

THAI FISHERIES DEVELOPMENT AND GENDER ISSUES

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The new National Coordinator and Deputy National Coordinator of the Thai Women in Fisheries Network share their views on gender.

The Royal Thai Government recently approved a special project on **Technology Transfer for Gender and Aquaculture in North-East Thailand** worth one million Thai Baht (approx. US\$42,000) for the Commercialisation of Freshwater Aquaculture in North-East Thailand. The project started in May 2002 and will continue a full year.

The **Department of Fisheries (DOF)** through the **Thai Women in Fisheries Network (TWIF)** is collaborating with the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT) and the Chulalongkorn University Social Research Institute (CUSRI) on this project. In fact, one of the main goals of the project is to build up stronger connections among the organisations involved. Although the budget is limited, it shows that the Thai Government is lending its support to a project that is studying aquaculture and fisheries technology from a gender perspective.

This project ties in well with the DOF aquaculture policy that aims to increase annual aquaculture production at the rate of 5 per cent. It has been found that subsistence aquaculture is mostly carried out by women. It has also been observed that these subsistence aquaculturalists are still not able to commercialise their operations. The Technology Transfer study will examine how the actual actors in aquaculture can develop their potential to benefit more from improved technologies. At present, with the decentralisation of governmental administration and decision-making procedures, extension systems are currently being reviewed and restructured. This study will thus be a timely contribution to the new approach to extension by running pilot projects that can be replicated elsewhere.

The study will also augment the development of Thai women's capabilities through access to aquaculture technologies and improved production and marketing systems. Women maintain the household economy in the Thai family. Women have been playing a very important role in subsistence freshwater aquaculture, particularly in north-eastern Thailand. The study aims to improve the status of Thai women, who are the major actors in aquaculture development.

The study will serve as a vehicle for capacity building for the TWIF based at the DOF. The members of the Network consist of, but are not limited to, aquaculture researchers, technicians and extension workers who are interested in supporting the roles of women in fisheries. This study expects to come up with modules for more effective technology transfer for commercialising freshwater aquaculture in north-eastern Thailand. It will strengthen the Network's capability since its members are involved in the whole process of the project, from the inception through its implementation.

The study will formulate strategies and recommendations to improve the transfer of technology for better commercialisation of freshwater aquaculture in some of the poorest provinces.

Gender and Fisheries Development

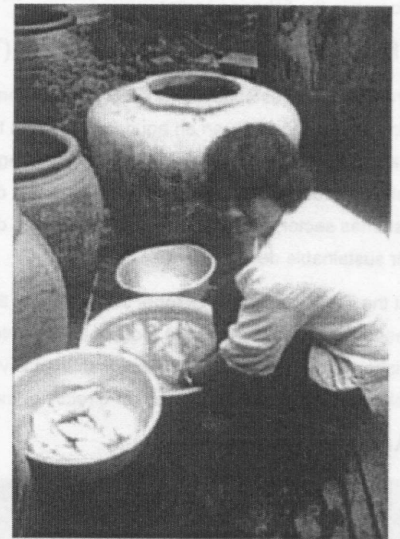
And what about other types of fisheries in Thailand? It should be noted that traditional small-scale inland fishers tend to identify themselves as farmers first and spend a part of their time fishing. This results in a lack of statistics reflecting so-called "full-time fishers" in inland capture fisheries. Unfortunately, there is no data or any record in Thailand about women involved in the fisheries sector.

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Training and credit facilities are easier for men to access than for women. Therefore, decision-making regarding financial matters, the scale of the fisheries business, species selection for aquaculture and marketing rests with men, and men also have greater control over the income.

Less than 10per cent of the farmers trained by the DOF are women. The men then train their wives. However, in the case of training on post-harvest technology including preservation and cooking, and the nutritional value of fish, more women tend to come to the training sessions. Except for this, the DOF has not been able to use



Woman preserving fish at Ban Wean Buk, Klong Cheam District, Ubolratchathani Province.



A woman joining her husband to fish in the Mekong at Nakhorn Panom Province.

women's resource to maximise fisheries production in Thailand.

Owing to cultural and traditional barriers, women do not participate in decision-making in public, even when they are involved in community activities. For example, women cannot participate in discussions regarding the financial, technical and marketing aspects of the community ponds. There are no women's representatives among the village committee members. But the secretary and accountant of the committee are likely to be women.

