

# Yemaya

No. 2

ICSF'S NEWSLETTER ON GENDER AND FISHERIES

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## From the Editor

Greetings! This second issue of Yemaya carries short articles from nine countries. Though from different parts of the world, through all of them, strikingly enough, run common themes.

All the write-ups speak of the lack of recognition of women within the fisheries sector, as fishworkers in their own right. They tell of efforts by women in different countries to assert their identities as fishworkers. They emphasize that fisheries is not only about harvesting of fish resources at sea—that it should more appropriately be seen as a system, which encompasses pre- and post-harvest activities, as also all types of harvesting activities.

The articles from Guinea Conakry, Gambia, Brazil and Pacific islands also bring out the important role of education and training—as defined by women fishworkers themselves—in enabling women to assert their identity as fishworkers and to improve their economic and social status.

The response to the first issue of Yemaya has been largely positive. In particular, we would like to mention a letter from Mariame Kane of the women's wing of CNPS, Senegal (reproduced on the last page), which suggests that by making possible an exchange between people of different continents—otherwise a very expensive proposition—a bulletin like Yemaya can become the

'umbilical cord' for women of fishing communities. A meaningful analogy and it is for us to ensure that the contents reflect the pulse of the people from fishing communities.

If you have any thoughts to share on what is carried here, or any piece to contribute, please write to us. Details on how this is possible are available on the last page. We plan to bring out three issues of Yemaya in 2000, in March, July and November. Could we request you to send in your write-ups in time for these issues?

## **FROM EUROPE/ France**

### **Include us**

**There must be parity in delegations to the World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fishworkers (WFF)**

**by Daniëlle le Sauce of the Association "Femmes du Littoral de Bretagne", France**

At their meeting in San Francisco in October 1999, the Coordination Committee of the WFF, composed of representatives from fishworkers organizations (FWOs) from different continents, received several letters from women members of FWOs from different parts of the world.

This was an outcome of the initiative taken by the women's movement in Brittany. Through letters addressed to women members of

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FWOs in different countries, they worked to raise awareness about the vital importance of women's participation in the WFF decision-making processes, and, in particular, the importance of women's representation at the next General Body meeting of the WFF in October 2000, in Brittany, France. Women members of FWOs were asked to write to the Coordination Committee of the WFF to stress these issues.

The following are excerpts from the letter addressed to the WFF Coordination Committee, by the women's movement of France:

"The World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fishworkers is bringing together fishworkers communities from around the world in order to defend their rights, their culture and to highlight the importance of the seas as a source of life. The riches of the sea should be prioritized for the use of the coastal populations and should be exploited in ways which ensure that the rights of future generations are respected...

One of the main objectives of the Forum is to recognize, protect and reinforce the role of women in the fisheries economy and to support communities who depend on fisheries for their livelihood.

During past years, women have revolutionized existing fishworkers' organizations. They have helped their communities to be more dynamic. The commitments, decisions and responsibilities taken by these women in fisheries have to be recognized by the Coordination Committee of the Forum.

.....women's role can no longer be ignored. The question is then how best to ensure a representation of all these women whose interests are similar and converging? The answer can only come from a forum where fishworkers from the South and fishworkers from the North stand together, through a global approach which will ensure the future of our communities.

The presence of more women in the delegations participating in the October 2000 meeting will not be a way to feminize the WFF image, but will help to recognize the presence of a women's movement within a men's movement. That is the reason we ask for parity to be promoted in delegations that will represent their countries in the 2000 WFF meeting. We would also like to see two more women in the composition of the next Coordination Committee."

The women's movement in France has also decided to organize a workshop during the WFF meeting in October 2000, for women who will be present at this meeting.

## FROM LATIN AMERICA/ Brazil

### Growing recognition

**Women fishworkers emerge as subjects in their own right in the province of Para**

**by Maria Cristina Maneschy, Professor at the Federal University of Para, Brazil and coordinator of the ICSF's Women in Fisheries (WIF) programme**

Fishermen and fisherwomen from six coastal municipalities in the province of Pará, Brazil, as well as members of unions and community-based associations, took part in a meeting organized by the Comissão Pastoral dos Pescadores (CPP), from 24 to 26 September this year. The objectives were to present to fishworkers and their organizations an overview of the present trends within the fisheries sector in the province and in the region, and to create opportunities for them to reflect on ways to improve the capacity of artisanal fishing communities to resist adverse developments.

