

Gender inequality: GAF6 asks ‘WHY?’

The recently concluded 6th Global Symposium on Gender in Aquaculture and Fisheries addressed the question of gender in very significant ways

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The 6th Global Symposium on Gender in Aquaculture and Fisheries (GAF6) was held in Bangkok, Thailand, over four days (3-6 August 2016) of intense engagement. It began with a half day Training Workshop—GAF-101: Theorizing Gender in Aquaculture and Fisheries Research—involving more than 50 new and experienced gender researchers. Workshop leaders Marilyn Porter and Holly Hapke set out to demystify theory. “Theory,” they said, “encourages us to ask, and keep asking, the question ‘WHY?’”

This set the tone for GAF6, which was the most successful of all the women/gender events held by the Asian Fisheries Society over the last 18 years. Moreover, GAF6 was a major component of the 11th Asian Fisheries and Aquaculture Forum (11AFAF), the first time an event on the question of gender has

achieved such prominence in a mainstream fisheries conference. GAF6 attracted the most Forum presentations: 68 oral presentations, summaries of posters as well as posters, and an overview presented at the Forum’s Closing Plenary.

This report organizes selected GAF6 presentations under four themes: policy opportunities and implementation challenges; challenging social and fish sector norms; definitions and filters that exclude; and the impacts of current sector trends.

In the context of the first theme—new gender equality policy opportunities and their implementation—one of the most promising policy opportunities is in the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines). The GAF6 Special Session on the implementation of the gender elements of the Guidelines had two objectives: first, to examine the Guidelines through a feminist lens; and

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Siri Gerrard and Katia Frangoudes during discussion on SSF Guidelines at GAF6. The workshop examined the SSF Guidelines through a feminist lens and identified through case studies the main barriers as well as challenges

second, to identify through case studies the main barriers as well as challenges the best approaches for a successful implementation of gender equity and equality.

Katia Frangoudes' presentation dealt with the inclusion of gender in the Guidelines and emphasized that implementation is the next critical step. In implementation, examples from different regions are important to bring out information about barriers, opportunities and challenges to gender equality, including norms and values that may prevent it. The ensuing presentations provided more such information from different geographical areas. All presentations spoke about the difficulties women experience in participating in the decisionmaking processes.

Lack of statistics was identified as one of the reasons for the absence of gender-sensitive policies. In addition, for the Caribbean, Nadine Nembhard identified the lack of gender mainstreaming in several national fisheries and aquaculture policies, as well as the limited capacity of the national gender agencies to monitor, report on, and implement strategies. Now, however, several regional agencies believe that implementing the Guidelines will lead to women's empowerment and capacity building. Within the Caribbean Network of Fisherfolk Organisations (CNFO), a 'fisherwomen' section has been created and, together, CNFO, the Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism (CRFM) and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) aim to get a protocol on the SSF Guidelines, including gender, into fisheries policy.

Kumi Soejima reported that in Japan, women have their own sections within Fisheries Cooperative Associations (FCAs). These deal with all social matters related to the community and the fishery sector, but women are not allowed to become full members of the sections that are empowered to discuss fishery management and the future of the community, or run the banking system. Fishermen claim that women cannot become members of the FCAs because "they are not participating in harvesting activities". Logically speaking, one might expect that women divers (*ama*) who harvest abalone would qualify for full membership of the FCAs, but this is not the case because their right of access is granted by their husbands as members of the FCA. This status quo, however, is being challenged by fisherwomen who have benefited from national schemes to develop their business capacities by establishing private

or collective units to process fish products, and who demand to be completely involved in the fisheries organizations. For the time being, fishermen have not fully opened the door, and only women struggling against male power have been successful. Women generally need support from scientists, prefectural and national fisheries authorities to force their way into the FCA.

