WOMEN WORKING TOGETHER & MAKING A DIFFERENCE

A story of women's participation and leadership in enhancing local fisheries

THE GUYSBOROUGH COUNTY WOMEN'S FISHERY ENHANCEMENT ASSOCIATION

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With Participation by Members of the
Guysborough County Women's Fishery Enhancement Association (GCWFEA)

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The story is based on GCWFEA records and conversations with members. Italicized quotations in the story are from conversations with members and an audiotaped presentation made by the GCWFEA members in November 2000 to students participating in a community-based resource management course delivered by the Coady International Institute, StFX.

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This story is dedicated to the women who participated in the
Guysborough County Women's Fishery Enhancement Association
which began with kitchen meetings in early 1998 and remained active until March 2001.

They started out as a group of women who, because of their interest and role, wanted to learn more about the fishery and alternative fisheries management strategies.

Through education, participatory research and collective action
these women discovered that by working together, they could make a difference.

With courage and enthusiasm they became active participants and leaders in community events and projects, committed to enhancing the local fisheries and intent on increasing the profile and recognition of women in the fishery and the quality of life for fishing families in their communities.

Acknowledgements

The StFX Extension Department wishes to acknowledge the Guysborough County Women's Fishery Enhancement Association (GCWFEA) members.

On March 27, 2001 a meeting of the GCWEFA took place in Whitehead, Guysborough County, NS. At this meeting a fieldworker with the StFX Extension Department asked those present if they were interested in pursuing a suggestion made several months earlier, that was, to document the story of the association. The women discussed the idea and wondered what could possibly be written about their group. They agreed to give the idea more thought and to meet again in a couple of weeks to discuss it further. Since then, a great deal of time, thought and energy has been spent researching, meeting and reviewing this document. It is with great pleasure and pride that the contributions of the members of the GCWFEA are acknowledged. They lived it—it is their story!

The StFX Extension Department and the GCWFEA wish to acknowledge the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Martha (CSM).

The CSM is known for its work in support of rural communities. The CSM made the initial kitchen meetings with women in Guysborough County fishing communities possible through its generous financial support. When asked to financially support the documentation of the story of the GCWFEA, agreement promptly followed. The CSM have participated directly in these community development projects through Sr. Mary Eileen McEachern, whose energy, commitment and song writing abilities have been of huge benefit to all. Without the support of the CSM, many of our accomplishments would not have been possible, and for this, we are truly thankful.

The GCWFEA would like to acknowledge the following groups and individuals.

The ***Guysborough County Inshore Fishermen's Association (GCIFA)*** provided both moral and financial support to our group and picked up where we left off on a number of issues. At times, their encouragement gave us the momentum we needed to continue our struggles; for this and for all of the support provided, the GCWFEA is deeply grateful to the GCIFA.

The GCWFEA would like to acknowledge the support of the following ***Guysborough County Community Organizations***: Whitehead Volunteer Fire Department; Christ Church Anglican Church, Queensport; Port Felix Volunteer Fire Department; and Half Island Cove Kindergarten. All of these organizations provided our group with greatly appreciated meeting space. Thank you.

Without ***Patricia Rhynold's*** knowledge of the fishing industry, the GCWFEA would have spent countless hours looking up information, attempting to make industry contacts and connecting with fishermen. Pat always made time in her busy schedule to organize meetings; work on the newsletter, which we often did in her home office; and attend

events on behalf of the women's association. She also found the time to pack and bring along her picnic basket, filled with lots of goodies. Pat was an instrumental member of the GCWFEA and for this we wish to express our sincere appreciation and thanks.

John Kearney, Centre for Community-Based Management, StFX Extension Department supported us in our efforts to organize as a group. He helped us figure out how we could support our fishing partners and communities and he provided guidance as we worked toward enhancing our local fisheries. Perhaps most importantly however, John challenged us as a group, encouraging us to achieve what he knew we could. Thank you John.

Nancy Wright, former Fieldworker, StFX Extension Department—Nancy's interest, energy and excellent teaching and facilitating skills were instrumental in turning a disparate group of rural women into an association that, in three short years, did some wonderful things locally and made friends internationally. Thank you, Nancy, for your vision and for your hours of work helping to develop the GCWFEA.

