

# Don't Discriminate against Women

**Gender-equitable and sustainable development of fisheries can occur only if there is an end to discrimination against women in fishing communities**

**M**ore than 30 years after States adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and more than 15 years after the Beijing Declaration and the Beijing Platform for Action that set out measures for national and international action for the advancement of women, women of fishing communities continue to face discrimination at various levels.

This fact was deplored by participants of the recent ICSF workshop "Recasting the Net: Defining a Gender Agenda for Sustainable Life and Livelihoods in Fishing Communities". The "Shared Agenda" (page 8) from the workshop underscores the need to address this situation urgently and systematically, through action at various levels—by households, communities, fishworker organizations, researchers, civil society, States and international organizations.

Notably, the agenda explicitly links the struggles of women fishworkers for their rights to the struggle for sustainable fisheries—fisheries that have the ability to sustain lives and livelihoods of fishing communities into the future.

The Shared Agenda must be taken forward at all levels. In doing so, measures that have served to recognize and support women's work must be studied and emulated, based on local realities. Several countries have taken positive steps to address the discrimination faced by women. Brazil, for example, recognizes all women who work in fishing and fisheries-related activities as workers entitled to social security and other benefits, France recognizes women who provide shore-based support to the fishing activities of their partners as 'collaborative spouses', and India produces gender-disaggregated data on those who work in fisheries-related activities through a periodic census of marine fishing communities. There is much that other States can learn from such examples.

It is critical to recognize the role of collective action. Indeed, evidence from across the world indicates that where fishworkers are organized, they are able to seek accountability and affirmative action from their governments, and, equally, are able to benefit from such measures. In this context, the need to support and strengthen organizations

in fisheries, including those of women fishworkers, is undeniable. Organization has enabled women to counter various forms of discrimination and violence, including at the household and community level. It has helped question social norms that restrict women's freedom and mobility, define what is 'acceptable' and 'unacceptable', and circumscribe their ability to participate in decisionmaking.

A critical evaluation of fisheries projects, many of which have explicitly had a gender component, is also needed, for possible adaptation and replication of positive interventions. This is especially important if the benefits of such interventions are evident for large numbers of the poor, particularly poor women.

While individual examples of men or women benefiting are no doubt inspiring, the focus has to be on wider benefits for those who are at the very bottom of the socioeconomic ladder. Interventions should have addressed the systemic causes of oppression and discrimination resulting from unequal power relations, underpinned by class, caste, race,

ethnicity, gender and other factors.

Also vital is research on power relations and discrimination, which can shape not only the discourse on gender and fisheries, but also the direction and form of aid and support to fisheries. Researchers need to address the paucity of work on the gendered nature of fisheries, and ensure the practical relevance of their work, including to fishworker and women-in-fisheries organizations advocating for gender-just and sustainable fisheries.

That discrimination, including against women, continues in various forms, is unacceptable. The obligations of States under CEDAW, among the most widely ratified Conventions, and their commitments to implement the Beijing Platform for Action, must be reflected in concrete ways in fisheries legislation, policies and interventions. As the 29th session of the Committee on Fisheries (COFI) of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) prepares to discuss the steps needed to support small-scale fisheries, it would do well to take note of the proposals for gender-equitable and sustainable development of fisheries contained in the "Shared Agenda". This must not go down as yet another missed opportunity. ♣



# Gender Agenda

**Developments in fisheries have had a great impact on the lives and livelihoods of women in fishing communities, a recent workshop was told**

*Oh Great Spirit, Creator of all Faiths  
and all of life,*

*We the women involved in the fisheries  
worldwide*

*Offer our Thanks for allowing us to  
gather here in beautiful Chennai, India  
and for all of those who are with us in  
spirit.*

*We humbly ask you to guide our  
discussions over the next few days with  
strength, compassion and perseverance  
and wisdom, and may our conclusions  
be transformed into action for all  
women in the fisheries and their  
families.*