Titled "Fishermen and Fisherwomen Looking for Citizenship in the New Times", the meeting was held in the village of Marudá, a fishing community about 180 km from Belém, the capital of the province of Pará. Sixty people—20 men and 40 women—took part in the meeting. CPP had invited five persons from each of the municipalities where it works directly, or where there are fishworkers organizations and groups, like the ones with which the ICSF-WIF project is working. But some groups sent more than five participants, as they had managed to raise funds themselves for the trip.

A total of 12 groups were present. Most of them stressed that they were looking for alternative means of income generation as well as for means to improve their organization and to create a political voice. They mentioned the environmental problems facing their fisheries and the fact that they have few means to cope with these.

The absence of representatives from *colônias* was significant. Representatives from only three of the

*colônias* were present. Only one *colônia* was represented by its president—the *colônia* of Maracaná municipality, whose president, a young woman, is doing a lot of interesting work, such as approaching local schools to teach children more about fishing culture.

*Colônias*—with their past history of military and government intervention—are still recognized as the professional association for fishermen in Brazil. The *colônia* card is accepted as evidence that a person is a fisherman. The presidents of *colônias* have considerable power, and are often propped up by political or economic interest groups. Most of the *colônias* are politically controlled and rarely work to enhance the social and political status of fishworkers. All fishermen are required to be members of *colônias* and to pay regular fees to it, though this is often not the case in practice.

Associations and independent groups develop initiatives that are not usually taken up by *colônias*—economic projects, for instance. But they also take on roles that should belong to the *colônias* or Federations (of *colônias*), such as representing the interests of fishworkers in governmental institutions dealing with credit programs.

At the meeting, it was interesting to observe the growing recognition of women within the fisheries and within the fishworker movement. The initiatives taken by four of the 12 organizations, directly working with women, are described below. It is significant that some of the themes raised by them are not commonly discussed at fisheries-related events.

- ◆ Women's Association, Cachoeira village: The president of this association spoke of the productive credit they have received from a governmental program, to support net weaving and crab processing activities. The group has received no support from the local *colônia*, making the work more difficult. They have problems in obtaining raw material and in accessing better markets.
- ◆ Women's Association, Baía do Sol: The group recalled its recent initiative in organizing a seminar on the social welfare system. The president of this group has herself learnt how to help fishworkers register with IBAMA—the government agency for the environment—a procedure obligatory for anyone in the country engaged in fish harvest.
- ◆ Group Erva Vida and Association of Women from the Fishing Area, Marudá: Both these groups are

engaged in the production of traditional medicines. According to the president of the first group, through this work, women have gained self-esteem and autonomy, since domestic work—even if related to fish or to agriculture—does not have social recognition. The second group shared its plans to support women's efforts to register in the *colônia*, as an initial step towards their greater recognition as fishworkers.

From the meeting, it was evident that women are emerging as political subjects in these communities and in the fishworker movements within the region. It was also evident that they face strong barriers in achieving their objectives—barriers ranging from a lack of recognition of their roles and identity, to their lack of access to education, to markets or to the means for reaching the markets.

Several challenges face the fishworker movements (MONAPE, MOPEPA etc.), and the NGOs that support them, researchers and activists, as well as policymakers: how best to support these individual group initiatives and to integrate them within a sustainable development programme for the coastal region, which is inclusive of men and women, and their communities.

## FROM LATIN AMERICA/ Brazil

### Count us in too

**Lourdinha Rodrigues has worked to give fishworker women a new self-identity**

**by Chandrika Sharma, Programme Associate, ICSF, Chennai**

In January this year, Cristina Maneschy, the coordinator of the ICSF- Women in Fisheries project in Brazil, and I, had the opportunity to meet with different groups working with artisanal and small-scale fishworkers in Brazil. In Recife, in the north-eastern state of Pernambuco, Nathanael Maranhao of the Centro Josue de Castro, took us to meet with Lourdinha Rodrigues, the secretary of the *colônia* of Ponte de Pedras Goiana for the past two years. It was a rich experience for us.

Lourdinha told us that she started her work in the *colônia* on a voluntary basis. Her earlier workplace was close to the *colônia* office and she had observed that there were no women who were part of it. Con-

cerned about this, she had spoken to the president. She had convinced him that it was in the long-term interest of the *colônia* to have women members, and he gave her the freedom to work on this issue.

In 1995 she called a meeting, and 75 women from the community came for it. She discussed the importance of women's participation in the *colônia*, of having proper documents, of making regular contributions to the INSS (the social security agency in Brazil) and to the *colônia*. Women responded well to her initiative.