The Field Trip

The women arrived early to open the community volunteer fire department hall in Whitehead, a small fishing community in Guysborough County, NS, on a brisk morning in November 2000. Unpacking their vehicles, they carried armloads of food in bags and on trays into the kitchen. While some hustled to get hot coffee, tea and biscuits ready, others moved the tables into a large square for the meeting.

The women had arrived that morning with mixed emotions. As members of the Guysborough County Women's Fishery Enhancement Association (GCWFEA), they had held a group meeting earlier in the week with fieldworkers from the StFX Extension Department to discuss whether to continue with their group or not. They had made a difficult, but necessary, decision to put the group on hold for a time because of lack of membership and new projects. Today, however, the idea of getting to know the students from the Coady International Institute was taking over their thoughts. Some members were thinking about the search they had done on the Internet to find out what foods to prepare for the international students. Others were going over their presentation for the students or thinking about the community tour they had arranged to the local scallop processing plant, the boat builder's shop (owned and operated by the husband of a group member) and the trap manufacturer's shop (owned and operated by a member of the group). Some were remembering the previous time they had hosted the Coady students. Still others remembered attending a summer institute on participatory research within the context of community-based coastal resource management with participants from around the world.

The Summer Institute on Participatory Research with participants from Cambodia, the Philippines, Vietnam, the United States and Canada had been a very memorable multi-cultural event for the women. A participant from the Philippines had given group members a candleholder as a gift and in her presentation later that morning one member recounted the experience.

> *[At the Summer Institute] a gentleman from the Philippines presented [the candleholder] to us as a women's group. He was a professor and we realized, when we went there [that] these people were very well educated and really none of us were. At least we were not educated in that way. We were educated in just knowing things and doing things. We were overwhelmed with him and he was overwhelmed with us, which made us think about ourselves in a different way. He gave [the candleholder] to us as a gift. We brought it to most of our meetings. It was a symbol to show us that we felt equal and we should feel equal, but there are some meetings where we don't feel equal.*

The women's thoughts were suddenly jolted into reality when someone shouted, "They're here!" as the busload of students rolled into the parking lot of the fire hall. Students from thirteen different countries, all of whom had at least five years of development experience, were participating in a community-based resource management course as part of a diploma program in community-based development

offered by the Coady International Institute at StFX. This field trip, hosted by GCWFEA, provided an opportunity for all the participants to share stories and for the international students to learn about some local activities in community-based resource management. After a lively and informative community tour, participants from Nepal, Malawi, Egypt, Ghana, Cameroon, Sri Lanka, Zambia, Papua New Guinea, India, Bangladesh, Nigeria, Kenya, the United States and Canada gathered around the tables. With the candle lit, the women began to share their story.

> *We started our women's group with the [support of the] Extension Department, and the Sisters of St. Martha [by participating] in kitchen meetings. The reason for [the kitchen meetings] was to find out our needs, our goals and other opportunities we may want to venture into, inside or outside the fishery. The majority of us wanted to enhance the fishing industry. First, we started by studying the government, which was very, very interesting—how the government worked years ago and how they work now related to the fishery…we also learned about community-based management.*

The women explained that six kitchen meetings were held in coastal communities along Nova Scotia's eastern shore, five of which were in Guysborough County (Kearney and Wright, 1998). Three community coordinators were hired by the StFX Extension Department to bring together women from fishing communities. In kitchens and community halls, Extension Department fieldworkers met with women, most of whom were married to or were partners of fishermen, to discuss fisheries issues and challenges facing coastal communities. Specifically, the kitchen meetings focused on the current state of the fisheries and the role(s) played by women in the fishery both historically and currently. As a follow up to the six community kitchen meetings, all of the women were invited to participate in a wrap up meeting during which specific initiatives, with associated actions, were identified for future exploration.

One of the initiatives identified by the women who participated in the kitchen meetings, and the subsequent wrap up meeting, was to learn more about the fishery. StFX Extension Department fieldworkers continued to work with these women toward this end. Meetings were held to examine the history of the inshore fishery in Nova Scotia and the enhanced role of women in the fishery. During this activity, other needs began to be addressed. Only two months after the last kitchen meeting, women were expressing an interest in further study and action in community-based management, research skills, association development, proposal writing, lobbying, action planning, writing newsletters and networking. A need to form a group or organization became obvious at this time.

Forming the Group: A Good Discussion Starts With Other Women

We were the wives of fishermen and [some of us] fished. We wanted to help our husbands get information about licensing because you have to get particulars to apply. Women fill out the licenses and new things are coming out. We educated one another and what one didn't know, the other one knew.

