

Leaky pipes and slippery ladders

A summary of the 3rd Global Symposium on Gender in Aquaculture and Fisheries

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Why, with few exceptions, are women so invisible and marginal to the mainstream? Why, despite access to microfinance, don't they own assets and property? Why do they continue to be discriminated against within institutions? What is the social context for gender-based discrimination?

These were some of the questions that were hotly debated in GAF3, the recently concluded 3rd Global Symposium on Gender in Aquaculture and Fisheries organized by the Asian Fisheries Society (ASF) as part of the 9th Asian Fisheries and Aquaculture Forum at China's Shanghai Ocean University. Held from 19 to 21 April 2011, this symposium—the ASF's fifth symposium on gender—involved 41 paper presentations, seven posters and many rounds of animated discussion. While some described the progress of women in the sector as a slow process of 'edging up the ladder', others drew upon the image of 'leaky pipelines' to describe how women in formal careers in aquaculture and fisheries find themselves being progressively eased out of status and opportunity.

Inaugurating the symposium, Nandini Gunewardena of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

urged for strategic initiatives that put gender more firmly on the aquaculture and fisheries agenda, especially by building the evidence base, engaging in advocacy and networking, and focusing on gender-based vulnerabilities. However, simply adding the gender lens to fisheries research is not enough; society, culture, power relations and household must also be examined, argued Marilyn Porter, who used examples from Tanzania, Canada and West Sulawesi to illustrate why researchers need to understand complex 'back stories' when helping to improve women's lives. This matrix of power was central to ICSF's 2010 workshop "Recasting the Net" whose outcome, a revitalized 'gender agenda', was summarized in a paper presented by Naina Pierri Estades from Brazil.

Demonstrating the ways in which gender adds value to fish supply chains, Holly Hapke, citing examples from fisheries development in the southern Indian State of Kerala, proposed a research framework that extends and links commodity chain approaches, such as multi-scaled gendered commodity chain analysis, with household-level analysis. A commercially significant supply chain, one that has experienced repeated trade upsets over product quality and production methods, can be seen in Asia's farmed giant tiger prawn, *Penaeus monodon*. From Bangladesh, Mohammad Nuruzzaman reported on a new project that included women in farmer training programmes in which the need to overcome the initial household resistance to including women and minimize the dominance of men, so that women's classroom learning may be facilitated, emerged as early lessons.

Often projects to assist women focus only on small-scale and minor industries within the fishing sector. The GAF3 Symposium heard three presentations on gender dimensions in three mainstream industries. In the first, M.C. Nandeesh, pointing out that "India is basically a carp culture country", shared the results of a study conducted across ten States in India of the workforce participation rates of women in carp culture. This varied widely from being very low in high-production States like Andhra Pradesh (in southern India) and Punjab (in the north) to being considerably high in Manipur, Assam and West Bengal (in the east and northeast) where the participation was largely in pond fertilization, nursery rearing, feeding

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Gender mainstreaming workshop in Cambodia. Gender mainstreaming aimed at eventual gender equality is today part of the official policy in Cambodia

and harvesting and often through women's self-help groups (SHGs).

In the second presentation, Sunila Rai offered a different view on women in carp-SIS (small indigenous species)-prawn polyculture in Nepal. Carp polyculture is the main aquaculture industry in Nepal but it does not supply household food. Work on experimental aquaculture involving women fish farmers of the Tharu community of Chitwan demonstrated that despite poor water quality, the polyculture of carp, *Macrobrachium* and SIS led to higher yields without affecting the production of carp.

The third presentation highlighted gender mainstreaming in a large fisheries development programme, the FAO-Spain Regional Fisheries Livelihood Programme (RFLP) for South and Southeast Asia. In this presentation, Angela Lentisco reviewed a set of tools, namely, the gender roles framework, the triple roles framework, the gender analysis matrix, the women's empowerment framework and the social relations framework that could be used for gender analysis in fisheries development projects. For small-scale fisheries projects, another set of tools for use in different phases of the project cycle was reviewed.