During her work, she observed that women lacked self-esteem and did not see themselves as individuals or as fishworkers. They saw the *colônia* as a male space. They came to the *colônia* only to make the payments and not for the meetings. She decided to call another meeting to discuss these issues, though she was still not paid a salary for her work. She also organized meetings to discuss other important issues, such as women's health.

Many more women began to participate in meetings of the *colônia*. This was quite an achievement, since women had to overcome the resistance from their husbands or fathers, and even the resistance from other women. Their level of confidence increased. Women who went fishing, mended nets, or processed fish (salted and dried) subsequently asked to become members of the *colônia*. At present, of the 649 members in this *colônia*, 200 are women. About 100 women make payments to the INSS. Earlier, the officials at the INSS were not even aware that a woman could be considered a fishworker. Today women feel that the *colônia* is their space too. They participate in weekly meetings, formulate their own agenda, and take notes.

The process has, however, been long. The women were mostly illiterate and Lourdinha worked to teach them how to write their names, keep accounts, etc. They were supported in this work by the Centro Josue de Castro, an institution based in Recife.

Earlier, even the women did not consider themselves as fishworkers. Lourdinha worked on their own reality, and women began to become aware of the role they play in the fishery and in the family and community. They realized that though they work, they are not recognized as workers. Lourdinha worked with images to help them discover their identity. This helped women move from domestic to public spaces. Issues of citizenship, sexual relations and familial problems

were also discussed. It became clear that being active in the public domain does not mean that the other roles women play within the family and community are compromised.

Also, as a result of these efforts, payments to the *colônia*, especially from the women, have become more regular, and its income has gone up. The number of *colônia* members receiving unemployment insurance and other forms of social security from the INSS has also increased. Lourdinha's own work has become better recognized. While her earlier efforts were voluntary, she later began to be paid a salary of R60 (about US\$35) per month, which has subsequently been increased to R130.

Meanwhile, the women in the *colônia* have begun to work together to increase their income and employment opportunities. In 1997, 20 women formed a group for fish processing, and undertook a two-week course on this. This has helped improve the utilisation of fish and reduce wastage. Women make small burgers of fish, sausages, etc., and supply to snack bars in Recife. They are being supported by the *colônia* in this work, even though at every stage this has been so only after a struggle.

## FROM ASIA/ Philippines

### Fisherwomen as researchers

**A research project proves to be a fascinating learning process**

**by Cornelia Quist, Research Adviser for the CB-CRM Programme of Pipuli, Philippines, and member of ICSF**

After several years of preparatory awareness building and organizing work, fishing communities and the supporting NGO, Pipuli, decided that they were ready to take up the management of the 2279 hectares covering Danao Bay (Misamis Occidental in Northern Mindanao). By that time, every *barangay* (village) around the bay had a local fisher organization, which, besides addressing local needs, together formed a Resource Management Council (RMC), which is the officially recognized representative body of the fisher community to undertake the resource management of the Danao Bay. Various resource management initiatives had been organized, such as the establishment of a fish sanctuary, a ban period for fishing, a ban on

destructive fishing methods such as dynamite and poison, and mangrove rehabilitation.

Until then, women had been practically invisible in the resource management initiatives. Women had participated in these initiatives, but mostly as supporters and not as initiators. There were no women in the leadership of the organization and women's special interests as resource users were practically not recognized, leave alone addressed. The NGO, while working with the communities, had already observed this gender-imbalance and had begun organizing work among the women. They had started with leadership training for women and gender sensitivity training for the local leaders and their wives. Women were encouraged not only to give voluntary support, but also to speak out their specific problems and needs in the resource management initiatives. This resulted in women coming forward in their roles of shellfish gleaners, fish-trap operators and mangrove harvesters.

Now, at the threshold of taking up the management of the Danao Bay, the leaders of the fisher organizations and the supporting NGO realized that until now, the resource management initiatives had never been assessed with the community. Plans had been made and projects designed mostly based on assumptions or on the (technical) views of the NGO and also on the problems and needs of the most active members of the fisher organization. To be sure of a broadly-supported and effective management plan, they were in need of more insights about the resource users. They required more factual data about their socioeconomic background, their resource-use practices and dependency, and their perceptions about resource management. They also wanted to know what their experiences with the resource management initiatives and the fisher organization were so far.

In mid-1998, the leaders of the organization, some active fisherwomen, the supporting NGO, myself (research adviser) and a colleague (gender adviser), gathered to prepare the research, which we called the Resource Users Profile of the Danao Bay. We had decided to make it a community-based research, which is to be understood as involving the community in all stages of the research, from defining the research question, and collection of data, up to the final analysis. The approach is process-oriented and, therefore, needs time and intensive monitoring, but yields interesting insights and, moreover, it generally has an awareness-building and mobilizing effect on the community.