The group's certificate of incorporation as "The Guysborough County Women's Fishery Enhancement Association" was dated effective April 30, 1999. However, in September 1998, the group's name was chosen, as was its purpose, that is, to foster community-based management of the inshore fishery by creating knowledge, sharing information, engaging in research, facilitating communications and exploring opportunities.

Since fishing was the main source of livelihood in their communities, the women chose to focus on learning more about and addressing fishing issues. In a newsletter published by the Guysborough County Inshore Fishermen's Association, the county and its fisheries were described as follows.

Guysborough County is located on the most eastern tip of mainland Nova Scotia and has a landmass of 4,370.85 sq. miles. We are blessed with 512 km or 341 miles of coastline with many tiny fishing villages nestled into the bays, inlets and coves. Inshore fishermen are perceived to be a dying breed but marine exports constitute the leading earner of exports dollars in Guysborough County as well as in Nova Scotia.

The primary fishing activity in the county is inshore or small boat operators but there are offshore vessels as well as large factory vessels that land in the county. The average size of the fishing vessel is less than 44 feet in length with the usual crew size being 3 men per boat. The inshore fishermen hold a variety of traditional fishing licenses as well as some exploratory or underutilized licenses. The collapse of the cod fishery in the early nineties forced the inshore fishermen to explore alternative species, harvesting methods, and fishing effort by landings and areas. The majority of our landed values comes from these new fisheries such as shrimp, snow crab and tuna. These species had previously been harvested but not as the primary exploited species. The fishermen must continually adapt their fishery to the changes in quota, management plans and gear restrictions. They are truly an adaptable breed and as for them being a dying breed, I wouldn't count on it.

Over the three years the group was active, fifteen women participated in group activities with nine women participating regularly. The women came into the group with dedication to and interest in fishing, fisheries management and women's role(s) in the fishery. They brought their local knowledge and their direct experience in these areas. They also possessed a wide range of other kinds of knowledge and skills they were willing to share with each other. Collectively, they knew about organizing meetings, bookkeeping, computers, report writing, facilitation, research and publications. They had access to resources such as books, computers, people and

educational programs in their communities. Most importantly, these women had energy and enthusiasm to work on community issues and to do the "leg work" necessary to get projects done.

The women participated in the group in different ways. A number of women attended all the meetings and were active in all of the group projects. Some engaged sporadically, while others participated initially, then left the group for various reasons. Common interests and goals and a shared workload helped the group work well together. Each woman felt she could participate at the level that was comfortable for her. This was evident in the many positive comments related to individual comfort levels and the respect, encouragement and support given to each other consistently. While recognizing each other's different perspective, members realized they had a great deal in common as women.

> *Working with a group of women is different than working with a group of men—very respectful. Everyone was appreciated and treated equally. [There was] no competition for control. This is why it was enjoyable and not stressful… Personally, I learned some skills related to working with other women and sharing the load.*

The Fishing News

> *Eventually we needed a project and we decided we would start writing a newsletter and the purpose of the newsletter was to inform the fishing families about the issues that concern them. Our first issue ran in September 1998.*

By June of 1998 women who had attended the kitchen meetings were continuing to meet. In the minutes of the June 10 meeting, the following suggestion appears: "Instead of just coming and meeting, why not make a newsletter. It could be a project to work on, there would be research involved for the newsletter. It could be sent to women who have been to a [kitchen] meeting…about things going on in the fishery in Nova Scotia, new licenses, what's coming up, topics to be discussed at meetings." From this point on, planning began in earnest.

As a result of this initiative, the women involved learned what needs to be considered when publishing a community newsletter. Nancy Wright, a StFX Extension Department fieldworker, facilitated discussions with the women regarding newsletter topics, features and advertising; product distribution; format and design layout; funding; target group/readers; and research, writing, editing and copyright. Engaging in this activity provided another capacity building opportunity for the participants. These women learned to use computer software specifically designed for desktop publishing. They arranged to have training as needed and applied what they learned throughout the production of six issues of the community newsletter.

