

# WOMEN IN FISHERIES ACTIVITIES OF THE ASIAN FISHERIES SOCIETY – HAVE THEY BEEN ABLE TO MAKE AN IMPACT?

M. C. Nandeesha

Central Agricultural University, College of Fisheries, India

E. Tech

Asian Fisheries Society, Philippines

## Abstract

The initiative of the Partnership for Development in Kampuchea (PADEK), in organizing a National Symposium on Women in Fisheries in Cambodia in 1994, received overwhelming support from the Government of Cambodia. This resulted in the organization of a regional seminar on the same issue involving all the countries in the Mekong Basin in 1996. The involvement of the Asian Fisheries Society (AFS) helped in scaling up the activities to the Asian level, leading to the organization of the Women in Asian Fisheries Symposium in 1998, which coincided with the 5th Asian Fisheries Forum in Chiang Mai, Thailand. The AFS also joined hands with PADEK in organizing the triennial photographic competition. A number of these activities have stimulated both national and regional interests, motivating various groups to organize discussions/meetings on the increasing role of women in the fisheries sector. Following the recommendations from these events, efforts are underway with the implementation of new approaches and better strategies, which will bring forth gender equity in a wide array of developmental activities.

The publication of the proceedings of the meetings and the photographic competitions have contributed to increased awareness and changes in attitude. Major changes at the policy level, however, have yet to be seen. While there is a need to intensify awareness in this area, more concrete steps are needed to translate awareness into actions. This paper summarizes the impacts observed in the different gender-related activities. It will put forward suggestions on ways to strengthen activities in this area.

## Background

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations organized the first global workshop on Women in Aquaculture in 1987 in Rome. The vision of FAO in recognizing the increasing role played by women in the development of aquaculture - now the fastest growing food producing sector in the world - has led to the establishment of gender-sensitive aquaculture policies. The Indian Branch of the AFS organized the first national workshop on Women in Fisheries in 1990. This workshop identified key issues affecting women in the Indian fisheries sector. It also brought together heads of various concerned organizations involved in fisheries research, education, and training and development. The workshop proceedings served as an important document, and stimulated further discussions and development of appropriate programs in India. The workshop stressed the importance of education of women and increase in their awareness to various issues in fisheries, provision of credit facilities and the need to develop women-friendly technologies. These were identified as key issues that require attention (Gadagkar 1992).

## The Cambodian Initiative

PADEK, with the support of the Government of Cambodia, took the initiative in organizing the first National Workshop on Women in Cambodian Fisheries in 1994. In Cambodia, women constitute the majority of the population. In the fisheries sector alone, women play a major role in bringing forth progress and development. The workshop recognized the contribution of women in the different areas of fisheries, identifying key issues that need to be addressed. The workshop was successful in bringing awareness and putting forward changes that require developmental and strategic approaches. The recommendations from the workshop formed the basis for the development of a country resource paper on women in Cambodia, covering agriculture and fisheries. This paper was presented at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. The workshop also recommended the organization of a regional seminar on Women in Fisheries in the Indo-China countries. There are many common issues in the region and sharing of information would help greatly in speeding up the development process (Nandeesh and Heng 1994).

In 1995, UNDP organized a workshop at the Asian level aimed at preparing a background paper on Women in Asian Fisheries for presentation at the Beijing Conference. The results of the Cambodian National Workshop were presented in this workshop. The Network of Aquaculture Centres in Asia (NACA) newsletter, *Aquaculture Asia*, dedicated a special issue to women in fisheries. These efforts were helpful in setting up priorities for addressing gender in fisheries issues at the Beijing Conference on Women.

## Impact at the Indo-China Level

Following the recommendations of the 1994 workshop in Cambodia, PADEK again with the support of the Cambodian Government, took the initiative in organizing a regional seminar on Women in Fisheries in the Indo-China countries from 6 - 8 March 1996. The seminar brought together not only interested participants from the four countries (Cambodia, Lao PDR, Vietnam and Thailand), but also attracted the involvement of regional/international organizations like ICLARM-The World Fish Center, Asian Institute of Technology, Network of Aquaculture Centres in Asia-Pacific, etc. Being the first woman Director General not only of ICLARM-The World Fish Center, but of all other CGIAR (Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research) institutions, Dr. Meryl Williams' participation helped the seminar derive inspiration, as she is seen as a role model for setting up new directions in the fisheries sector. The seminar recommended the formation of national networks in the region in order to strengthen the activities at the national level. In addition to this, it also suggested the participation of women in various training programs and the provision of credit to help women initiate activities within their fields of expertise and trade (Nandeesh and Hanglomong 1997). The participants also felt that the experience and the impact created at the Mekong region should be shared at the Asian level. Since AFS had shown interest in this area, it was suggested that with the upcoming Asian Fisheries Forum, efforts should be made towards organizing an international seminar covering the Asian region.

