

The climate for change!

A recently held global conference underscored the importance of including gender considerations in climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction strategies

By **Meryl Williams**,
MerylJWilliams@gmail.com, Co-Chair GAF6
Organising Committee,
Angela Lentisco, angie.lentisco@gmail.com,
Gender Special Session
Organiser, FishAdapt

Climate change is already affecting people in many environments, as reported at GAF6 (see article 'Gender inequality: GAF6 asks "WHY?"') and in the FAO FishAdapt: Global Conference on Climate Change Adaptation for Fisheries and Aquaculture (8-10 August 2016). The GAF6 session on climate change and disaster preparedness, and previous GAF findings, were communicated at FishAdapt and built on by additional presentations and discussions in a Special Session. FishAdapt could be the launch pad for a discourse on gender and climate adaptation work in fisheries and aquaculture.

Beginning in 2007, the Global Symposia on Gender in Aquaculture and Fisheries (GAF) began to focus on climate change, disaster recovery and relief as a theme, producing a modest but important set of studies. The results of these studies are showing that a gender lens brings deeper understanding of climate and disaster adaptation; that flexibility, versatility and agency are keys to resilience; and that gender-blind responses should always be challenged.

Presentations and discussions in Bangkok stressed that climate change adaptation is deeply interconnected with other women's issues: for example, when women are expected

to engage in sex with fishers or fish traders to secure fish for sale or processing; the spread of HIV; or the issue of rights and social protection for women and men along the value chain. Despite these linkages, the research on women in fisheries and aquaculture vis-à-vis climate change is very limited.

Marieta Bañez Sumagaysay described how women in Leyte, Philippines, asserted their agency through embracing the fish value chain in post-disaster livelihood intervention following the devastating 2013 Typhoon Haiyan. Women's groups, once formed, were able to "build back better", bringing all parties together, including donors. They created new, value added soft bone milkfish products with longer shelf life and lower labour costs.

Following disasters, flexibility in income options for women and men seems to improve household and community resilience. A study led by B. Shanthi in Tamil Nadu found that, after losing their fishing livelihoods in the 2004 tsunami, many men migrated for work, leaving women to head the households. Researchers, NGOs and others successfully introduced brackish water aquaculture to the women to diversify their livelihoods, but few local opportunities were available for the men.

Flexibility and agency rely on perceptions, attitudes and emotions. At GAF6, Louis Lebel reported that the attitudes of Thai inland fish farmers towards climate risk were not strongly gendered, but their emotions were. Farmers' decisions were not made just on analytical logic but emotions were also brought to bear. From a survey of perceptions of climate change by women and men engaged in reservoir fisheries in the state of Karnataka, India, at FishAdapt, Arpita Sharma reported finding no significant gender differences, although women did perceive that livelihoods would experience a greater change than did the men. Women in these fisheries have more limited access to power and assets and reported greater financial dependency than men.

Gender-blindness in approaches to adaptation starts from a lack of gender measures in climate change vulnerability assessments and climate change National Adaptation Plans (NAPs). Speakers at FishAdapt explained that the assessments are used to find the vulnerability of people, human activities, places, and the ranking of countries that determine priorities for action.

ANGELA LENTISCO



GAF6 workshop stressed that the gender lens should be used at all stages of the National Adaptation Plans and climate change projects, from design to implementation and impact assessment

Yet, methodological choices have a large impact on rankings. GAF experts and climate change adaptation experts need to work together to put the gender dimension as an integral part of the vulnerability assessments and of the NAPs.

Standard gender-blind responses to climate emergencies should always be challenged. Mary Barby Badayos-Jover found that “every time people come here to give aid, they give boats! What about aid specifically for women?” Her presentation and those of others at GAF6, which come in the context of a post-Typhoon Haiyan Philippines, painted a more complex picture than most relief agencies might comprehend. Following Typhoon Haiyan, also known as Super-Typhoon Yolanda, which struck the Philippines in 2013, women in Bayas village, Visayas, formed a women’s association and were able to secure a boat to use for transport and also rent out. Although donations of boats to fishermen following a coastal disaster are now formulaic, this action is viewed as having greater legitimacy. Hanny Mediodia’s studies showed that households lost proportionately more income from fisheries than from other household activities.

The lively FishAdapt Special Session titled ‘Integrating Gender Considerations into Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction for Fishing Communities’ stressed that the gender lens should be used at all stages of the National Adaptation Plans and climate change projects, from design to implementation and impact assessment. The ‘Too Big To Ignore’ Special Session linked this to the need for gender training modules to enhance the ability of decisionmakers to identify the specific needs of women. To move forward, gender champions must be identified, developed and capacitated. The fisherwoman should also be brought to the table for others to hear her voice. ❏