Publishing the community newsletter, *The Fishing News*, was one of the highlights of the women's work. It was their first project and was intended to inform all fishing families about topics of interest and issues of concern. Working together, learning new skills, doing research and providing a service to the fishing community were all noted as reasons why the newsletter was a success. The newsletter shared information through regular features such as 'news and views,' information made available from the Guysborough County Inshore Fishermen's Association; 'webwaves,' a listing of fisheries related web sites; 'fish finder,' current fisheries questions and answers; and opinion pieces. The StFX Extension Department supported the first issue of the newsletter. The following issues were funded by PLURA, an inter-Church association that promotes social justice in Canada, and through fisheries-related advertising revenue.

Scallop Enhancement

> *Then it was brought to our attention about a form of enhancing the scallop beds. The scallop fishery had been in decline through the last few years and scallop enhancement was, hopefully, a way to revive it. So we obtained information and we had workshops for the scallop licence holders. We financed, with the Guysborough County Inshore Fishermen's Association, a field trip to New Brunswick where they have been doing scallop enhancement over the last five years.*

In August of 1998 GCWFEA members learned from John Kearney, StFX Extension Department, about a scallop enhancement initiative under investigation by Antigonish County fishermen. The women thought scallop enhancement should also be considered in Guysborough County. During the fall of 1998, a member of the women's association approached the Guysborough County Inshore Fishermen's Association (GCIFA), presented the idea and asked the members of the fishermen's organization if they were interested in collaboratively learning more about this option. With the agreement of the GCIFA, planning began in January 1999 for a scallop enhancement workshop.

On March 30, 1999, approximately twenty people came together at the Whitehead Volunteer Fire Department to hear an industry perspective, what scientists had to say about scallop enhancement and to hear from a fisherman who had been practicing scallop enhancement for several years. As a result of this workshop, local fishermen decided they needed to learn more about this form of enhancing a declining wild species. Work began on a funding proposal in the hope of obtaining support for research into the potential for scallop enhancement in Guysborough County. The StFX Extension Department provided the services of an Interdisciplinary Studies in Aquatic Resources intern to work with the women and the fishermen to develop the funding proposal while continuing to research the scallop enhancement potential in the area.

Throughout the summer of 1999 a great deal of activity occurred regarding scallop enhancement. The women's association, with the assistance of the StFX intern, continued speaking with fishermen and conducting research that could be supported by the GCIFA and the GCWFEA. Eight people visited a scallop enhancement company in the Cape Tormentine area of New Brunswick and a scallop enhancement information session was held in Whitehead. Five local fishermen agreed to set scallop spat (spawn) collection bags for analysis by a Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) scientist. The funding proposal was developed and submitted to a number of funding agencies. Even with all of this activity, discouragement set in.

Scallop enhancement is a form of fisheries enhancement that requires a three to four year investment in time and other resources before harvesting can occur. In order for local fishermen to engage fully in this experimental form of fisheries enhancement, funding was required to support their efforts in the interim period. The project proposal was submitted to several government funding agencies. Funding was never approved. The men and women had already made a significant investment in this initiative and became very discouraged by the lack of support from community economic development agencies.

Even as expressions of interest in scallop enhancement came from Richmond County fishermen, members of the GCIFA and the GCWFEA lost energy for this project. However, several fishermen continue to collect spat and seed the natural scallop beds. A scallop committee of the GCIFA now provides leadership for these efforts. While this project may have come to a disappointing conclusion for the women's association, a lot was gained. The women conducted a great deal of participatory research. They made contacts in other areas with people engaged in scallop enhancement as well as with DFO staff. And perhaps most importantly, they successfully provided an opportunity for local fishermen to consider a fisheries enhancement opportunity that may provide even greater results in the future.

Fin Fish Farming

> *[While we were working on scallop enhancement], there was another type of aquaculture in the works proposed for our harbour and the surrounding area—our next door community. It was a proposed fin fish farm which, after being looked into, was going to take up a huge amount of water and was going to displace some lobster fishing efforts, and possibly some scallop fishing…We had environmental concerns. We had concerns about pesticides, antibiotics, and if the fish did get diseased, how they were going to treat them.*

On March 31, 1999 a public meeting was held in Whitehead, Guysborough County. The purpose of this meeting was to discuss the possibility of leasing waters off Whitehead, Port Felix and Tor Bay to a fin fish aquaculture company, Scotia Rainbow Incorporated, for the purpose of farming steelhead trout. Three representatives from Scotia Rainbow Incorporated attended this meeting, as well

as representatives from local governmental bodies and the Guysborough County Regional Development Authority. This meeting provided the first opportunity for consultation with community members.