The fact that gender-based vulnerabilities play out in widely different ways was demonstrated in Ramachandran C Nair's presentation which revealed how even success can make women vulnerable in the contested space of Indian marine aquaculture. Across five States, mussel farming and seaweed culture were developed largely as part of women's empowerment programmes, while, from the start, open-sea cage culture was developed as a male activity. However, once mussel and seaweed farming became profitable through State support, banks began stepping in, transforming these industries into male-dominated, privatized coastal activity. The takeover of capital and coastal space rights, which the very State governments that once promoted women's empowerment now turned a blind eye to, was facilitated by the fact that mussel and seaweed farming, unlike cage culture, lacked the protection of common property rights.

Other forms of vulnerability were also examined at GAF3. Two presentations studied the liabilities created by microfinance, which, though well regarded by recipients, appear not to increase assets and productivity. Based on data from two districts of Kerala State, India, Nikita Gopal reported that microfinance schemes had helped finances and improved household financial decisionmaking in low-income families but most of the funds had gone into meeting household expenses with only minimal assets

having been created. In Guimaras, Philippines, Alice J. G. Ferrer found similar results in a study of women and men from fishing and non-fishing households. Both presentations stressed the importance of thoroughly understanding the issue of credit and examining its various sources better.

The vulnerabilities faced by women sea divers, whose lives, poorly understood but for long a source of wonder, were examined in presentations from Japan and Korea. In Japan's southwest Iki Island in Nagasaki Prefecture, most sea divers (*ama*) are women, and more than half of them, in the study presented by Cristina P. Lim, were already in their fifties. Despite formal rights to harvest sedentary species such as abalone and sea urchin, these women's earnings are in decline, and their overall fishing rights and access to decisionmaking in the fisheries co-operative associations are secondary to those of the men. In contrast to Japan, where men still dive, diving in Korea is exclusively women's activity. As in Japan, Korea's divers are an aging group. Sun-Ae Li traced the history of Korean women divers, many of whom are in the south, having originated over a hundred years ago from Jeju Island. These women, despite their knowledge and contributions, are marginalized on account of gender; their inshore fishing is restricted to species that are sedentary or of island origin and their needs are rarely addressed in fisheries policies and assistance.

Fishers and fishing communities continue to be vulnerable to poverty even in fast-modernizing economies such as Malaysia. Jariah Masud's work analyzed Malaysian national poverty eradication programmes, which, despite their considerable achievements, and despite the growth of the fisheries and aquaculture sector, have not changed the endemic poverty in fishing communities. Jariah also explored the constraints that women from fishing communities face in the field of entrepreneurship, arguing that while several women in rural Malaysia have succeeded in productive ventures, further study is needed to better understand the underlying reasons for their success, including how to best use, or even avoid, credit. The changing demography of Malaysia's fishing population was the subject of Tengku Aizan Hamid's presentation, which shows an aging trend with traditional fishers being, on average, older than commercial fishers, although in Sabah and Sarawak, the entry of foreign labour appears to be the reason for a lower average age. This presentation also discussed the unreliability of official statistics on women's employment in the fishing sector and the failure of national fisheries development policies to address human development issues.

Formal career paths in aquaculture and fisheries 'leak' women at a greater rate than men, leading to progressively lower salaries and loss of seniority for women even in programmes that champion equal opportunities.

Climate change increased women's labour, costs and risks in fish drying; however, women are pursuing adaptive strategies within limited livelihood alternatives.

Moving on to neighbouring Indonesia, Zuzy Anna's study of two coastal cities—Semarang, a large city, and Pekalongan, a smaller one—examined the uncertainties faced by wives of traditional fishermen and those of non-fishermen engaged in fishing-related activities. The study found that the women from Semarang experienced higher anxiety levels than did the ones from Pekalongan and that seasonal variations in uncertainty were lower for women married to non-fishers. The main reasons for uncertainty were ecological (drought, pollution and season), economic (volatility in production and income), social (family instability, unemployment and health), and institutional (dependency on credit and savings and local financiers). The women used many different strategies to cope with uncertainty, with personal and cultural attitudes also playing a part. Another study from Indonesia by Ria Fitriana, which documented the overlaps and complementarities in the fishing activities of men and women in the country's remote Pantar Islands, found that even though the island's women are officially classified as fishers, they tend to be less regarded than men as marine resource users.