*We also wish to honour all fisherfolk  
and their loved ones who have passed  
on from this life, by remembering our  
good comrade and friend, Harekrishna  
Debnath and the very source of our life,  
the fish in the seas, rivers, oceans and  
lakes*

*May we carry the heartbeat of all  
Mother Earth in our hearts, our work  
and in our relations with each other.*

*Thank You*

*All of My Relations*

*—Sherry Pictou, Co-chair,  
World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP),  
Canada*

**T**hirty-nine people from 18 countries met at Mahabalipuram, India, during 7-10 July 2010 for the workshop “Recasting the Net: Defining a Gender Agenda for Sustainable Life and Livelihoods in Fishing Communities”, organized by the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF). Participants included fishworkers, members of fishworker organizations, fisheries researchers, academicians,

policymakers and representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and multilateral agencies.

The workshop was meant to analyze the impact of current developments in fisheries on the lives and livelihoods of fishing communities, specifically focusing on women's experiences; share local agendas and strategies of women's organizations in fisheries; and to define an agenda and strategies for sustaining life and livelihood in fisheries into the future. It followed on national/regional workshops in the Philippines, India, South Africa, Brazil, Thailand, Europe and Canada, and a desk study on women in fisheries, based on a review of literature.

The workshop began with an invocation (see above) read out by Rosetta Ferreira, a woman fisher from South Africa and a member of Coastal Links, on behalf of Sherry Pictou of the WFFP. This was followed by a traditional ceremony of lighting the lamp and exchange of flowers. Welcoming the participants, Chandrika Sharma, Executive Secretary, ICSF, pointed out that this was not a one-off workshop—it was part of a much longer process of work with women in fisheries.

## Co-sponsor

Nalini Nayak, Member, ICSF, elaborated on ICSF's work in support of fishing communities since 1984. “We gather here to critically assess what has happened and to discuss how we can go ahead. We hope to develop a shared agenda for fisheries that will sustain lives and livelihoods of coastal communities,” she said. Following this, Ria Fitriana, on behalf of Natasha Stacey of the School for Environmental

Research, Charles Darwin University (CDU), Australia, introduced the work of CDU, a co-sponsor of the workshop.

The session on national reports, moderated by Cornelia Quist, Member, ICSF, saw ten presentations—from Asia (the Philippines, India and Thailand), Africa (Guinea Bissau, South Africa and Tanzania), South America (Brazil and Chile), Europe and Canada. Rosetta Ferreira of Coastal Links, South Africa, reported on the women-in-fisheries workshop held in South Africa in February 2010. Coastal Links, a network of community-based organizations on the west coast of South Africa, started in 2004, has a membership of over 2,000, which includes fishers, women and youth. Women, as part of Coastal Links, have been fighting for the rights of fishermen, said Rosetta. Through litigation, they have got the government's commitment for a policy on small-scale fishers, pending which fishers have been granted interim relief, in the form of temporary permits to access selected fisheries resources. However, this has not benefitted women much as the fish is still being sold to big companies. "We were so busy helping men get their rights that we forgot ourselves. The new policy process has left women out. Men have not supported us in ensuring that there are livelihoods for women," said Rosetta. "Our priority now is to ensure that the new policy recognizes women's rights and the important role they play in the fishery and the community, and protects their livelihoods."

Rosetta also dwelt on how the current quota system in South Africa has divided communities by introducing an individualistic ethic. Marine protected areas (MPAs), which cover 21 per cent of South Africa's coastline, have been established without consulting local fishing communities, and large no-take zones have had negative impacts on their livelihoods. The need is for a community-based approach to management and provision of social security to all, she stressed.