Community members were 'of two minds' about the potential aquaculture development in the area. Some residents were very much in favour of the development because of the potential jobs that would accompany it, that is, hundreds of jobs, according to Scotia Rainbow Incorporated spokespeople. Other community members, however, had serious concerns about what the potential development might mean for the environment and the established fishing industry. Questions posed by the latter group had not been answered during the meeting to the satisfaction of those present. These community members decided to form a group to consider the implications of fin fish farming for the specified waters. Among this group were some members of the GCWFEA.

The Whitehead-Tor Bay Integrated Management Group (WTBIMG) was formed to examine the potential impact of fin fish farming on waters off its members' communities. For strategic reasons, members of the GCWFEA decided to join this new integrated management group as individuals, not as an association. The women suspected the issue on the table might split the community and did not want to involve the GCWFEA directly for fear it would discourage women from participating in the future. However, the women who joined the WTBIMG brought with them the knowledge, skills and abilities they were acquiring and fine tuning as a result of their work with the GCWFEA.

> *We used the media to get our message out that we did have concerns about this and we used the internet to access information worldwide on different aquaculture sites and we used what little community support we had—we also used Extension Department resource people.*

Meetings organized by the WTBIMG were held with fishermen and other resource users to determine information and other needs that had to be met before a decision to support a fin fish farming development could be made. A letter of request for information was even sent to the then Nova Scotia Minister of Fisheries, Keith Colwell, but not all of the information was available. A member of the WTBIMG had been quoted as saying the group was not opposed to Scotia Rainbow Incorporated's proposed development, but it wanted to see it done in a safe and responsible way.

Ultimately, Scotia Rainbow Incorporated did not develop a fin fish aquaculture farm in Guysborough County waters. The absence of this development pleased members of the community who feared negative environmental impacts would result. These community members also recognized that promises made by Scotia Rainbow Incorporated were unrealistic in many regards and that an effective process of consulting with community members had not been used. Additionally, research efforts of the WTBIMG uncovered the instability of Scotia Rainbow Incorporated's financial position at the time.

Unfortunately, a price had to be paid by the GCWFEA for the involvement of individual members, acting as individuals and not as representatives of the association, in efforts to uncover truths about the proposed aquaculture development. GCWFEA members have expressed feelings that women who may have otherwise become involved with the association did not after the activity around Scotia Rainbow Incorporated because they did not want to be associated with people who had been involved in this contentious issue. Members also fear these activities, which were viewed by some as divisive, may have weakened the GCWFEA's ability to obtain further fisheries enhancement funding, even though the association was not directly involved.

Workshops and Meetings

In December of 1998 we facilitated a meeting between inshore and offshore fishermen trying to promote community-based management.

During the three-year period from 1998-2000, GCWFEA members were both participants in and organizers of educational events and meetings related to community-based management and other topics.

One of the women's primary reasons for forming the GCWFEA was to support their fishermen husbands and partners. It was from this perspective that the association embarked upon its first facilitation project, a joint meeting of inshore and offshore fishermen, which included the Guysborough County Inshore Fishermen's Association (GCIFA), established in 1977 and the Canso Trawlermen's Co-operative, an offshore fishermen's organization formed in 1997. The GCWFEA viewed a joint meeting as an opportunity for the inshore and offshore fishermen to come together to discuss working together for the common good.

John Kearney of the StFX Extension Department contacted both the Trawlermen's Co-op and the GCIFA, inviting them to participate in a joint meeting to discuss options for working together, including community-based management. The minutes of the GCWFEA's November 20, 1998, meeting read, "Our role as the women's fishery group is to facilitate groups at the meeting/workshop level as we are the sponsors of the meeting along with the Extension Department." As a result of this joint meeting, the fishermen learned that they had a great deal in common. The women's group received positive feedback regarding the role they played, and although a second joint meeting was scheduled, it did not materialize.