Ravadee Prasertcharoensuk explained that, in Thailand, women are participating actively in small-scale fisheries, but national statistics are not sex-desegregated and the needs of women are therefore not taken into account during policy formulation. NGOs that work for the recognition of small-scale fisheries communities and gender equality, promoting and supporting the active involvement of women fishers in national policy development and concrete local initiatives, view the Guidelines as an important tool. They have used the Guidelines framework to conduct a national consultation forum in collaboration with the Department of Fisheries and representatives of provincial level small-scale fishing communities. A national implementation plan for securing sustainable small-scale fisheries has been drafted and is expected to direct future actions of NGOs and civil society organizations.

In spite of what is proclaimed in government gender policy, gender equality strategies frequently are not implemented. Why does this failure occur? In 2003, the government of Lao PDR promoted gender equity as a priority and established the National Commission for Advancement of Women (NCAW). Dongdavanh Sibounthong examined how national gender equity policy was being implemented locally in fisheries and aquaculture in Pakse and Phonthong districts, where district plans promote gender equality and the inclusion of women in decisionmaking. At the grassroots, however, Dongdavanh found traditional gender divisions of labour in fish value chains. Further, in the district agriculture and forestry offices, there were few women staff, few prospects of promotions, and no funds to advance gender plans. NCAW also lacked the capacity to provide assistance to sector ministries and district level offices.

Roel Bosma found that sectoral Gender Action Plans (GAP) in Vietnam had not reduced gender inequality in aquaculture and fisheries. These plans did not address the constraints to gender equality, including the attitudes of men and families, and Roel



GAF6 Meeting at Bangkok, Thailand. GAF6 participants emphasized that fisheries and aquaculture should be defined by reference to the whole of the value chain

concluded that “the struggle for gender equality will be a continuous struggle”.

Natasha Stacey and colleagues reviewed Indonesian aid, and government and NGO livelihood projects in the last two decades. Most projects performed little gender analysis, did not follow through on planned gender activities and did not measure gendered impacts. As a result, no strategies yet exist to support women, who, as Anindya Indira Putri found, were suffering greater burdens in their triple roles (productive, reproductive and community), especially if men migrated to work following resource and coastal degradation due to climate change and other factors.

One new project taking gender equality to heart is the USAID Oceans and Fisheries Partnership, according to Arlene Satapornvanit, who explained how the Partnership embeds gender policy and strategies. For example, as part of its Asia-Pacific work to combat illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing and seafood fraud, the Partnership is strengthening the human well-being component by including gender tools and case studies in its Catch Documentation and Traceability system.

Related to implementation struggles, the second theme was about social and fish sector norms that present a major constraint to gender equality.

Afrina Choudhury, from Bangladesh examined whether women in homestead pond aquaculture and shrimp processing factories were empowered by their engagement in aquaculture. Both activities have attracted many poor women, and they reported modest improvements in their empowerment, measured at multiple scales.

The study concluded, however, that we cannot assume that inclusion leads to empowerment, especially because household and factory attitudes and strictures on women constrain them into conforming to their existing gender roles. Will empowerment be sustainable or even possible without normative change?

Integrating women into decisionmaking in the governance of fisheries in Kiribati faces hurdles, according to Aurelie Delisle. The country was trying to implement a new mode of co-governance which called for equal participation for all user groups. Although paying particular attention to women’s involvement at all stages, participation has not materialized because cultural norms, traditional governance structures and the gender-blindness of fisheries authorities impede change. In another presentation from the Pacific, Helen Teioli made a strong case that, to succeed, gender transformative processes in Solomon Islands need to engage men as well as women. Ignoring men in the transformative processes overlooked gender differences such that Western Province women tended to lead changes and more innovative activities than men, whilst Malaita men tended to innovate more than women.

Long-term changes in perceptions will only happen if awareness on gender starts early. In schools, art is one medium that might help. At GAF6, a ‘Youth and Fish’ painting competition for students was held. Opening the event, Arlene Nietes Satapornvanit said “we should start our advocacy about gender awareness and sensitivity at a young age, so that these concepts will be incorporated into youth mindsets and be carried into adulthood as a lifestyle”. The Youth and Fish Session was a pilot activity involving senior and junior

Bangkok high schools, with students working in pairs. The artworks revealed concern for the environment and people.