During the first session with this preparatory group, we organized a workshop where all could familiarize themselves through various exercises with what research is and how to define a research question. The formulation of the actual research question led to the first exciting discussion. It appeared that the leaders (men) had a rather limited definition of a resource user. In their eyes, resource users were first and foremost fish harvesters—who were mostly men—and that the data collection should focus on these. This implied that other resource users, such as shell gleaners, mangrove harvesters and those involved in pre- and post-harvest activities—all activities where women were to be found—would be left out from the research. The women participants were encouraged to give their views on who a resource user is and, after a lively discussion, the men indeed broadened their definition.

In order to collect solid baseline data, it was decided to choose the survey as research methodology. The formulation of the questionnaire showed again how important the involvement of the community leaders and women was. They pointed out issues, problems and views that would have been overlooked by the NGO, which had a different perspective. The women were of great help in making the questionnaire gender-sensitive, meaning that the concerns of the women as resource users were addressed as well. The women also pointed out that the resources are not only valued commercially in the community, but also considered for their non-cash value, such as food for the family, and that they were also used as an exchange product. This preparatory phase of the research was already a fascinating learning process for all.

The next step was to select and train research volunteers in the community. It was decided that we would select only women research volunteers, because women were seen as more approachable and better listeners than men. After we made a profile of the research volunteer, the leaders of the organization and the NGO went to look around in the community. More than 29 curious and enthusiastic women of all ages came for our training session. Their motivation and commitment was great and this made them good learners. And we also learned a lot from them, because after they pre-tested the questionnaire, they gave us very valuable feedback that enabled us to make important improvements.

When the first batch of filled-in questionnaires came in, we found out that it was mostly men who had been

interviewed, despite our instructions to interview in every household, both the husband and the wife. During our assessment meeting with the research volunteers, we were confronted with rather persistent gender biases, as they told us that women were just housewives and, therefore, did not need to be interviewed. They also said that many women did not want to be interviewed and had told them that it was sufficient to interview their husband only. We encouraged them to go back to the households and interview the women too.

When the preliminary processing of data showed that women were very much involved in resource use—it was even revealed that 21 per cent of the women respondents were actually engaged in fish capture—and that women's knowledge about the state of the resources and ideas about resource management were as good as that of men, the last barriers to interviewing women were finally taken away. So, again, we had an exciting step in the learning process.

As said earlier, community-based research also has an impact on the mobilization of the community. After we had presented the initial findings to the community, not only did more people join the organization, but the organization also adjusted its strategy based on the feedback from the community. And moreover, many of the women research volunteers became activists, advocating the concerns of the women as well.

## FROM ASIA / India

### Victory will be ours

Coastal village women in the south Indian state of Kerala battle hooch

by the Sakhi Resource Centre for Women, based in Trivandrum, India

Nellikunnu is a tiny coastal village 4 km off Kasargod, the northernmost district in Kerala, south of India. 'Welcome to the Liquor-free zone' is a sign that looks the visitor straight in the eye.

There is a calm beauty and serenity in this coastal village; a calmness that belies the fact that not so long ago, the presence of heavily intoxicated men steering their way with drunken gaits, was a common sight.

Changes have come to Nellikunnu; and these changes are the result of the relentless and determined struggles of the women of Nellikunnu. These are the women who work tirelessly, scouring the waters in their daily routine of gathering, by hand, the bounty of the sea—mackerels and sardines.

Says Sarojini, who has been involved in this anti-liquor protest for the past one-and-a-half months: 'Onam is the season when visitors pour into our village. That is also when *Vyajjan* (local term for illicit liquor) pours in. We anticipated this and planned our raids accordingly.' Sarojini is not alone in her journey for justice. There are others like Nalini, Lakshmi, Madhavi....

In 1994, the government in the province of Kerala passed an order prohibiting arrack. This led to the influx of spurious liquor from the neighbouring province of Mangalore. Simultaneously, in the outskirts of Nellikunnu, the locals started producing *Vyajavattu* (hooch) on their own. All this despite there being stringent laws against the manufacture of spurious liquor. Rules were bent according to the whims and fancies of the liquor lobby.

The tragedy and misery of all this was acute—in a short time span of two years, this village has lost 30 precious lives to the consumption of adulterated liquor. There are several others who, though alive, in many ways live the 'dead' life of an addict.

It was in June 1999 that the double tragedy of the death of Samikutty and Ravi, along with the suicide attempts of two young men, occurred. It was then that the women decided to take matters into their own hands. The women needed no deep wisdom to realize that, sooner or later, there would be only women left in their village. Unless they acted soon.