From Brazil, Maria Santos of the National Articulation of Fisherwomen (ANP) and Naina Pierri of the Federal

University of Parana reported on the two workshops that had been organized in early 2010. The main issues that concern women fishworkers are: securing their rights as workers, including to social security; securing land rights and access to fishery resources in the face of large-scale tourism, aquaculture, and infrastructure projects; environmental degradation; and access to education and healthcare. Women of fishing

**Stronger leadership is emerging among women, and women are also better represented in the *colonias*.**

communities are active in different organizations, including traditional fishermen's organizations (*colonias*), community-based and economic solidarity associations, as well as in the ANP and in the Brazilian Movement of Artisanal Fishermen and Fisherwomen, established in 2009. Through their organizational initiatives and broad alliances, they have got their work formally recognized in Brazilian fisheries legislation. Stronger leadership is emerging among women, and women are also better represented in the *colonias*. However, there are several challenges ahead. These

JOHN KURIEN



Traditional ceremony of lighting the lamp to inaugurate the Mahabalipuram workshop on current developments in fisheries and the lives and livelihoods of fishing communities

include ensuring the autonomy and financial sustainability of their organizations, improving communication among members, and creating greater awareness about problems like domestic violence.

To a query on whether women organizing autonomously outside fishworker organizations could undermine the fishworker movement as a whole, it was noted that in Brazil there is some degree of integration. There is, however, resistance among fishermen to women's participation, particularly at the *colonia* level. Fishermen should recognize that fisherwomen share the same concerns, and should create spaces for women to participate in organizational work.

**Women, however, still have to cope with high rates of illiteracy, unsafe, unhygienic and difficult working conditions, and sexually transmitted diseases.**

These issues are being taken up by UNFFPG, with the support ADEPEG-CPA.

Purnima Meher and Ujwala Patil of the National Fishworkers' Forum (NFF), India, reported on the workshop held in Mumbai in February 2010. Over the past 30 years women fishworkers in India have organized for their rights as part of larger fishworker movements and unions. They have had success on a few issues, like gaining transportation to markets, reducing taxes, and getting access to savings-cum-relief schemes in some regions.

However, various problems persist, including lack of access to credit, poor sanitation and healthcare facilities, lack of land titles, alcoholism, increase in dowry demands, declining access to fish for processing and marketing (due to both stock depletion and exports), poor facilities at markets and landing centres, displacement and pollution. Leadership, particularly amongst women, has not grown over the last few decades and women's issues are not reflected in the broader agenda of the fishworker movement, noted Meher.

Recent efforts are to seek recognition of women as workers in the informal sector, and to lobby for a street vendor policy that is supportive of women fish vendors. Meher said that where the fisheries are export-oriented, women's access to fish for local markets has been affected since fishermen prefer to sell their fish to the highest bidder.

In the absence of Sherry Pictou, the presentation on the consultation organized by the Coastal Learning Communities network in Canada was made by Nalini Nayak.

### **Harvesting fish**

The consultation, in the form of a teleconference, included aboriginal and non-aboriginal representatives of fishing communities. Women in Canadian fisheries are involved in harvesting (especially shellfish), drying, processing and trading fish, and in land-based fishing activities like preparing gear, bookkeeping and looking after family and community. Among the major challenges they face today are the privatization of fisheries resources, inability to commercially

Mamayawa Sandouno from the Guinean NGO, ADEPEG-CPA, noted that more fish is being smoked these days—from about 10 per cent of artisanal fisheries production before the country's independence in 1958 to about 70 per cent today. Almost all the fish that is smoked enters national or regional trade. The technology for fish smoking has improved and a wider variety of species are smoked. Women fish smokers have recently established a co-operative union, the Guinean National Union of Women Fish Smokers (UNFFPG). From a family-based subsistence activity, fish smoking has become an organized commercial enterprise, with support and training from the co-operatives. Women, however, still have to cope with high rates of illiteracy, unsafe, unhygienic and difficult working conditions, and sexually transmitted diseases. There are also significant barriers to trade in fish and fish products, including hygiene standards for export markets and customs barriers for regional trade, including *ad hoc* checkpoints and extortion.

sell fish caught in traditional fisheries, and environmental degradation. Privatization has led to the loss of licences and access to resources and facilities. Industrial aquaculture and market forces have also led to higher levels of stress and violence within families. Canadian women seem to have less voice in the fisheries today than they did ten years ago, when there was greater openness to the idea of women's participation in fishing organizations.