## Impact at the Asian Level

In November 1998, AFS organized an International Symposium on Women in Asian Fisheries, coinciding with the 5th Asian Fisheries Forum in Chiangmai, Thailand. The Symposium provided insights into the status of women in fisheries in different countries of the region. It also identified common issues among these countries that need to be addressed. ICLARM-The World Fish Center and the AFS jointly published the proceedings with financial support from the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD) and Department for International Development (UK) (DFID) (Williams et al. 2001). Table 1 shows the specific and general recommendations that emerged from the said symposium. Efforts were made not only to disseminate and make known these recommendations, but also to follow up on its implementation by the concerned agencies.

**Table 1: Recommendations from the International Symposium on Women in Asian Fisheries held in 1998.**

RECOMMENDATIONS	STATUS
<b>Specific</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• AFS should Continue Photographic Competition.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Third Photographic Competition was organized during the 6th Forum in Taiwan with PADEK support.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sponsor Women in Fisheries Session during the 6th Asian Fisheries Forum.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Global symposium on Women in Fisheries was held in Taiwan coinciding with the 6th Asian Fisheries Forum.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Select both Men and Women Keynote Speakers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dr. Meryl Williams was chosen as the first woman keynote speaker of the 6th Forum held in Taiwan.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure Gender Equity in Selecting Chairpersons for conducting scientific sessions during fora/ scientific meetings.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many sessions had men and women as Chairpersons during the 6th Forum.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strive for Gender Equity in the council.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are Five Women Council Members in the 7th Council. President and Secretary of the Society are Women.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Investigate forming a Gender in Fisheries Section of the Society.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Society is willing to support, if someone is willing to take the leadership and organize the section.</li> </ul>
<b>General</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training and Extension Programs should Specifically Target Women.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many agencies are taking action and targeting women.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Initiate Micro credit programs to Benefit Women Along the Successful Patterns Adopted in India.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some NGO's and Projects have demonstrated the necessity and benefit of targeting women. Self Help Groups (SHG) have become successful in Cambodia.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formation of Networks at National Levels.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All the Mekong basin countries have active networks. (Cambodia, Thailand, Vietnam and Laos)</li> <li>• Philippines - Established</li> <li>• India - In Progress</li> <li>• Bangladesh - Initiated</li> </ul>

Most recommendations have been implemented by different agencies. Within AFS, some changes have already taken place. At the 6th AFS Forum General Assembly where the 7th Council was elected, the number of women in the Council increased from two to four—the President and Secretary are both women (Table 2). This is a significant development and it is hoped that AFS will continue its efforts to further promote gender equity in the Council without compromising on quality.

The AFS also made a noteworthy move by inviting a woman, Dr. Meryl Williams to deliver a keynote address of the Forum for the first time. This was a landmark presentation in the history of Asian fisheries as it provided a roadmap of mainstreaming gender for fisheries development. In addition, the AFS also took steps to involve both men and women in conducting several scientific sessions during the 6th Asian Fisheries Forum. However, it is apparent that while more attention is being given to gender equity, efforts should be made to encourage participation of more women in the forthcoming fora.

**Development of Networks and their Impact:** Dr. Kathleen Matics, one of the more active participants who took part in the Indo-China seminar on women in fisheries followed closely the recommendations related to network formation. With the support of the Mekong River Commission (MRC), she played a key role in the establishment of national networks in all the four countries within the Mekong region (Cambodia, Vietnam, Thailand and Lao PDR). These networks have proved to be beneficial in increasing information exchange and encouraging good research. Inspired by the results achieved by the networks in the Mekong belt, several other countries have shown interest in setting up similar networks. The Philippines Network on Women in Fisheries has already been established under the leadership of Dr. Ida Siason from the University of the Philippines in the Visayas. A number of other countries are also making efforts towards this direction. It is hoped that the success of the existing networks would encourage the formation of new networks in other parts of the world.

**Impact of the Photographic Competition:** PADEK provided support to AFS for the organization of the photographic competition on the theme "Women in Asian Fisheries". This coincided with the 4th Asian Fisheries Forum in Beijing, China, in 1995. This first photographic competition had more than fifty entries and among them, four photos garnered awards (Table 3). The first prize photograph was won by the MRC. This impressive photograph that depicts the involvement of women in fishing was the cover

photo of the 10th Anniversary Commemorative Volume of AFS. The second prize was won by Dr. Yip Hoi Kee of the Department of Zoology, National University of Singapore. The photograph, representing the involvement of women in fish processing was used to produce a greeting card. The third prize was won by Dr. Thieu Thi Tao Mado, who is an active member of the Vietnam Network on Women in Fisheries. She has taken the lead in organizing several programs on women in fisheries. The third prize was also shared by Mr. Nao Thuock from Cambodia. He is now the Director General of Fisheries and has been active in promoting gender-sensitive fisheries activities in the country. Currently, he is also in the Council of AFS. Recognizing the impact of the first photographic competition, PADEK has continued its support for the organization of subsequent photographic competitions.