On June 23, around 300 women went to Srikurumba Bhagavathi temple to seek support from the temple authorities for their raid against illicit liquor. The temple folk, seeing their determination, promised to support them.

Campaigning began in an aggressive manner—the first raid being in the district of Kasargod. Women entered the liquor dens. Many soda bottles were smashed on the floor. During these raids, the women suffered—five of them from grave injuries.

Ingenious ways were adopted to track down the liquor dens. Disguised as men, in shirts and trousers, women managed to mislead the hooch dealers and to gain entry into the dens. Every day the women divided themselves into two groups and branched off into different directions. These explorations were always in the night—from 10 pm to 4 am. A heavy price was paid, since all the women worked during the whole day selling fish.

Physically exhausted and emotionally challenged, the women of Nellikunnu were relentless in their pursuit of justice and change, undeterred by threats from their men folk or their contemptuous comments.

There was a slight and unexpected setback when the police intervened, declaring that the women had no right to encroach and conduct raids in homes and shops. This failed to dampen the enthusiasm of the women who then shifted their attention to the beachfront. The long, sunny beach is home to this group of women protestors. The protest is straightforward and their modus operandi simple—vehicles passing their way are stopped and the liquor stocks are raided.

The women of Nellikunnu have only one regret—that their efforts started rather late. Many of their men folk would still be alive had all this began earlier.

This group of women protestors do not have any political affiliations. They are dismayed and disheartened that the local representative of the government, the MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly) has not even come to visit them. Since they had also confiscated hooch from the home of the woman councillor, the ruling political party has also chosen to ignore them. As a protest to the apathy and indifference shown, the women decided to boycott the national elections earlier this year.

The voices of 300 women sing, “Even if we die in this struggle, it does not matter, so long as we achieve the aim of getting rid of spurious liquor. Victory will be ours”. When 300 women unite and sing this refrain, it reverberates with a power and unity seldom seen in this ‘totally literate and developed’ state of Kerala.

## FROM NORTH AMERICA/ Canada

### Rallying for the cause

**The New Brunswick Coastal Women’s Group Women makes headway in allying with the women’s movement**

**by Chantal Abord-Hugon for the New Brunswick Coastal Women, Canada**

In the first issue of Yemaya, we had explained how, after government cuts to unemployment insurance, a huge protest movement of seasonal workers highly dependent on this type of aid programmes, had developed in the coastal communities of Canada. The movement was led mainly by women. Some of them had organized conferences to help coastal women break their isolation and to provide them with critical information. They had conducted an action research to help develop strategies for action and assist them to meet with decision-makers in order to bring about social changes identified as critical.

Since the publication of that article, many positive things have happened, but keeping women mobilized and sustaining the movement remains our main challenge.

Last winter, women not yet ready for political action, organized a two-day conference using the same model that had been so popular in previous years. Participation was excellent. We had a guest speaker who spoke on family violence and another on positive thinking and relaxation. Of course, we had the usual party and talent show, but we also held a workshop to identify future directions for the group. From the many ideas, two priorities emerged: increase of minimum wage and achievement of pay equity, and improvement of working conditions.

The province of New Brunswick has one of the lowest minimum wage rates in Canada. A full-time worker earning a minimum wage will earn less than what the government has identified as the poverty line. At the same time, men working at identical or similar jobs, earn an average of Can\$2 an hour more than the women. The law is not strong enough to force employers to respect pay equity.

An action plan was developed on the issue of pay equity. Women saw very clearly that they risked losing their jobs if they fought this battle alone. As seasonal

workers, their employers do not need to fire them—they simply will not hire them the following year. They have absolutely no protection. Good media coverage surrounding the conference put the concerns of coastal women and the pay equity issue in the spotlight. Women were very nervous with this sudden public attention.

They feared that they would not be recalled to work for the next fishing season which was about to start. Our provincial Minister of Labour, a woman herself, called a meeting and indicated that the government could not investigate employers if women did not file complaints. These female seasonal workers, mainly fish-plant workers, said they would never file complaints for fear of losing their jobs.

It was clear that the women in coastal communities needed to ally themselves with women's organizations that could fight the battle for them. A momentum was created through media coverage. At this time, another group of women was inviting provincial women's organizations to join the World March of Women 2000, the themes of which were Women's Poverty and Violence against Women.