Members of the GCWFEA participated in many other workshops and meetings since 1998, including a 'People's School on the Economy' in Canso (a series of six three-hour workshops), a Maritime Fishermen's Union meeting in New Brunswick, a conference on community-based management at Dalhousie University in Halifax and a 'Summer Institute on Participatory Research' held at the Bay of Fundy Marine Resource Centre in Cornwallis, NS. The area coordinator for the WEE (Women for Economic Equality) program delivered two training sessions for the GCWFEA, one

on conducting effective meetings and the other on networking skills. Several women attended a workshop delivered by John McKnight in Antigonish, which focused on 'building communities from the inside out,' and, a member represented the association at a week-long gathering of social scientists studying ecological knowledge related to fisheries at StFX. The meetings and workshops listed above were all in addition to or in combination with those previously listed under *The Fishing News* and *Scallop Enhancement*.

Hosting and Participating in International Events

> *In the summer of 1999, we were invited to the Summer Institute put on by CoRR (Coastal Resources Research Network). It was a multi-cultural event. We were there to discuss community-based coastal resource management and how participatory research was used or useful to our situations or the projects we were dealing with. Our topic for discussion was scallop enhancement. Pat was there for the GCIFA. We also talked about fin fish farming. It was the first multi-cultural event that we had taken in and at times it was overwhelming but we did thoroughly enjoy it. We found that community-based management can be useful in different ways in different [places]*.

GCWFEA members have cited their work with international visitors and guests as a major highlight. The opportunity to share experiences with people from other parts of the world proved to be very rich in affirming local experiences and knowledge. In addition to participating in the summer institute, on two occasions, including 'the field trip,' members hosted students from StFX's Coady International Institute. When the weather permitted, Coady students were treated to a boat tour on the waters off Whitehead. On both occasions the women and the students shared a meal and the students' community-based resource management class was conducted with the women. These events have been very popular with both the Coady students and the association members.

On August 2, 2000, as part of an international movement, three members of the GCWFEA addressed the 'World March of Women' vigil in front of the Antigonish town hall. Members shared fisheries information and related impacts on fishing communities with approximately fifty people who gathered to hear what they had to say. They also sang a song composed by Sr. Mary Eileen McEachern entitled, *Something Fishey*. The members described this experience as one they had never imagined themselves engaging in, but having done it, found it interesting and worthwhile.

Later in 2000, the women's association hosted a group of five community-based management practitioners from the Philippines who were visiting StFX's Centre for Community-Based Management, a joint initiative of the Extension Department and the Coady International Institute. Those present gathered in a circle to hear members recount how the women's association had evolved. The guests asked questions of the

women. As the sharing continued, more and more similarities between the Philippine and Canadian small fishing communities became apparent. The persistent nodding of heads around the circle was indicative of a deeper understanding developing among the people in the room. The afternoon concluded with a trip on the water with some time spent jigging for mackerel—a fitting conclusion to a wonderful meeting.

Making a Difference—Building Capacity

> *[Participating in the group was] enjoyable, valuable and necessary. We worked very hard and accomplished a great deal. We were determined, reliable and loyal to each other in what we were trying to accomplish.*

If it could be summed up in a few words, the women's efforts helped to build capacity—the capacity of the individual women, the capacity of a group to take collective action, and the capacity of a community to consider new ideas and alternative approaches. They employed a number of strategies to help build this capacity, including information sharing through the newsletter, participatory research, community education, local and global networking and policy advocacy.

They started out as a group of women who, because of their interest and role, wanted to learn more about the history of the fishery and alternative fisheries management strategies for today. Through education and discussion the women discovered that, by working together, they could make a difference in their community. They became active participants and leaders in many community events and projects.

Building Individual Capacities

> *[There were] opportunities and exposure…now we know what we do not know. A lot of individual growth and development occurred. People became empowered and blossomed. Overall, it was a very positive experience and fun. Friendships developed that will continue for a long time to come.*

Many women were personally affected by their participation in the GCWFEA. They increased their self-confidence, personal resolve to continue the work and pride in their achievements. They learned more about community-based management, fishing issues, scallop enhancement and the history of the fishery. They developed new perspectives and strengthened their analysis of fisheries management, community power structures and cultural awareness. They learned about or "fine-tuned" their skills in participatory research, community organizing, running an organization, conducting effective meetings, facilitating, public speaking, writing and producing a community newsletter, bookkeeping and computer software applications. Furthermore, many are now applying what they learned to other work or volunteer activities. The women are using both their organizational skills and the analysis they developed of fishing issues in the larger context through their commitment to the local fishing community, working with the public and speaking in public about fisheries issues.

The leadership, as well as the social network, developed by the GCWFEA enhanced the lives of individual women who participated and enhanced the profile and recognition of the role women play in fishing families and communities.