The second photographic competition was held in Chiangmai, Thailand (1998) coinciding with the 5th Asian Fisheries Forum. This also attracted a large number of entries. Mr. Peter Degan, a well-known social scientist working with the MRC capture fisheries project in Cambodia, won the first prize. He is known for using various audio and visual systems to address social issues where gender is a main area of focus. The second prize winner, Mr. Dewey Sergio, is a local photo enthusiast from the Philippines. The third prize winner, Dr. Mohinder Singh Kohli, has been actively involved in conducting research on gender issues. He organized an International Symposium on Women in Fisheries in Mumbai, India, in December 2001.

The third Photographic competition held in Kaohsiung, Taiwan, in conjunction with the 6th Asian Fisheries Forum in 2001 also attracted a good number of entries and most of the winning photograph entries focused on women in aquaculture activities. Here again, the winners have shown strong interest in gender issues in fisheries. The First Prize photo, "Knitting a hole for better yield" was won by Dr. Rubiyanto Haliman of Indonesia and the second, "Women in aquaculture-A nurse and conservator" was won by Dr. B.B. Sahu of the Indian Council for Agricultural Research (CIFA), India. Two photos were awarded the Third Prize: "We grow fish for our family: Women with their fish harvest", won by Dr. P.K. Sahoo of the National Research Centre for Women in Agriculture, India; and "The women fish farmers are harvesting fish in Bangladesh with the help of their husbands", won by Dr. Md. Ghulam Kibria, who is involved with the Northern Upland Aquaculture Development Project in Vietnam. It is anticipated that these individuals would continue to stir interest and provide leadership in bringing forth gender equity.

The prize-winning photos were featured in a number of fisheries magazines, newsletters and websites thereby contributing to increased awareness. In view of its successes, PADEK has agreed to continue supporting the organization of the 4th photographic competition, which will coincide with the 7th Asian Fisheries Forum in 2004, in Penang, Malaysia, with the theme "Gender and Fisheries".

**Table 2: Women Council Members of the AFS from 1st to 7th Council.**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Council</b>
Dionisia Rola	Philippines	First
Elvira Tan	Philippines	Second
Meng Qingwen	China	Second
Jahara Yahaya	Malaysia	Fifth
Angela Arthington	Australia	Fifth and Sixth
Kamonporn Tonghuthai	Thailand	Fifth, Sixth and Seventh
Roshada Hashim	Malaysia	Seventh
Fatima Md. Yusoff	Malaysia	Seventh
Ida Siason	Philippines	Seventh
Clarissa Marte	Philippines	Seventh

**Table 3: Winners of the three Photographic Competitions conducted by AFS with PADEK Sponsorship.**

<b>First Photo Competition</b>	<b>Prize Winner</b>	<b>Prize Type</b>	<b>Country</b>
Women fishing along Mekong River	Mekong River Commission	First	Thailand
Labor of love	Yip Hoi Kee (National University of Singapore)	Second	Singapore
Handless woman in fish processing	Thieu Thi Tao Mado (Institute of Tropical Biology)	Third	Vietnam
Woman weaving fish net	Nao Thuock (Department of Fisheries)	Third	Cambodia
<b>Second Photo Competition</b>			
Smoking fish in Tonlesap river	Peter Degan (Mekong river Commission)	First	Cambodia
Woman fishing in Laguna de Bay	Dewey Sergio (Fisheries Department)	Second	Philippines
Chinese dipnet operation by woman in NE India	M.P. Singh Kohli (Central institute for Fisheries Education)	Third	India
<b>Third Photo Competition</b>			
Knitting a hole for better yield	Rubiyanto W. Haliman	First	Indonesia
Woman in aquaculture-a nurse and a conservator	B.B. Sahu (Central Institute of Freshwater Aquaculture)	Second	India
We grow fish for our family	P.K. Sahoo (National Centre for women in Agriculture)	Third	India
Women harvesting fish in Bangladesh	Md. Gulam Kibria (UNDP project)	Third	Vietnam

## Global Symposium on Women in Fisheries

Based on the recommendations of the Asian level symposium, initiatives were taken by ICLARM-The World Fish Center and AFS to organize the Global Symposium on Women in Fisheries which was held in November 2001, Kaohsiung, Taiwan. The symposium attracted participants from many parts of the world where review papers highlighted women in fisheries in the different continents. The symposium also identified major issues that had to be addressed. It was noted that there is a need to train more staff on gender issues so that they may serve as resource persons in their respective countries/territories. The need to carry out a study to understand the existing knowledge level of AFS members on gender issues, and the formulation of development strategies based on the results was recognized and identified as another area requiring immediate action. In addition, the Global Symposium highlighted additional recommendations (Table 4) which will create an impact on key issues affecting fisheries development at a global scale.