The presentation on the European workshop was made by Marja Bekendam, the chair of AKTEA, the European Network of Women in Fisheries and Aquaculture, and a member of VINVIS, the women-in-fisheries network of the Netherlands.

A questionnaire circulated before the workshop in Europe received responses from women in fisheries organizations from seven countries in Europe. The workshop focused on four themes: work and changes in the gender division of labour; women and decisionmaking; rights to coastal and fisheries resources and fisheries management; and women organizing in fisheries. Bekendam noted that women's organizations are seeking a legal status to women's unrecognized work (including as 'collaborative spouses'), better working conditions, equal opportunities and representation in decisionmaking at all levels—in household enterprises, community fisheries organizations, national organizations and at the European level. Women's knowledge and skills are sought to be integrated into fisheries management. Bekendam noted that women-in-fisheries organizations have multiplied in Europe since the mid-1990s to defend the future of the sector and the communities dependent on fisheries. AKTEA has helped facilitate this process, by functioning as a hatchery for women's leadership. Challenges for the future include expanding membership and leadership and seeking support from fishermen's organizations and the government.

To a query on the legal recognition accorded to shellfish gatherers (*mariscadoras*) and women working



Nalini Nayak, Mamayawa Sandouno, Marylene Chever, Lamine Niassa and Alain Le Sann at the Mahabalipuram workshop

in ancillary jobs (notably as *redeiras* or gear riggers) in Galicia, Spain, it was noted that their gains have been because the Galician government has a sense of pride in its fisheries. One major struggle of the *mariscadoras* has been for social security, and pension and benefits for work-related ailments.

The presentation on the workshop held in the Philippines was made by Jovelyn Cleofe from the Centre for Empowerment and Resource Development. The discussions explored the perceptions and

**Women-in-fisheries organizations have multiplied in Europe since the mid-1990s to defend the future of the sector and the communities dependent on fisheries.**

experiences of climate change among fishing communities. The lack of a supportive policy environment that recognizes women as major stakeholders in fisheries development and management, has prompted women to organize at the village and national levels, including for advocacy work. This has led to several achievements like the Philippines Fisheries Code of 1998, which includes women under the definition of fishers, and the Magna Carta for women, approved in 2009.

## A shared agenda for sustaining life and livelihoods in fishing communities

### OUR DREAMS FOR THE FUTURE

*We dream of a future in which:*

- aquatic ecosystems are free of pollution, retaining their ability to regenerate living resources, sustain livelihoods and meet food security;
- interaction with natural resource are based on principles of sustainability and a respect for the rhythms and limits of nature;
- interactions within communities and with society are based on principles of equality, social justice and mutuality;
- there is respect for the diversity of ecosystems and communities and the recognition that this diversity is the basis for sustaining life and livelihoods;
- fishing communities, including women and children, are able to live their lives in peace and dignity, free of violence, and to enjoy decent living and working conditions;
- people have the right to work and to choose the work that they prefer, irrespective of the sexual division of labour, and all work, including reproductive work, is valued;
- the rights of fishing communities to their coastal lands, as well as the preferential access of small-scale and artisanal fishworkers and indigenous peoples to coastal and inland fisheries resources, are recognized;
- small-scale and artisanal fisheries are recognized for producing high-quality fish in a sustainable manner;
- fishing communities retain ownership and control over economic assets employed in fishing and fish processing and marketing operations;
- fishing communities have strong organizations, including producer organizations, enabling them to negotiate from positions of power, and in these organizations, women have central roles in decisionmaking;
- women engaged in fisheries activities have the first right to access the fish that is landed, and the marketing chain is restructured in equitable ways to privilege and valorize small-scale and artisanal fisheries and fishworkers;
- power to manage coastal and fishery resources is devolved to local and indigenous communities, and their capacity to do so is strengthened;
- planning for small-scale and artisanal fisheries takes into consideration broader aquatic and coastal management issues, and where traditional and local knowledge, together with scientific knowledge, form the basis of fisheries management systems;
- the choice of fisheries conservation and management mechanisms and instruments are sensitive to principles of equity, social justice and solidarity;

- fisheries conservation and management mechanisms and instruments promote community-based management and incorporate approaches other than market-driven quota management systems;
- fishing communities have access to the information they need to participate in decisionmaking in an informed way; and
- basic economic, social, cultural and political rights are guaranteed by the State through a range of instruments, including the provision of social security, education and health facilities and a range of social and infrastructure assets for fishing communities.