The New Brunswick (NB) committee for the March decided they would focus on the pay equity issue as their main demand. A working group has been set up, which includes women lawyers, and they will draft a pay equity law and present it to government. The President of the World March, Françoise David, has been involved in the struggle to implement a pay equity law in Québec. She was invited by the NB committee to explain the strategies that had been used by them, the main obstacles they had faced, and the traps that should be avoided.

The New Brunswick Coastal Women's Group is enthusiastic about the progress they have accomplished in such a short time. The challenge now is to keep the women mobilized. It is difficult to maintain participation and communication between them and the more urbanized women in the pay equity working group. We not only face the problem of geographic dispersion but also, in some cases, the shyness of these less experienced committee members.

Organizing the World March in various regions of the province will hopefully be a way of bringing women from different backgrounds to work towards a common goal.

Referring ourselves to the criteria to sustain a social movement we had used in the previous article, we can evaluate our progress as follows:

- ◆ The process moves step by step/issue to issue: we have been able to move from the issue of employment insurance to the one focusing on pay equity and working conditions.
- ◆ Purpose and objective are sharpened: we have clearly made progress here.
- ◆ The base is expanded through education: we still have no capacity for this.
- ◆ Facts are researched, studied and documented: not only did we have the action-research report prepared by the women in coastal communities themselves, but we also developed linkages with professionals able to work on the issue of pay equity.
- ◆ Links are built with supportive allies: this is the area where we have been the most successful. The World March of Women 2000 committee, which represents many women's groups, has taken our pay equity issue very seriously.
- ◆ Members are kept involved: this is still difficult to achieve. The World March may be a good way to keep the women in coastal communities involved.
- ◆ People speak for themselves, and develop diverse leadership: a lot of progress has been made here. The women have done very well in articulating their demands, not only with the media but with other women's organizations. They see that so far nothing harmful has happened to them but the fear of losing their jobs is still in the background.
- ◆ Structures are developed—useful to guide and stabilize the movement, but caution is required since structures can also kill it: we still have no formal structures, and we still don't know if these would have helped or harmed us.

We realize we have made important progress in different areas but we still do not have a social movement able to bring about social changes. Indeed, we are lacking in some of the essential conditions, all of which are necessary to achieve a sustainable social movement.

Nevertheless, the New Brunswick Coastal Women Group is very proud of its achievements. We have been able to make significant progress in drawing other women's groups to support our demands. This has increased the awareness of urban middle class women to the living conditions and working realities of women



from coastal areas. At this time, our leaders are encouraged to continue but they are tired and realize the importance of involving more women. This will be our challenge for the coming year.

## FROM THE PACIFIC

### What's 'fishing'?

**The way fishing is defined in the Pacific islands often omits women's role**

**by Lyn Lambeth, Community Fisheries Officer, Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC), New Caledonia**

The SPC Women's Fisheries Development Project, now the Community Fisheries Project, was set up in 1991 at the request of Pacific Community member governments, to provide assistance and support to women in the fisheries sector. It was recognized that the needs of women had often been overlooked in development projects undertaken in this region. Pacific island women have traditionally been involved in fisheries activities, in the collection and processing of seafood for family consumption and small-scale income generation, but little has been done to document their activities and identify their potential for development or to understand the problems of overharvesting.

This lack is not necessarily the result of 'men's development' as opposed to 'women's development'. It is more a result of the nature of the fishing areas and the type of development involved—traditionally in the Pacific islands, men have fished with boats offshore, while women have concentrated their activities on the inshore areas, collecting or gleaning a number of species from the reef and inshore areas. Pacific island States have been keen to encourage the development of offshore fishing activities, to generate income and to reduce the pressure on inshore marine resources, and have naturally targeted the people most involved in this type of fishing—men.

The lack of recognition and support of women's roles in fisheries has been further highlighted by confusion over the meaning of the term 'fisheries'. Many local languages in the Pacific islands have different words for different types of fishing. The idea that fishing predominantly involves men going fishing in boats (therefore overlooking a huge range of inshore marine resource use) is common throughout the world, but is

especially strong in the Pacific where different words may exist for the various types of fishing. For example, there may be numerous words for the different types of 'men's fishing', such as trolling or bottom-fishing and separate words for 'women's fishing', such as collecting clams or sea cucumbers, etc. The English term 'fisheries' is often translated and understood as meaning 'men's fishing'. This affects the way the fisheries sector is supported, and the manner in which the management and conservation of marine resources is approached.

The work of the Community Fisheries Section includes research and assessment of those involved in subsistence and artisanal fisheries. Based on this, further development support is provided. This support may be given by means of national and regional training activities as well as the provision of resource materials such as manuals, bulletins and videos.