Building Capacity for Group Action

> *The group achieved a lot in a short time. It shows the difficulties under which women work and what they can achieve. How much more could they achieve under favourable conditions?*

The women learned how to work effectively as a group and demonstrated that women, when working together, can be empowered to make things happen. They produced and distributed a community newsletter. Members conducted participatory research in scallop enhancement and fin fish farming. They participated in and organized educational events and meetings that raised public awareness of fisheries issues and community-based management as an alternative resource management strategy. Association members also developed local and international linkages and networks.

Building Community Capacity

> *The scallop enhancement [initiative] brought fishermen together to discuss a new idea. Generally, the women's association got people talking to each other about fisheries issues.*

The women's group played a role in building community capacity through organizing educational events and meetings during which people talked about fisheries issues and discussed new ideas and opportunities. They also increased public awareness of fishing issues and alternatives through the newsletter. While some members express uncertainty about the extent to which the GCWFEA had an impact on the local communities, others feel their work raised awareness of the power that communities can exercise when acting together, which resulted in some fishermen thinking differently about the focus of the local fishery.

There have been some direct spin-offs resulting from the work of these women. Some fishermen have continued their scallop enhancement efforts and have moved to the second stage of spat collection. The scallop license holders now have a scallop management board that is a vehicle for fishermen to put forward their opinions. The Guysborough County Inshore Fishermen's Association recognized the need for continued research efforts and now has a research arm to fulfill this need.

Lessons Learned

> *A good discussion starts with women. Women's history is essentially buried. This could change if this story is documented. This story could help others build on what was learned through our experience.*

These women wanted to document their experiences because they felt women's roles are too often downplayed and their story demonstrates that women are able to assume leadership roles. They hope other women can learn from their story and become inspired by it. They identified many factors that enabled them to participate, learn, take collective action and work toward community change. There were also many challenges. These supporting factors, barriers and challenges; the role played by community-based management; and their suggestions for other groups are included here.

Supporting Factors

The women's interest in and commitment to the issues was critical to the women's participation and individual learning. What enabled individual women to participate effectively was personal interest, adequate free time, access to transportation, location, family supports and involvement of friends. What helped their individual learning was interest in topic areas, an enjoyable experience, group support, effective resource persons and the opportunity to apply new skills and knowledge, all of which are important considerations in adult education.

The women worked well together and group development was facilitated through respect for each other's comfort levels, mutual support, ease of communication and commitment to work toward a common goal. Recognition of the knowledge and skills that they brought to the group and willingness to share and learn from each other were also important factors. In addition, the resources and facilitation provided by the StFX Extension Department, the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Martha and the Guysborough County Inshore Fishermen's Association were important supports.

This powerful combination of participation, individual learning and group development enabled group members to participate in and organize community activities, therefore facilitating community-based development.

Barriers and Challenges

The women faced many barriers and challenges, both individually and as a group. Factors that facilitated participation for some women were barriers for others.

The barriers to full participation were time restraints due to work conflicts, family responsibilities, volunteer activities and, for some, meeting times. Some women felt a little frustration at the length of time it takes to accomplish things and the lack of access to people and information due to location and technology. The main barriers to individual learning were time and technology.

The challenges to group development were the group's inability to attract new members, a number of negative responses from the community related to the group's perceived opposition to the proposed fin fish farm development in the area, too few people to make a significant impact, lack of access to power and

decision-makers and the lack of opportunities and challenges to propel group members to a new level of activity.

Challenges to community development included the large geographic area with small pockets of population that made participation and community organizing more difficult, traditional attitudes regarding the role of women and a lack of funding to take on new activities or to continue with activities such as the newsletter.

The strong interrelationship between the barriers to participation and the challenges to group and community development ultimately led to disappointment. Despite their personal and group achievements, the women were discouraged by not being able to increase their membership or access funds to continue their work.

While some members felt that more people could have been encouraged to participate, there were various attempts to increase membership. For example, initially only women directly associated with fishing, such as wives and partners of fishermen or women fishermen themselves, could join. The GCWFEA eventually amended its membership requirements to make it accessible to all women in their communities. The members realized that other women might also have a commitment to enhancing the fishery, whether they were the local corner storekeepers, tourism operators or fish plant workers. All of these women depend on the success of the fishery, in one way or another, for the communities to survive. Active members also contacted women on a regular basis to keep them informed of meeting times and activities. However, in November 2000 even the most dedicated members decided that they too needed to take a break and put the group on hold.