### OUR AGENDA FOR ACTION

*Based on these dreams, we propose the following action agenda for different sections of society:*

#### Households and communities

- Strengthen the capacity of women to participate in fishworker movements and organizations.
- Challenge men's resistance to women's participation in organizations, where it exists, and ensure the sharing of household work.
- Enhance the capacity of communities, including through literacy programmes, information on aquatic ecology and access to appropriate technology.
- Secure an environment of safety and freedom from violence and sexual abuse within the household and community.
- Ensure that community-based organizations guarantee women's participation in decision-making processes and their access to resources such as fish and fish products.
- Recognize and assert the value of traditional and local knowledge, including that of women, as an important component in decision-making processes.

#### Fishworker organizations

- Develop a culture in which all forms of discrimination are eliminated.
- Guarantee space and support for women to participate in decision-making processes, including those related to conservation and fisheries management.
- Address women's issues within organizations, and create separate spaces for women to organize autonomously at local, regional, national and international levels.
- Promote exchanges between women fishworkers and their organizations across different contexts.

Much remains to be done, including: ensuring the implementation of existing legislation; capacity building and strengthening women-in-fisheries organizations at various levels, and improving the capacity of local communities to deal with climate change and natural

disasters, taking note of specific impacts on women.

The presentation on the workshop held in Thailand was made by Ravadee Prasertcharoensuk of the Sustainable Development Foundation (SDF) and Suphen Pantee of the Fisherfolk Federation of Thailand. Insecure access to resources, depletion of

- Raise awareness about, and participate actively in monitoring implementation of, international instruments, such as CEDAW.
- Challenge liberalization of global trade and the decisions of the World Trade Organization on patenting of food products, in particular, fish and fish products.
- Promote equitable and sustainable alternatives to existing models of development.

#### **Civil society organizations (including NGOs, media, consumers and environmental organizations)**

- Promote awareness of the socioeconomic conditions and basic needs of fishing communities, especially of women and other marginalized groups.
- Respect and value traditional and local knowledge, and support efforts of fishing communities towards sustainable and equitable fisheries.

#### **Research organizations**

- Taking cognizance of the shifts in the dominant discourse on women in fisheries, undertake research and analysis on:
- the conditions and contributions of women in small-scale and artisanal fisheries and fishing communities, and make the findings widely accessible;
- the impact of development and conservation projects on the lives of men, women and children in fishing communities; and
- the impact of fisheries conservation and management measures on the lives and livelihoods of fishing communities.

#### **The State**

- Guarantee access and control over resources by small-scale and artisanal fishers and their communities, with particular attention to women.
- Recognize and protect collective rights to the resources and territories on which fishing communities, including indigenous communities, have traditionally depended on for their food security and livelihoods.
- Guarantee universal health and social security and the socialization of housework, and protect existing systems of social security that have proven to be adequate.
- Guarantee safety, and assure freedom from violence and sexual abuse.
- Regulate markets, discouraging the concentration of capital, and promote local markets.
- Build the capacity of, and empower, fishing communities to manage their resources.