Recommendations that have resulted from the national assessments include improving information services for small-scale fishermen and women, increasing the involvement of women in the work of the government fisheries agency, improving training for small-scale fishermen and women, and increasing education and public awareness of the importance of fishing communities to the overall health and well-being of the country.

The SPC Community Fisheries Section also produces, in collaboration with the SPC Information Section, a twice-yearly bulletin, 'Women in Fisheries'. This includes news of interest concerning fishing communities around the region. This bulletin, along with other SPC bulletins is now available on-line (<http://www.spc.org.nc/coastfish/>)

## FROM AFRICA/ Gambia

### Informal power

**The *kafos* of Gambia are informal associations of women fishworkers**

**by Anna Mbenga Cham, a researcher based in Gambia**

In Gambia, as in many other countries, fishing is predominantly men's work. Women are engaged in post-harvest activities (smoking, drying and marketing). They encounter several problems in this work, such

as the lack of access to credit. These problems, combined with the fact that women also have to manage their heavy household responsibilities, make it difficult for women to improve their business prospects.

Generally, women have no access to institutionalized credit. Some credit is provided by the Fisheries Department, which operates a revolving loan scheme for artisanal operations. This, however, benefits more the men. In fact, few loans are destined for the post-harvest activities in which women are involved. Due to such problems, women have, on their own, formed associations to try and access traditional as well as institutionalized credit.

Kinship plays an important role in these associations. It is the basis of co-operation at the beach site, market places and processing houses, as well as in *kafos* (an informal rotating credit organization where members contribute money regularly to a central pool). Women help each other in many ways, such as by lending tools and drying racks. The social organization of kinship relations helps women escape from the cycle that perpetuates poverty.

There are several *kafo* groups in different villages. The *kafo* network is usually limited to women of the same ethnic group. Through membership of these groups, women can overcome barriers due to lack of credit facilities. The credit schemes of the *kafos*, which operate with a set of agreed rules and regulations, involve specific weekly or monthly cash subscriptions by members. From the fund, credit is given to members in rotation, to help them meet operating costs. The amount of credit obtained through these *kafos* may not be large enough to enable the women to substantially expand their businesses, but it has proved the ability of women to organize and create by themselves.

## FROM AFRICA/ Gambia

### Educating Ms. Fish Cutter

**An experiment in Ghanatown catches up on women's education**

**by Eva Munk-Madsen, a Copenhagen-based consultant on fisheries and women's issues**

In Gambia, women of all ages come together after finishing their household chores, in the late evening. They are here to learn English. Few of them got much school

education in their childhood. They work hard every day at the beach, where they cut sharks and skates, the catch of their husbands, brothers, sons or other fellow villagers. There they salt and spread the meat on drying racks for sun-drying. Some of them are wage workers, while others are able to buy the catch and export the final processed product themselves. All of them aim at keeping their children in school and most of them succeed. At the same time, they are eager to improve their own abilities and to learn English.

In Ghanatown, a Ghanaian immigrant fishing village in the Gambia, an evening school was started this year in August. It was open to women and men who had never learned to speak English. As an outsider in the village, attempting to open an export-promotion house for by-products from the traditional fishery, I soon learned that communication in English was only possible with men, as they generally have received more school education than women. This restraint on building direct business relations with the women, together with my Danish background, made me propose the organization of evening classes in Ghanatown. In Denmark, adult education through evening classes, at low cost, is very widespread and popular.

The proposal was received with enthusiasm. The idea was presented to the council of village elders, to church leaders, in churches, and to the women's leaders, and soon the community mobilized its own internal resources. Several educated villagers had earlier organized classes for women in both English and Fanti, but the migratory character of the fishing business had always put an end to these initiatives. Now a school board has been set up with members who hold important positions in the community. This includes: the headmaster of the primary school, the Imam, a church leader, a member of the elders council, a teacher with experience in adult education, two young innovative fish traders, two women students and me. The women rarely show up at board meetings, as they are busy with household chores when it is quiet at the beach.

I had the pleasure of teaching the first two conversation classes in English for about 15 dedicated women and 14 dedicated men. Under the light of a few petrol lamps and sometimes with strong competition from the noise of the rain falling on the tin roof, the students learned to present themselves and their occupations. "I am a fish cutter", said most women, and "I am a fisherman", said most men. On my departure, several teachers were ready to take over on a volun-

tary basis. For the rest of the year, the evening classes will be given free of charge. The teachers work for free. The school board has applied for some financial support to get lights in the school building and wages for the teachers from next year. A school fee will also be introduced, but it is the intention to keep it low.