Gender Promotion in the DOF, Thailand

Gender is still a new thing at the DOF in Thailand. Despite the fact that there are some activities focusing on women that are supposed to improve post-harvest technology including processing, an implementation plan, programme or project that directly empowers women in the fisheries sector is not clearly defined. In fact, there is no clear idea how to address gender in

the fisheries sector.

The DOF lacks data and research on gender and fisheries development and the division of labour of men and women working in fisheries activities. Without solid information on the gender roles, status and needs in fisheries, it is difficult to integrate gender in a programme or project to equally benefit men and women in the fisheries sector.

Thai Women in Fisheries Network (TWIF)

The TWIF was established (unofficially from the point of view of the DOF) in February 2000 with the support of the MRC Fisheries Programme. The Network aims at ensuring women an equitable share in the country's development of the fisheries sector. The TWIF has connections with other National Networks (in Cambodia, the Lao PDR and Viet Nam). Linkages are maintained with members from women's groups, organisations and agencies that deal with gender and related issues in Thailand. The TWIF is now a centre of gender information and is undertaking various activities to promote women in all spheres of the fisheries sector, such as arranging for training courses and workshops for gender development, conducting gender research and trying to make women visible for sustainable development.

At the TWIF meeting in October 2001 held at the DOF headquarters in Bangkok (see *Catch and Culture*, Vol. 7 No.2, December 2001), the DOF took responsibility to serve as the focal point. The Network structure was revised at that time. The DOF is now working with the TWIF through a group of eight Fishery Biologists from the Inland Fisheries Division and other Divisions whose work is related to gender promotion. Out of 28 Divisions, ten have activities related to gender promotion either directly or indirectly.

Activities of the TWIF



February 2002 post-harvest study trip in north-eastern Thailand.

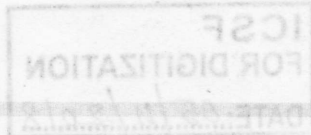
In 2001, two meetings were arranged by the working group of the TWIF and the Thai National Coordinator to build up understanding about the Network among the DOF officers and to discuss future TWIF activities and the Network structure as follows:

- 1) Making a draft plan of the TWIF activities for 2002-2004. The four main activities aim at increasing understanding in gender and strengthening the TWIF as follows:
 - a. Training of Trainers (TOT) in gender analysis supported by the NCWA (National Commission of Women's Affairs)
 - b. Collaborating with AIT and CUSRI on the Gender and Aquaculture Project in North-East Thailand (supported by the Thai Government, May 2002- April 2003).
 - c. Conducting gender training programme by the Gender Trainer Team and the Fisheries Training Division (one-month training course funded in 2002 by the World Bank).
 - d. Fostering the integration of gender in the DOF, Thailand, and DOF Development Projects such as One Village, One Product, etc.

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- 2) Refining the TWIF structure and selecting the new National Coordinator (Mrs N apaporn Sriputtinibondh).
- 3) Setting up the sub-committee, focal point and task force groups to work for the TWIF.
- 4) Building up linkages among organisations and agencies working on gender.
- 5) Participating in the Seminar on Women's Activities in Fishing Villages in Japan (November to December 2001).

New initiatives should ensure that women in fisheries are given equal opportunities to participate in development activities. They need to be offered equal access to training and other kinds of support. Women should be given the chance to take part in the planning of a development initiative that will impact on them and their families. (The full text of this article appears in the MRC Fisheries Programme, *Report of the Third Annual Meeting of the Regional Coordinators*, Ha Noi, March 2002, pp. 49-57).



3) Reviewing the TWT activities and selecting the new National Coordinator (Ms H. Sagon, Singapore)

4) Setting up a committee, local point and task force groups to look for the TWT

5) Building up stronger organizations and gender working on gender

6) Participating in the Seminar on Women's Activities in Fishing Villages in Japan (November to December 2001)

New initiatives should emerge that women fishermen are given equal opportunities to participate in development activities. They need to be created early.

Access to training and other types of support. Women should be given the chance to take part in the planning of a development initiative that will impact on

them and their families. (The list of the above appears in the MFC Fisheries Programme Report of the Third Annual Meeting of the Regional

Coordinator, Ms. H. Sagon, 2002, pp. 48-51)

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