The third theme was about why definitions and filters may exclude or render invisible fish value chain participants.

For a start, individuals and groups are deliberately or incidentally excluded when informal and invisible work is not counted in national statistics and when fishing is too narrowly defined, for example, when practices such as gathering and gleaning are not considered to constitute “fishing”. Jennifer Gee of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) reported how statistical exclusion, including that based on gender, is being addressed. FAO is now reporting the limited available sex-disaggregated national data and has published new guidelines on census and sample survey methods for collecting socio-economic data. Efforts are underway to find ways to integrate project-based data, often the only data available, into national data.

Throughout, GAF6 participants emphasized that fisheries and aquaculture should be defined by reference to the whole of the value chain, and not simply to production, as is currently being done. Considering the entire value chain reveals a greater number of women and a greater diversity of people who depend on fish, often in ways that are not envisaged by planners.

In the production nodes of the value chain, narrow definitions of fishing exclude many small-scale operators. Most commonly excluded is inshore gathering, mainly of invertebrates. In Costa Rica, fishers both women and men feel that though they work with dignity, their labour, primarily due to the particular conditions of the work and the associated lack of resources, goes unrecognized, keeping them in poverty. Along the Pacific coast, 7000 mollusc gatherers, mainly women and families working in the mangroves, have been trapped by laws that prohibit their work unless the status of the fished stocks is known. This seemingly hopeless situation has started to turn around. One group managed to meet with the President of Costa Rica, and began to organize themselves. With the help of the local NGO, CoopeSoliDar R.L., and the FAO, they started to work with the government to resolve the dilemma, using a human rights approach and participatory stock assessments, leading to sustainable use of the resource. Under the umbrella of the SSF Guidelines,

this action is aimed at creating decent work with dignity, as defined by the Guidelines.

For Mozambique fisheries, Horacio Gervásio asked why substantial subsistence fishing by women and men is not better integrated into local food systems. Under the new 2013 fisheries law, it is defined as non-commercial and secondary, even though it contributes to the fishers’ incomes and supplies local hotels and elites. Intertidal fishing should be formalised, he contended, and women encouraged to apply the business skills they use to balance their portfolios of livelihood strategies.

Formal and official conceptions of gender and place in fish value chains that seem to be exclusionary may in practice be circumvented. Ray Pavo studied why some women managed to work successfully in the overtly masculine tuna port in General Santos City, Philippines. He found that a few women prospered in their own business spaces, which they perceived quite differently from the way these spaces were conceived by planners of the value chain nodes.

In Davao Oriental, Philippines, Jecelyn Pastor interviewed women who have been fishing offshore for many years and some who were involved in barter trade for fish products from the deep sea vessels, despite taboos about women bringing bad luck to deep sea fishing. She found that, due to such prejudices, women are invariably excluded when considering deep sea fishing, even though they may be active fishers.

The fourth theme covered the gendered impacts of current sector concerns, namely labour conditions, illegal fishing, trade concentration, and fishing community disruption.

The labour conditions under which women in the fish sector work have received little public attention and are barely visible in NGO exposures of human trafficking and migrant labour exploitation. The GAF6 Special Session on the fish industry, gender and social development encouraged participants to share experiences and perceptions of how women are affected. One of the presentations in this session, by Mohammad Nuruzzaman, described the factory provisions for occupational safety and health among female shrimp factory workers in Bangladesh.

