

Still a Long Way to Go

The fifth symposium on Gender in Aquaculture and Fisheries was a platform to examine progress in achieving gender equality in aquaculture and fisheries

The fifth symposium on Gender in Aquaculture and Fisheries (GAF 5) was held in Lucknow, India, during 13-15 November 2014, in conjunction with the 10th Indian Fisheries and Aquaculture Forum. Organized outside the Asian Fisheries Society (AFS) framework, GAF 5 was a platform to examine progress in achieving gender equality in aquaculture and fisheries.

The symposium brought together 70 participants from the continents of Asia, Africa, Oceania, Europe and North America. Only Central and Latin America were not represented at the symposium, a shortcoming that must be overcome in the future, especially considering that the GAF symposium is the only regular international event that deals with gender in aquaculture and fisheries, and functions as a meeting ground for scientists, managers and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that work on the gender dimension in the largely male-dominated sectors of fisheries and aquaculture.

The symposium had four main themes: (a) women in fisheries harvesting and aquaculture; (b) processing and marketing of fisheries and aquaculture products; (c) climate change and natural disasters; and (d) gender/women's networks. Two themes dominated, namely, women's participation in aquaculture and fisheries, and women's networks. The gender dimension of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines), adopted in June 2014 at the 31st Session of the Committee on Fisheries (COFI 31) of the Food and

Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), was discussed in a session organized by the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF), which included a presentation on the fish vendors of Mumbai.

Meryl Williams, the former Director General of The World Fish Centre, introduced the two main guests of the symposium, Leena Nair, Chair of the Marine Products Export Development Authority (MPEDA) and B Meenakumari, Deputy Director General, Fisheries, Government of India.

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Meryl, in her keynote address, traced the journey of the AFS to gender equality in aquaculture and fisheries using the Gartner Hype Cycle.

She explained how the attention to gender was triggered off by the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1979, which led to a spurt of activity and awareness on integrating gender issues in research and technology transfer, facilitated by several international and regional conferences and publications, and that this process peaked around 2000, when WinFish and other networks were created.

First decade

But, subsequently, for the first decade, until around 2010, there seemed to be

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a drop in enthusiasm, which also had to do with the global crisis and impact of globalization. Gradually, with the 2010 ICSF gender workshop—Casting the Net, the 2011 FAO State of Food and Agriculture focus on gender and the 2011 GAF3 (Shanghai) FAO workshop, things began to gradually emerge from the trough. Then, through several subsequent workshops and processes, things finally seem to be now lifting up again with the SSF

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Guidelines and the UN Fish and Food Security Report in 2014, which specifically highlights the role of gender in achieving human rights and food security.

The two main guests of the GAF5 symposium underlined the importance of women's participation in the fisheries and aquaculture sub-sectors in India at all levels: pre-harvest, harvest and post-harvest. Fisheries is a source of food and employment, and sustains the livelihoods of countless families. Modernization of the sector, especially mechanization of fishing, has had a negative impact on women since they were slowly moved out of harvesting. Though women comprise the main labour force within the seafood processing industry, they are absent in decision-making processes.

The discussion that followed focused on the difficulties faced by researchers, academics and managers working on gender or women in fisheries—highlighting the lack of both guidance and useable material to indicate how to develop a transformative agenda in fisheries. Courses on the gender dimension in fisheries are not available currently.

This issue was discussed in a special session organized by Marilyn Porter and the discussion indicated that while it is important to provide inputs to people at all levels, it is important for the goals to focus on

such a gender perspective in order to be able to evolve a genuine transformative agenda. To do this, it is also necessary to understand the political history of the feminist movement, in the context of the broader social and development policies, global and regional.

One symposium session was organized by the Network of Aquaculture Centres Asia-Pacific (NACA), which presented the results of the project Maximizing Agricultural Revenue through Knowledge Enterprise Development and Trade (MARKET). The project aims to leverage aquaculture to improve food security in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) region.

Scientists from the Indian Council of Agriculture Research (ICAR) presented a series of papers indicating application of gender dimensions in fisheries/aquaculture technology transfer in India. Apart from understanding women's role in fisheries and aquaculture, ICAR hopes to generate data and case studies on gender, technology intervention and women's entrepreneurship. The studies done so far point to constraints of limited access to resources, funding and decisionmaking.

In aquaculture, women are involved in freshwater fish farming, shrimp farming and culture of ornamental fish, as was shown by examples from Bangladesh, Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia and India.

Women's role and capacity in fish trade was another issue discussed at GAF5, with examples from India, Cambodia and Thailand. The role of Indian women in selling fish is evident but examples from Mumbai and Patna showed that they lacked the power to access fish resources and markets. Women are rarely consulted in decisions related to the management of markets.

Natural disasters

How climate change and natural disasters affect women in fisheries was another subject discussed. The case presented on Typhoon Yolanda in the Philippines, the December 2004 tsunami in India and climate



GAF5 attendees on the opening day of the 10th Indian Fisheries and Aquaculture Forum, at Lucknow, India. The symposium discussed the existing inequality and lack of social justice in aquaculture and fisheries

change in Indonesia featured in the discussions.

The Philippines case highlighted the adaptive capacity and resilience of vulnerable groups to natural disasters and the role of group discussions as a tool to psychologically support victims of natural disasters.

A sharing session on the Aquaculture without Frontiers network explained about connecting the dots on women and gender issues in aquaculture around the world. The network is expected to promote equity for women in a male-dominated sector.

A panel from ICSF presented the FAO SSF Guidelines, highlighting how they focus on sustainable fisheries being possible only when the human rights of communities are also secured. Specific attention was drawn to the focus on gender, indigenous people and vulnerable and marginalized groups. The SSF Guidelines are perceived as offering an opportunity to factor in social and gender issues into fisheries policy. Nevertheless, it was noted that such a document should also have addressed aquaculture.

As a comment, it may not be inappropriate to mention that there is

still a long way to go in engendering fisheries and aquaculture, moving beyond merely sex-aggregated data and the sexual division of labour. A feminist perspective is much wider as it focuses on life and livelihood and thus challenges the present frameworks of centralized and capital-intensive production systems, which disregard the well-being of communities and the ecosystem. The violence of such development has its toll, both in terms of an increase in violence on women in the household and on the living aquatic systems and their resources. Developing a theory of change is, therefore, necessary to assess how and what kind of modern science and management systems need to evolve to secure life and livelihoods. ♣

For more



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