requiring durable, expertly-made nets. Additionally, the women worked on

nets for smaller coastal boats. The logistics were challenging, with nets being delivered to their homes by truck and van, but the dedication to their craft kept the tradition alive.

The early days of Atalaia were marked by significant logistical challenges. The nets, essential for fishing operations, were delivered to the town square by a large truck. From there, a van would distribute the nets to the home of each woman involved in the craft. This method, while effective, highlighted the need for a centralized workspace. The women managed to persuade the town council to provide them with a communal facility where they could work together. For over a decade, this facility became a hub of activity, with ten women working collaboratively to add the top and bottom lines to the nets and perform necessary repairs.

However, the association faced a significant challenge as the original members began to retire. The group dwindled to just three members, bringing Atalaia to the brink of dissolution. Marina Alvarez, one of the remaining members, reached out to O Peiran for support. Recognizing



Source: <https://maps.lib.utexas.edu/maps/europe/spain.jpg>

**The netmakers of Atalaia continue to uphold a vital tradition while navigating modern challenges. The netmakers of Atalaia continue to uphold a vital tradition while navigating modern challenges**

the critical situation, the federation organized net-making courses across Galicia. These courses not only preserved the skills but also attracted new members, revitalizing the association. Today, Atalaia boasts seven active members who are proficient in the craft.

Marina Alvarez expressed her delight at the progress made by the new members. "They can now do everything independently without having to ask me," she says, highlighting the successful transfer of skills. For her, the addition of four new members not only ensured the continuity of the association but also demonstrated a renewed interest in the trade.

To supplement their income and showcase their creativity, the women of Atalaia also create various accessories from leftover materials. Brooches, bracelets, rings, and scarves are among the items they craft, blending traditional techniques with modern design. These products are displayed and sold in a store within their workspace, providing an additional revenue stream and a platform to exhibit their skills.

The association's efforts extend beyond mere production. Atalaia actively promotes the profession through public outreach. They organize tours of their facilities and conduct

workshops to educate the public about netmaking and repair. Schoolchildren, in particular, are introduced to this ancient craft, fostering an appreciation for the profession and potentially inspiring the next generation of netmakers. These initiatives aim to raise awareness about the trade and advocate for improvements in working conditions, social security, health benefits, and environmental issues.

At a broader level, O Peiran plays a crucial role in advocating for the netmaking profession. The federation seeks to regulate the trade nationally, ensuring a sustainable future for netmakers. One of its primary goals is to secure a new generation of netmakers to take over as the older generation retires. This involves not only training new entrants but also providing alternative employment opportunities during periods of inactivity.

Improving port infrastructure is another key focus of the Federation. By enhancing the facilities where netmakers work, O Peiran aims to reduce occupational injuries and create a safer working environment. The Federation's efforts have already yielded significant successes, including organizing training sessions that improve the skills and employability



## PROFILE

### **Dolores Gómez – Moving from strength to strength** **Dolores Gomez not only leads shellfish gatherers in the male-dominated Galician seafood sector but also places feminism front and centre in the conversation**

By **Sandra Amezaga**  
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**D**olores Gómez Ordoñez has been the President of Mulleres Salgadas since 2019. Mulleres Salgadas is an association of shellfish gatherers in Spain. It was founded in 2016 and was initially called Asociación de Mulleres do mar de Arousa, and confined its activities to areas around the Arousa estuary and the provinces of A Coruña and Pontevedra. In later years,

the organization became autonomous and changed its name to Mulleres Salgadas-Asociación Galega de Mulleres do Mar, and gradually spread throughout the whole territory of Galicia.

The President of Mulleres Salgadas, Dolores Gómez Ordoñez, has a wide-ranging background that includes years of experience in the tourism sector. In 1991, after obtaining a Certificate in Business Administration, Dolores spent a year in Manchester, UK, improving her proficiency in English while

working part-time in the hospitality industry. In 1992, she returned to her hometown in Spain, and joined her family-run business - a mytiliculture company that cultivated mussels commercially on rafts. After her parents' retirement, she took over the running of the company.

Dolores is committed to improving the management of marine and fishing resources through the adoption of sustainable, fair and egalitarian practices. She was the Chair of the organisation of mussel producers, ASPROMERI, in Rianxo between 2014 and 2020, gaining widespread recognition for her contributions; indeed, for a woman to head a producer organisation in a male-dominated sector is no small achievement.

Under Dolores' mandate, Mulleres Salgadas consolidated its role as an agent of change in the Galician and Spanish fishing and seafood sector. In recent years, the association has declared itself feminist in its statutes and defends the need for a gender perspective in public policies related to the sea and the people who work in it. Together with her colleagues in the association, Dolores fights for the visibility and recognition of the important role that women play in fishing and to facilitate their access to management and leadership positions. **■**





Netmakers of the Rederas Atalaia Association in Baixo Miño, A Guarda, in Galicia, Spain. From left, Sara González Pacheco, Sonia Fernández González, Nuria González Adrover, Mila Martínez González and Marina Álvarez Rodríguez

of netmakers. These sessions culminate in professional certifications that recognize the expertise of both new and experienced netmakers. This formal accreditation is a crucial step in professionalizing the trade and ensuring its recognition at a national level.