The success of this initiative relies upon its acceptance, not only by the women students, but also by their husbands. The male students are, whether married or not, in a different position to make decisions on their own. The support of younger and/or educated men in the community is here of utmost importance. Blessed be the school board for their dedication to the task and their visions for a better future.

## FROM AFRICA/ Guinea Conakry

### Training hard

**Women in the fisheries sector in Guinea Conakry train for new commercial skills**

**by Mamayawa Sandouno, who works for the NGO, ADEPEG, in Guinea Conakry**

Women occupy a central place in the fisheries sector of Guinea Conakry. They are involved in fish processing and fish marketing. Women represent 70 to 80 per cent of fishworkers involved in this activity. However, a majority of them are illiterate. To address this issue, a training programme has been set up for women working in associations.

The educational needs as identified by the women themselves are:

- ◆ functional reading and writing
- ◆ understanding credit mechanisms
- ◆ knowledge and information about national and regional markets
- ◆ training in appropriate technologies (for fish processing)

All along the coast, fish processing is a major activity, providing women with important revenue, helping feed thousands of families, and contributing significantly to the socioeconomic development of the country. These are the reasons why women fish processors are so involved in training/education—they know that through education, they will get access to information and communication.

Through these training sessions, women have been able to improve their skills in management, planning and commercial operations. Already, women working in the smoking centres of Bonfi, Temenetaye, Dixinn, Dabompa and, soon, women from Boulbinet will be able to use two big warehouses built by a Japanese project for women organized into GIEs (Economic Interest Groups).

## FROM AFRICA/ Ghana

### Together we build

**Getting together has helped the women in the Central and Greater Accra Regions of Ghana**

**by Lydia Sasu, Project Coordinator of the Freedom from Hunger Campaign/ Action for Development (FFHC/AD) project in Ghana.**

The FFHC/AD project, a small project with a grassroots base, operates in the Central and Greater Accra Regions of Ghana. It covers 13 village associations, of which six are fishing villages. One of the many objectives is to help the associations grow into self-sustaining groups.

All the members of the associations meet regularly to exchange ideas, to discuss problems and find solutions. At one of these meetings, women from Bortianor, Faana and Chokomey villages (in the Greater Accra Region) complained that fishermen were collecting five handfuls (instead of the customary one handful) of anchovies from each basket of anchovies that they carry for the women from the boats, at Bortianor beach. The women complained to the chief fisherman of Bortianor, who tried unsuccessfully to solve the problem.

The women of Bortianor then invited other women from the village associations of Oshiyie and Kokrobite, as well as the chief fishermen from these villages, to help them resolve the problem. At this meeting, held at the house of the chief fisherman of Bortianor, the practice of collecting five handfuls of anchovies was prohibited and the earlier practice of collecting one handful was reverted to.

Women in these associations have also begun to take other initiatives. Aware of the decline of fish resources over the years, they have collectively decided not to buy fish caught through the use of explosives.

**LETTERS/ Senegal**

Dear Chandrika,

I received your bulletin (Yemaya) on 18 September 1999 and I feel the contents are very enriching. This bulletin represents an alternative because all fishing communities from all over the world have the objective of exchanging experiences in order to improve their daily livelihood. This being very difficult to achieve because of economic constraints, I feel that your bulletin is a mean to that end. Through all the short, clear and precise articles, we can see experiences from our continent and problems that our colleagues from the North are facing.

This bulletin should not become intellectual literature but should continue on the same track, relating concrete experiences that could help to resolve problems of the others. I talked about it with Therese and Seynabou and we all think that we will make this bulletin our umbilical cord. Thank you.

Mariame Kane  
M'bour, Senegal

**NEWS/ Canada**

Genglobfish

A listserv (a mailing list management programme), to discuss issues linked to fisheries, gender and globalization, has recently been initiated on the Internet. This listserv is intended to help 'address issues related to globalization by creating a global network to monitor its impacts'. Present members of the listserv are primarily those who have been working on issues of fisheries and gender, and include academics, activists and people from NGOs. In case you are interested to know more about Genglobfish, you could get in touch with Barbara Neis (bneis@morgan.ucs.mun.ca).

**YEMAYA**

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

Writers and potential contributors to YEMAYA, please note that write-ups should be brief, about 500 words. They could deal with issues that are of direct relevance to women and men of fishing communities. They could also focus on recent research or on meetings and workshops that have raised gender issues in fisheries. Also welcome are life stories of women and men of fishing communities working towards a sustainable fishery or for a recognition of their work within the fishery. Please also include a one-line biographical note on the writer.