- Promote education and capacity-building of fishing communities based on local realities and a culture of non-discrimination.
- Ratify and fully implement human-rights instruments, in particular CEDAW and the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action, by adopting specific measures to address discrimination against women, while creating spaces for civil society organizations, in particular for women fishworkers and their organizations, to participate in monitoring their implementation.
- Support and protect coastal and inland communities, with particular attention to women, in relation to natural disasters and pandemics such as HIV/AIDS.
- Protect coastal communities from displacement or forced migration.
- Guarantee that both men and women of fishing communities are consulted and enabled to participate in decisionmaking, including in relation to fisheries conservation and management.
- Recognize and value traditional and local knowledge as an integral part of information required for fisheries conservation and management.
- Promote sustainable fisheries, mitigate pollution and reduce the impact of extractive industries such as oil and natural gas.
- Recognize workers in the informal sector, in particular, women, including as collaborative spouses, and guarantee their labour rights and their rights to decent work.
- Generate sex-disaggregated data on those who work in all aspects of fisheries, through census operations.

#### **International organizations**

- Integrate an understanding of gender that shapes fisheries policies at various levels towards sustaining life and livelihoods in fishing communities.
- Desist from funding projects that are environmentally destructive and socially unjust, and that impose structural adjustment conditionalities (poverty reduction and growth facilities) on recipient States.

We resolve to work together to ensure that this agenda is widely disseminated, incorporated and implemented at all levels, including in an international instrument on small-scale fisheries that may be considered by the Committee on Fisheries (COFI) of the FAO.

—The full text of the Shared Agenda can be found at <http://icsf.net/icsf2006/jspFiles/wif/wifWorkshop/english/agenda.jsp>

fisheries resources and degradation of the coastal environment are threatening fishing communities. The recent Southern Region Development Plan envisages several major infrastructural, industrial and tourism projects that will pose fresh challenges to fishing communities. Climate change poses another major threat.

To take up these issues, participants at the Thailand workshop decided to form the 'Women's Network for the Defence of Fisherfolk Rights' to protect their rights to access, use and manage natural resources and to advocate for appropriate policies.

Rosemarie Mwaipopo, Member, ICSF, said that the context in Tanzania

is changing fast with the growth of large-scale aquaculture and tourism. There are several externally supported projects for small-scale fisheries. While these provide for organization at the community level, in practice, the ability of communities to organize is often restricted by low capacity and the overlapping mandates regarding rights of access and management over the fisheries. While there is recognition of gender issues, the focus is more on livelihood enhancement—women join organizations mainly to enhance their livelihood opportunities,

proposal to consider a parallel organization of women in artisanal fishing; rather, the need for fishermen and fisherwomen to work together for common objectives was stressed.

Several issues of concurrence were identified. There should be a thorough evaluation of the individual transferable quota (ITQ) system when it comes up for review in 2012, reversing injustices against the artisanal sector. The five-mile limit reserved for artisanal fishing should be fully respected. Women engaged in baiting hooks, filleting fish and helping at landing centres should be recognized and supported. Fishers who suffer from work-related ailments should benefit from social-security programmes. The problem of pollution from power plants and industrial projects on the coast should be addressed. Attention should be paid to work-related illnesses women suffer from. CONAPACH, she said, has succeeded in integrating women into the organization, and in taking up their concerns.

Bustamante said she faced some initial resistance when she took over as the president of CONAPACH in November 2007. Subsequently, however, there has been a change in the working culture of the organization, with the leadership now functioning more as a team.

On the second day of the workshop, Meryl Williams, a specialist in fisheries, aquaculture and natural resource management from Australia, synthesized the presentations from the first day. She observed that the presentations had mainly been from a women's perspective rather than a gender perspective, and that there is still a lack of agreement on what gender means in small-scale fisheries. Even as fish rights are increasing, through, for example, licences and quotas, fishers' rights seem to be diminishing.

### **Building evidence**

While several of the presentations called for community-based fishery management, there is need for clarity in operationalizing this approach

## **Sex-disaggregated data in fisheries and gender-based resource mapping is important...**

not to claim their rights. Sex-disaggregated data in fisheries and gender-based resource mapping is important, as is raising awareness on rights and deepening the political engagement of fishworkers, concluded Rosemarie Mwaipopo.