> *We called a list of women before a meeting and let them know when the meeting was and what was going to be discussed—a few joined our group and others left. Maybe for personal reasons…perhaps the fin fish farm.*

> *I feel [our group] was like a ladder. Together we were climbing higher, achieving things, taking the steps along the way. When people left it was like the rungs being broken…[it was] harder to take the steps and we, couldn't climb anymore.*

The Role of Community-Based Management (CBM)

Prior to their involvement in the association, most of the women had little or no in-depth understanding of community-based management. Three years later, the women were able to describe what was important to them about CBM. While these responses varied from woman to woman, collectively the women described most aspects of CBM and how it was linked to the focus of their work, in particular that it helps communities gain control of their resources. This form of management is community oriented and designed to enhance local fisheries while

also connecting resource users and managers on regional and global levels. One woman insightfully stated that "community-based management means different things to different people."

The women faced challenges in their attempts to apply community-based management. Several women were optimistic about the potential of community-based management while others expressed scepticism about its ability to work in rural Nova Scotia. A lack of community participation, information, power and government support was identified as a challenge to fully implementing community-based management. The women suggested that youth need to learn about CBM and there needs to be an increased role for women in decision-making.

Suggestions for Others

When asked if they had any advice for other women organizing in fishing communities, the GCWFEA shared the following points.

- *Don't think about it too much, just do it. Even without a plan, get together to exchange ideas.*
- *Partnering is a valuable exercise/activity for both parties.*
- *Implement a combination of collaborative learning [what one doesn't know, another probably will], and subject matter expert knowledge—treating both as resources.*
- *Once a group gets organized, networking is invaluable, e.g., internationally [Coady, Philippines] and locally [other fisheries and women's organizations].*
- *The social contact that is possible when organized as a community is invaluable. In this case it was very informal and very supportive.*
- *In terms of membership—quantity does not equal commitment, quality is what counts.*
- *A community group must provide flexibility for its members, e.g., must be able to bring small children to meetings, etc.*
- *Having refreshments at meetings makes for a better group dynamic.*
- *Youth should be included in the organizing activity, as should men, when appropriate.*
- *When possible, identify needs and plan projects before beginning the work.*
- *Keep accurate and complete records—document and photograph everything, if possible.*
- *Use community facilities when possible, as opposed to homes of members, etc. This adds to the perceived openness and transparency of the organizing activity.*
- *Take advantage of any training and capacity building opportunities available. This might range from taking a computer course at the local CAP site to hosting international visitors.*

- *Work as a team, not as individuals—the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.*
- *Organizing activities have to be relevant and meaningful to community members to keep them interested and motivated.*
- *Learn how to relate to, work with [if possible], or change existing community power structures.*
- *Accept offers of support, even if they seem minimal at the time of the offer.*
- *Learn from mistakes made and apply the learning to future endeavours.*
- *Have fun!*

The Field Trip

On that November morning the Coady field trip participants listened intently as the women finished their story.

> *Right now our association is at a standstill. We don't have any drive anymore. We just had a discussion here on Wednesday. We have tried to get new members…but we haven't been getting new members and our funding is running out…maybe we have just done all we could. We wish we could do more. Perhaps with the end of the association, there might be a start-up of something else…it may be fishery-related but we may get involved in some different things.*

The women's story generated many questions and much discussion around the table. One Coady student summed it up when she said:

> *You have only twelve members and in less than three years you have achieved a lot…I think that your group could be very empowering to women in industries that are considered to be men's industries, like your work [or] women who are making boats, and for future women—the younger generation. I am glad that this project was chosen for our visit because it is very hard for women to get involved in community-based projects, so how you were able, as fishermen's wives, to get involved and to raise concerns…It shows how powerful you are.*

In March 2001 members closed the bank account and decided it was time for the Guysborough County Women's Fishery Enhancement Association to enter a "holding, but not folding" mode. Members agreed to record the story of the association so it would be documented as an historical record. Additionally, members expressed a desire for the story of the GCWFEA to be used as a discussion starter and an inspiration for women's organizations and for youth in schools as well as for other educational purposes. The story of the GCWFEA was documented with the membership in a participatory research project conducted by fieldworkers at the StFX Extension Department from May to August 2001.