The panel discussion captured practices/experiences (or the lack thereof) linked with social responsibility and development. Marie Christine Monfort, a seafood marketing

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Nadine Nembhard identified the lack of gender mainstreaming in several national fisheries and aquaculture policies in the Caribbean countries

consultant based in Europe, noted the absence of women in the majority of high level decision-making positions in seafood companies, as well as in conferences and meetings. Thai business development worker, Supaporn Anuchiracheeva, shared how participatory interventions empowered the women in a fishing community in southern Thailand to improve fishing practices, post-harvest, marketing, and business negotiations. The women's status has been elevated and they are now supplying seafood with international certification to five-star hotels in Bangkok. Based on her experience in the International Labour Organization, Anna Olsen recommended that gender

and intersectional analyses are essential in activities to create decent work in fishing and seafood processing.

This session stressed that concerted work with the seafood industry and development agencies is needed to raise awareness and build up capacity to achieve gender equality, as this is not yet on the agenda.

The international media has been filled with stories of importing states cracking down on illegal fishing, but few carry the voices of those affected. Since 2015, Thai fishers, their households, communities and life options have been roiled by new trade threats from importing regions, especially the European Union's 'Yellow Card' on illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, and the consequent Thailand's 2015 Royal Enactment on Fishing. Khamnuan Kheuntha from Thailand, examined why the fishers are experiencing seemingly constant stress and asked, "is this stress due to more than the new regulations?"

Chalermwan Wichakoon, a young woman CEO of a Thai fishing company shared her perceptions on the current situation facing the fishing industry in the fight against IUU fishing. The voices of the fishing company owners are not heard and their opinions were not asked regarding media reports. This has affected their businesses to the extent that the younger generation who inherited the businesses from their parents and grandparents—and especially she as a female, are now thinking of giving up the fishing business.

Negatively and positively, fish trade and its growth impacts women. Nikita Gopal described how, in coastal areas of India, women in fish marketing are being pushed out by resource rich traders who have entered the scene in many states. NGOs are helping the affected women to organize and raise awareness of their situation but, at the same time, state led interventions and schemes are also being made to explore livelihoods within and outside fisheries. The efficacy of these strategies is yet to be explored.

Current fish trade trends are not all negative, as Amonrat Sermwatanakul showed with a good news story about Thailand's Siamese fighting fish industry. After 30 years of traditional extension experience in Thailand, Amonrat discovered the power of branding and social media to help the second generation of growers of these ornamental and sporting fish. Many growers are women—for example, in Nakhon Pathom Province near

Bangkok where half the growers are women. Using Facebook and group training, she has helped connect producers with each other and thousands of buyers, and provides training to women farmer groups in branding, product photography, as well as in online marketing to local and global aquarium fish markets through such sites as AquaBid.

Even in an equal opportunity country like Norway, where fish production is an important economic sector, fisheries management changes have disrupted fishing communities in gendered ways. Siri Gerrard explained how, in 1990, many contributions by women to fisheries were not valued and thus were not considered in the major privatisation of the fisheries. Women ended up owning little of the capital that was created by way of quotas, and although they continue to contribute, they do so in invisible ways and by bringing in household income from their work in other sectors.

Migrations often disrupt fishing communities. Kyoko Kusakabe explored why migration is now a pervasive feature of Cambodian coastal and inland fisheries. Rather than caused by simple economics, she found migration patterns were shaped by complex interactions of many factors, including gender, age, identity, resource depletion and alternative opportunities.

New coastal developments, including aquaculture, affect coastal communities. Benedict Carmelita examined women and men's attitudes towards new government-promoted mariculture parks in Misamis Oriental, Misamis Occidental, Bohol, La Union and Pangasinan Provinces, Philippines. In most, but not all areas, proportionally more men than women like having mariculture operations nearby, but non-fishing households tend to be more favourably disposed towards having mariculture operations nearby than did fishing households. After mariculture was established, fishing, gleaning and leisure activities, including swimming and strolling, decreased. Local employment was perceived to have improved because of mariculture operations.

What is the impact of GAF6 likely to be? We quote Peter Wessels: "I have now returned to the Maldives after the GAF6 conference with a renewed energy. Based on what I observed at GAF6 and through my own research, I am confident that momentum is building." ❏