Zolla Bustamante, President of Confederación Nacional de Pescadores Artesanales de Chile (CONAPACH), introduced herself as coming from a fishing family in Estaquilla, a *caleta* in southern Chile. She began working assisting her father, a shellfish diver, and now works with her brothers. There are 12,932 registered women fishers in Chile, she pointed out, and women are particularly active in seaweed collection.

Women are better organized in the southern region of Chile. Many women, particularly those who work as filleters (*fileteadoras*) and baiters (*encarnadoras*), and those who rig nets and help land the catch (*auxiliares de caleta*) are now demanding formal recognition as workers, as well as access to official support.

A national meeting on women in Chile's artisanal fishing sector, held in 2009, in which both women and men leaders participated, recognized the fundamental role of women in the sector. There was, however, no

and building evidence that such systems can actually work. The issue of climate change and its impact on coastal communities covered in several presentations needs serious attention, noted Williams, to enhance the resilience of local communities. Several of the presentations—from Spain, the Philippines, France and Brazil—highlighted issues of organization, providing examples of collective action yielding positive results, Williams said. The presentations also underscored the need for gender-disaggregated data and for new tools and approaches such as gender-based resource maps.

In the session that followed, Nilanjana Biswas, an independent researcher based in India, made a presentation based on a review of literature on women in fisheries. It analyzed the major shifts that have taken place over the last three decades in the dominant discourse on women in small-scale fisheries. The first was a shift in focus from political economy to political ecology, which, while allowing a significant critique of the industrial model of development, obscured, over time, the analysis of women's labour in the sector.

The second was the shift from opposition to women's oppression to an individual-centric gender-empowerment agenda. Gender has been progressively disassociated from

other structures of power, creating room for individual empowerment and gender mainstreaming strategies to gain currency. The third was the increasing emphasis on a human-rights framework.

However, whether community rights, which are based on custom, can be reconciled with the modern discourse on human rights still remains to be demonstrated. Positing community rights as human rights runs the risk of doubly obscuring the problems that women face. Finally, there has been a shift and growing dependence on donor aid for both social action and research. Given that destructive industrial fishing practices have been introduced in the South chiefly through aid tied to structural adjustment policies, and given further that donor aid is increasingly aligning itself with the imperatives of globalization, this dependence is problematic.

In the forenoon session, participants were divided into three groups along broadly regional lines to discuss the following questions : (1) Can we dream of a fishery that will sustain life and livelihoods in communities? If yes, what will this look like and what will be the components of such a fishery? Are there any ethical norms that may be required to guide such a process and what will be

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39 participants from 18 countries took part in the Mahabalipuram workshop on defining a gender agenda for fishing communities

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Recasting the net: The Mahabalipuram workshop resulted in a "shared agenda" of common dreams and strategies for improving the lives and livelihoods of fishing communities

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the role of different players in helping create such a fishery? (2) What lead should we take in making such a reality possible, and how do we (women, fishworker representatives, researchers, etc.) strategize this process at different levels?

The third day of the workshop started with the presentations of the group reports based on the previous day's discussions. Many common dreams and strategies emerged, which formed the basis of the "shared agenda" agreed on by workshop participants the following day (see box).

In a session chaired by John Kurien,

**There is need to remind States of their obligations under CEDAW and their commitment to implement the BPFA.**

Member, ICSF, Chandrika Sharma made a presentation on international legal instruments relevant to women in fisheries, with a special focus on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), 1979, and the Beijing Declaration and the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA), 1995. She also drew attention to relevant articles in other instruments such

as Agenda 21, the Convention on Biological Diversity, 1992, and the United Nations Fish Stocks Agreement, 1995. Sharma pointed out though discrimination against women continues to exist in fisheries, and is well documented, international fisheries instruments, including the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (CCRF) of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), have not addressed issues of gender equality/discrimination. This is also largely the case with national legislation for fisheries. There is need to remind States of their obligations under CEDAW and their commitment to implement the BPFA. There is also need to examine and evaluate the several fisheries projects that have been implemented with 'gender mainstreaming' and 'women's empowerment' among their objectives.

