



32 Years in Support of
Small-scale Fishworkers

Yemaya

ICSF'S NEWSLETTER ON GENDER AND FISHERIES

From the Editor

July 2018 witnessed the release of the flagship report of the United Nation's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO): The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture (SOFIA) 2018. A trove of information that, in the months to come, will be unpacked and discussed by activists and researchers in the fishery and aquaculture sectors, SOFIA 2018 presents, for the first time, sex-segregated employment data—a step forward by the FAO towards implementing in its work the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (the SSF Guidelines) that call for gender equity and equality throughout the fisheries, including in information and communication.

There is no doubt that global awareness of the role and contribution of women in fisheries is on the rise. Some sources estimate women as constituting nearly half of the total employment along the fish value chain. However, government enumerations across the world tend to still undercount women's participation and undervalue their contribution to the sector. Thus, based on country reports, SOFIA 2018 estimates women's participation in fisheries and aquaculture to be only around 15 per cent. How does this low enumeration impact women? The article 'Outside the Net' in this issue discusses how, in Sri Lanka, government statistics show declining levels of women's employment in the fisheries, a trend that commentators point out may simply indicate the growing invisibility of women's work in the sector. Further, country data as reflected in SOFIA 2018 continues to exclude vital reproductive work, such as gleaning, that women engage in to feed their families and that ensures food security in fishing communities. Such lack of recognition disbars women from policies and programmes supporting livelihood development.

Lack of recognition is not only at the level of data. In this issue, Nalini Nayak's review of a recently released FAO publication finds a stark contrast between the increasing recognition of women's contributions to fisheries and their continuing low access to decision making roles, within both government and non-government organisations. Recognition of women's work is only the first step in mainstreaming their roles within decisionmaking in the sector.

Women's work as fishworkers and caregivers is becoming increasingly fraught in the face of rapid climate change, responsible for an increasing frequency of extreme weather events and presenting grave threats to fisheries. This year, the cyclone Ockhi ravaged communities and took the lives of 348 fishermen in the southern coast of India. The tragedy points to continuing weaknesses in the ability of states to address issues of early warning mechanisms, last mile connectivity in communications, training of local communities, the need to take on board traditional knowledge systems, and post-disaster relief and rehabilitation.

Environmental challenges, however, sometimes spark innovation. In eastern India, annual monsoon floods and the changing course of the river Brahmaputra wreaks regular and devastating damage on communities along the river's banks. This issue covers a unique initiative called 'Ships of Hope' which, through financial contributions from individuals and corporate entities, and the dedication of health workers, brings medical care literally to the shores of these communities. Such examples represent hope in troubled times. **M**



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