In the same symposium, a resolution was made to shift the focus from women in fisheries to gender and fisheries with a view to address the issues more holistically—involving both men and women in the sector. It is hoped that through follow-up actions on these recommendations, measurable progress will be seen and felt before the global forum on Gender and Fisheries, scheduled to be held in April 2004 in Penang, Malaysia, during the 7th Asian Fisheries Forum.

## Conclusion

The women in fisheries activities carried out so far has had significant impacts and has brought about greater awareness. There is now an opportunity to heighten this awareness through the exchange of information and research results in the different countries. The proposed setting up of electronic networks on gender in fisheries will help speed up information exchange among collaborators.

To achieve gender equity, changes have to occur at several levels. The existing gender-related programs have resulted in awareness on gender issues. This awareness needs to be translated into more visible actions. Continued and coordinated efforts are necessary to bring about long-lasting changes in the area of gender. It is hoped that AFS and ICLARM-The World Fish Center will continue their efforts in this field and provide leadership towards gender equity in the fisheries sector.

In addition, the major role of women in small-scale aquaculture activities is noteworthy, considering that aquaculture has been recognized as an alternative to meet the increasing demand for fish of the growing population. A global workshop held in 1984 visualized and called for the development of aquaculture through the formation and promotion of gender-sensitive programs in aquaculture. The Global Symposium recognized the role of women in aquaculture while highlighting the need to sustain production from capture fisheries. Education of women and the provision of financial support to enable women to undertake income-generating activities are the two basic needs that may bring about changes in the various sectors. More partnerships and alliances among women's groups worldwide will effectively bring about progress, development and success to the future efforts in gender in fisheries.

**Table 4: Recommendations from the Global Symposium on Women in Fisheries held in 2001.**

RECOMMENDATIONS	STATUS
• Publish proceedings of the current symposium.	• Funding has been secured. ICLARM and AFS are making arrangements to publish the proceedings in about six months time.
• Establish electronic network on gender issues.	• ICLARM is taking steps in establishing the network.
• Promote formation of national networks using local resources.	• Participants of the Global symposium should take lead in their continents to promote formation of national networks.
• Encourage national networks to develop locally appropriate research and development programs.	• ICLARM and AFS would provide support.
• Train more people through national networks to serve as resource persons on gender issues in fisheries.	• AFS would support national networks.
• Publish an educational brochure on gender issues in fisheries.	• Prof. Ida Siason/Dr. Stella Williams will work on this idea and develop a brochure.
• Strengthen knowledge of AFS members on social issues with focus on gender.	• AFS will conduct a survey and develop plans to help members.
• Use ICLARM quarterly publication-Naga offer to provide space for publication of articles on gender issues.	• Stella Williams has agreed to assist. Also Dr. Kuperan Viswanathan has agreed to give priority for publication of articles on gender issues in the Social Science section of the NAGA Newsletter.
• Provide wide publicity for good examples of gender sensitive programs.	• AFS to compile and publish such good practices.
• Influence policy changes to promote gender sensitive developments.	• More research is required to generate quality data to assist in policy changes.
• Recognize the growing importance of aquaculture and role of women in aquaculture development.	• Asian Fisheries Society would coordinate with various organizations involved in aquaculture development programs in aquaculture.
• Organize Global forum on gender and fisheries in April, 2004 coinciding with the 7th Asian Fisheries Forum in Penang, Malaysia.	• ICLARM and AFS to take lead in the organization of this event. Encourage research and attract good research papers for presentation.

## References

- Gadagkar, S.R., Editor. 1992. Women in fisheries in India. Proceedings of the Workshop on Women in Fisheries in India. Asian Fisheries Society, Indian Branch. Special publication 8. Mangalore, India. 51p.
- Nandeeshha, M.C. and N. Heng, Compilers. 1994. Women in Cambodian fisheries. Proceedings of the National Workshop on Women in Fisheries. Bati Fisheries Station, PADEK, Cambodia. 128p.
- Nandeeshha, M.C. and H. Hanglomong, Editors. 1997. Women in fisheries in Indo-China countries. Proceedings of the seminar on Women in Fisheries in Indo-China countries. Bati Fisheries Station, PADEK, Cambodia. 167p.
- Williams, M.J., M.C. Nandeeshha, V.P. Corral, E. Tech and P.S. Choo, Editors. 2001. Women in Asian fisheries. Proceedings of the International Symposium on Women in Asian Fisheries. ICLARM Contribution No. 1587. Penang, Malaysia. 181p.