Susanna Siar from the FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Department provided information on FAO's work on gender and fisheries. She pointed out that one of the strategic objectives under the new FAO results framework was "gender equity in access to resources, goods, services and decisionmaking in the rural areas". FAO had earlier organized the Global Conference on Small-scale fisheries (4SSF) in October 2008, which, among other things, stressed the need to adopt a human-rights-based approach to development in fisheries, and highlighted the need to enhance women's participation in decisionmaking.

Following 4SSF, the 29th session of the FAO Committee on Fisheries (COFI) expressed the need for an international instrument on small-scale fisheries and the establishment of a specific global programme dedicated to small-scale fisheries (SSF). To follow up on this mandate, FAO is organizing regional consultative workshops in Asia, Africa and Latin America in October 2010, with the participation of governments and civil society organizations, to develop the possible contents of an international instrument on sustainable SSF and to identify priorities and

implementation modalities of a global assistance programme. The outcomes of these consultations will be presented to the 29th session of COFI in 2011, and if COFI provides the mandate, negotiations on an international instrument on SSF will be initiated, informed Siar.

Gunilla Greig of the Swedish Board of Fisheries shared her views from the perspective of a donor government. Sweden has partially supported the FAO inception workshop to discuss the Global Programme on Fisheries and Aquaculture for Poverty Alleviation and Food Security. Greig also informed participants about the commitment of donor countries to the Paris Declaration on Aid, following which countries like Sweden increasingly work through national governments on their priorities for development.

In the afternoon session, participants saw three films: "Manguezais e Carcinicultura", from Ceara, Brazil, on the impact of shrimp aquaculture on the mangrove ecosystem; "Femmes pecheurs, Femmes de pecheurs", a documentary on women's lives and jobs in the fishery from France; and a film from Ecuador about women and mangroves.

At the concluding session of the workshop—a panel discussion—Meryl Williams said that a lot more needs to be done if gender issues in fisheries are to be placed higher on the agenda of researchers. The Asian Fisheries Society (AFS) is one of the few mainstream bodies to have consistently focussed on this issue. Researchers need to develop discipline-based approaches to gender in fisheries, stay closely in touch with ground developments, and ensure that their work is relevant to users of the research.

Ravadee Prasertcharoensuk, speaking as a representative of the WFFP, of which the Fisherfolk Federation of Thailand is a member, highlighted the need for support to local- and national-level organizations of women in fishing communities. Margaret Nakato of the World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fishworkers (WFF), drawing on her experiences

of working with fishing communities around Lake Victoria, stressed the need to protect communities that depend on fisheries and strengthen their control over resources.

Gunilla Greig pointed to opportunities available for making gender-in-fisheries issues visible in the upcoming processes of FAO, including in the international instrument on small-scale fisheries that may be considered by COFI, and the Global Programme on Fisheries and Aquaculture for Poverty Alleviation and Food Security.

Alain le Sann of the NGO, Pêche and Développement, and Member, ICSF, said that ICSF should advocate the 'shared agenda' at three levels: (i) among international organizations

**Researchers need to develop discipline-based approaches to gender in fisheries, stay closely in touch with ground developments, and ensure that their work is relevant to users of the research.**

and major NGOs, particularly at international events; (ii) among fishermen's and women's organizations, supporting and strengthening new and existing networks of women, recognizing that women's organizations have an important role to play in 'humanizing' fisheries; and (iii) locally, by highlighting the roles of women and working for their greater visibility.

Alain le Sann noted that ICSF is in a unique position to animate the debate on the future of fisheries and to refocus it on the human dimension while simultaneously integrating the ecological perspective, as a powerful counterbalance to the use of the media by certain environmental NGOs. Small-scale fishers need to fight for an alternative approach to development. 

#### For more



[wifworkshop.icsf.net](http://wifworkshop.icsf.net)

**Recasting the Net**

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**Women in Fisheries**