

Setting the Agenda

A regional conference on Women in Fisheries held recently in Hanoi, Vietnam defined a regional agenda for the advancement of women and gender equity in fisheries

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Ecologically sound practices, social and worker's rights, community participation, and women's rights. These four tenets formed the basis of a significant statement released recently, the Hanoi Declaration on Women in Fisheries, which aimed to define the identity of artisanal fisheries in Southeast Asia.

The declaration was the outcome of a three-day conference held in Hanoi on "Women in Fisheries in Southeast Asia" from 2-4 December 2008, organized jointly by the Center for Marinelife Conservation and Community Development (MCD) and the Southeast Asia Fish for Justice Network (SEAFish).

Sixty participants from fisher peoples' organizations and non-governmental organizations in Southeast Asia attended the conference along with representatives from international development institutions such as Oxfam Novib, WorldFish Centre, and the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF).

The conference focused on the regional and international situation of women in fisheries; the setting of a regional agenda for women in fisheries; and the harmonization of agendas and the development of a plan of action to promote women's rights in fisheries. A roundtable meeting with representatives of the Government of Vietnam and the media to announce the regional agenda and action plan on women in fisheries was organized.

Participants also visited the Giao Xuan Commune, a model of community ecotourism initiative supported by the MCD, situated in the district of Giao Thuy in Nam Dinh Province. The trip to the Giao Xuan Commune exposed participants to the role of women in fisheries, and to community organizations and local governance in Giao Xuan. It provided an opportunity for participants to obtain a firsthand account of the gender situation in the Vietnamese fisheries industry, and of actions being undertaken to advance the women's agenda in coastal communities in Vietnam.

At the conference, fisheries development efforts were contextualized in terms of poverty, social exclusion, ecosystem degradation and resource exploitation. Women's concerns in fisheries were also addressed in relation to social exclusion, poverty and the overall marginalization of artisanal fishers.

Women engaged in fisheries in Southeast Asia are facing a variety of issues starting from their household-based role in production and reproduction right up to their lack of representation in decision-making processes in governance. Discrimination against women and lack of gender equity are a common experience for women in fisheries. The role of women is under-recognized or ignored. Participation of women in decisionmaking and management and the low income of women fishworkers are areas of grave concern. The conference was thus a platform that united interested parties on a common regional agenda on women in fisheries and set the direction for fisherwomen's rights and advocacy.

The focus on gender in socioeconomic development processes was an outcome of country case studies on women in fisheries carried out by the SEAFish Network. The countries covered by the research were Indonesia, Philippines, Vietnam and Cambodia. Apart from these case study presentations, women from fishing communities in Malaysia also shared their experiences at the conference.

The Southeast Asia Fish for Justice Network (SEAFish), which co-organized the conference, is a fisheries network comprising 15 non-governmental and fisheries organizations from Cambodia, Indonesia, Philippines and Vietnam in the Southeast Asian region. SEAFish envisions gender equity in access to, and control of, marine, coastal, and inland aquatic natural resources, and seeks to terminate the suffering caused by unsustainable resource use and privatized control over public resources.

SEAFish emphasizes the role of artisanal fisherfolk in policy formulation and decisionmaking in fisheries at the World Trade Organization (WTO), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and the Asian Development Bank (ADB). It urges the



Participants at the conference on “Women in Fisheries in Southeast Asia”, Hanoi, Vietnam

adoption of community-based coastal resource management as a framework for sustainable fisheries and trade. It advocates a reduction in industrial shrimp aquaculture, and emphasizes socially and environmentally sound aquaculture practices that benefit communities and promote social justice. It also promotes a regional agenda on gender equality and women in fisheries, enriched by local and national experiences, with emphasis on women’s rights.

MCD, also a conference co-organizer, is a SEAFish member organization, dedicated to coastal community livelihoods, marine conservation and sustainable coastal development in Vietnam. MCD recognizes the living interdependency of coastal communities and marine ecosystems. The coastal and marine environment provides jobs, food and ecological services, and must be protected to ensure that the livelihoods of local people are sustained. As degraded marine ecosystems reduce present and future opportunities for coastal communities, MCD’s goal is to harmonize conservation with socioeconomic development. MCD seeks to improve the quality of life of coastal communities and marine ecosystems through coastal management, community development, life science, education and advocacy as well as institution-building.

The conference concluded with the drafting of the Hanoi Declaration on

Women in Fisheries (<http://www.fact.org.kh/Download%20online/Hanoi%20Declaration%20of%20SEAFISH2012.4.08.pdf>). The regional agenda focused on the integration of gender concerns into the SEAFish themes, which are Community-Based Coastal Resources Management (CBCRM) and Markets; Shrimp and Aquaculture; and Fisheries and Trade. It was decided that action points will be developed to ensure that the regional agenda is adopted by governments throughout Southeast Asia. SEAFish already sought the support of the Government of Vietnam and the media through the earlier-mentioned roundtable meeting. The regional agenda will be communicated at the regional level through the ASEAN Summit as well as through other international institutions.

The conference highlighted the issues of women in small-scale fishers in Southeast Asia, making an important contribution to the process of policy formulation at both the national and regional level. Furthermore, it provided a wonderful opportunity for SEAFish members to express their friendship and solidarity with each other.

For further information about SEAFish and MCD, please visit the sites www.seafish4justice.net and www.mcdvietnam.org

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