The central coastal region of Vietnam presents real challenges to women dependent on fisheries resources, according to Nguyen Dang Hao, who, as part of the FAO-Spain RFLP, studied 16 communes in the provinces of Quang Tri, Thua Thien Hue and Quang Nam. Here, women bear more children than the national average and work 12- to 14-hour days, three or four hours longer than the men; education levels are low and there is an escalating pressure on open-access fisheries under sometimes dangerous and risky weather conditions. Women, despite access to credit, know little about financial management and have almost no voice in managing the natural resources. Although women and men have high participation rates in the Women's Union and Farmer's Association, respectively, these bodies offer little more than sympathetic support and an opportunity to share experiences.

Pacific island case studies from Melanesia (Fiji, Solomon Islands), Polynesia (Niue, Samoa) and Micronesia (Federated States of Micronesia) showed, with some variations, the dominance of women in inshore, reef and lagoon fisheries and fish marketing. Young people are also major users of the coastal zone and, therefore, are affected by climate-change phenomena such as sea level rise and greater salt intrusions into coastal gardens as are women. Apart from urging for a cultural shift, Veikila Vuki concluded that women, the youth and fisheries institutions should urgently be

brought into climate-change decisionmaking to represent their special needs and contribute their special insights.

At Barangay Bislig, Leyte, Philippines, a fishing-dependent village with many migrant families, Marieta Bañez Sumagaysay found that most, but not all, women fish driers attributed phenomena such as prolonged rain and unpredictable weather to climate change. Climate change increased women's labour, costs and risks in fish drying, adding to the problem of declining fish stocks. However, within their limited livelihood alternatives, the women are pursuing certain adaptive strategies.

Mangrove destruction presents a serious problem for most tropical countries, not least the Philippines where efforts to reforest coastal sites have met with mixed success. In two presentations, Farisal U. Bagsit and Alice Joan Ferrer delved into gender roles and responsibilities in mangrove reforestation programmes in the Western Visayas, Philippines. The studies examined different types of institutions involved in reforestation. In both studies, women tended to remain active longer than the men in people's organizations, and undertook a greater range of roles in the mangrove replanting and nursery activities. Although the work is difficult and pulls people away from their other responsibilities, both studies reported an appreciation of the importance of reforestation and the building of camaraderie.

Gender is an important dimension in human institutions. Rather than waiting for gradual and externally driven change, many have taken to activism and advocacy. Over the last decade, successful activism by representatives of fisher's wives, fishing women's organizations and feminist academics in Europe has led to major gains in the status and rights of women. An example is the 2010 European Union Directive 2010/41 on spouse rights. Katia Frangoudes, drawing from the experience of AKTEA, the European women's network, argued that women activists have been critical of this achievement while women parliamentary leaders could not always be relied upon to advocate for women.

Gender mainstreaming aimed at eventual gender equality is today part of the official policy of Cambodia, reported Heng Ponley, where, since 2006, it has been developed and added to the Fisheries Administration by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries.

Using the metaphor of a leaky pipeline, Hillary Egna, using data from nearly 30 years of work by the USAid-funded Co-operative Research Support Programmes (CRSP) for aquaculture, reported that formal career

paths in aquaculture and fisheries from education to research 'leaked' women at a greater rate than men, leading to progressively lower salaries and loss of seniority for women even in programmes that champion equal opportunities. Adding to these observations, Stella Williams argued that world development

had ignored women for nearly 50 years in every field, including science, education and research. The lessons emerging from the African Women in Agricultural Research and Development (AWARD) programme too pointed to leaky pipelines in agricultural education and research, she added. ■