Despite these positive developments, the netmaking industry faces significant challenges. Marina Álvarez acknowledges the ongoing challenge of undeclared work. Many individuals prefer to work from home without formalizing their activities, driven by economic pressures. This practice undermines the efforts of associations like Atalaia, making it difficult to attract new members and secure fair wages for all women in this trade. Undeclared work is also a serious threat to decent work and fair wages, as such practices tend to undercut the wages of those working legitimately and hence deters young people from joining the profession. Marina Álvarez emphasizes that the quality of their manual work surpasses that of machine-made nets, providing a competitive edge. However, the proliferation of undeclared work jeopardizes the industry's future, making it essential to address this issue.

Recycling is another area where Atalaia has made significant strides. The association has agreements with fishers to collect netting that can no longer be used. This material is then repurposed into new products or sent for commercial recycling, where it is converted into ropes and nets for mussel farming in Galicia. This practice not only supports the local economy but also contributes to environmental

sustainability by addressing the issue of abandoned, lost, and discarded fishing gear, which contributes to marine plastic.

As the focus on sustainability intensifies, Atalaia is exploring the use of biodegradable nets. While fully biodegradable nets may not yet be viable due to durability concerns, mixtures of biodegradable and conventional materials offer a promising solution. These innovative materials balance functionality with environmental friendliness, aligning with the broader goal of sustainable fishing.

Since its inception, the Rederas Atalaia association has demonstrated remarkable resilience and adaptability. Through the support of the O Peiran Federation and their own innovative, the netmakers of Atalaia continue to uphold a vital tradition while navigating modern challenges. Their story is a testament to the power of community, the importance of preserving cultural heritage, and the potential for traditional craft to evolve and thrive in contemporary contexts.

By fostering a new generation of skilled netmakers, promoting sustainable practices, and advocating for fair working conditions, Atalaia and O Peiran are ensuring the future of this ancient craft. Their efforts exemplify how organized associations can make a significant impact, not only preserving a way of life but also adapting it to meet the demands of the present and future. The women of Atalaia are not just netmakers; they are custodians of a rich cultural legacy, innovators in their field, and a vital part of Galicia's fishing community. 🍷

## FILM

### Women in Small-scale Fisheries in Ghana - the unsung heroines

Executive Producer: Richard Kwadwo Nyarko; Duration 25 min 20 sec;

Language: English

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"I've learned that I should do away with fear," declares Juliana Anna Dogbe Kumado a fishmonger in Ghana and a participant in the One Ocean Hub workshop, "I can do as well as a man does and I can even do it better!" Her confidence, determination, and conviction shine through my laptop screen.

I am watching a YouTube documentary hosted by the platform, One Ocean Hub. This platform, anchored at, and led by, the University of Strathclyde, is funded by an agency named UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) through the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF). In the African continent, One Ocean Hub runs programs in Ghana, Namibia and South Africa, taking a collaborative approach to address intractable ocean challenges.

This documentary showcases Ghana where the most pressing issues are those of overfishing and pollution due to a rapid decline of fisheries in the country. To address these issues, One Ocean Hub focuses on promoting co-management of marine resources, education and training for fishworker communities as well as promoting alternative and supplementary livelihoods. They do this in collaboration with research organisations, universities, government bodies, non-governmental organisations, civil-society organisations and human rights organisations.



One of the breakaway successes of the program is a Pop-up Law Clinic which is held as part of the workshops. Faculty and students from the University of Cape Coast offer support and run a law clinic, addressing any queries the women have. Through this clinic, issues that were previously not taken into consideration have come into public light. The two major issues include a gendered knowledge gap as well as the advantage that men take of this gap; and women's experience of sexual and gender-based violence and oppressive roles.

Women in Ghana are involved in both pre-harvest and post-processing activities, the only thing they do not do is go out fishing. In fact, women in Ghana, known as 'fish mummies', actually own the fishing canoes and provide support in terms of capital, fuel, food and other necessities. Women are also responsible for marketing and processing the catch. Women in Ghana enjoy such economic influence to varying degrees, however the influence doesn't translate into economic power. The program aims to address the issue by empowering women with financial and legal advice to transform their economic influence into power; it also aims to reduce the knowledge gap between men and women.

In the documentary, women open up about sexual and gender-based violence as well as the ever-increasing burden of childcare. We observe how the law clinic tactfully handles as many cases as they are able, referring women to specialized help when needed. Clearly, women's identities extend beyond the care work that they do, and equally clearly, they have the determination to push against enforced boundaries and can emerge as economic powerhouses when empowered with the legal knowledge of their rights.

The film shows not just the issues faced by Ghanaian fisheries and the solutions that One Ocean Hub offers, but it also presents the many different faces, aspects and experiences of women in Ghanaian fisheries, focusing on their dreams and desires as well as their attempts to actualize their goals. ■

The documentary may be viewed at  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N7U5ZI8Qmr0&t=399s>



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Writers and potential contributors  
to YEMAYA, please note that

write-ups should be brief, about 2000 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.