Making women's roles visible

Recent case studies in Cambodia, Myanmar and Thailand explored women's roles in the fisheries value chain

By **Jariya Sornkliang** (jariya@seafdec.org), Fisheries Management Scientist, Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center, Thailand

Women's contributions in the fisheries value chain are not well recognised, even though there are many tasks in the fisheries value chain involving women. To show how important the women involved in fisheries are, gender analysis on women and men's roles in fisheries is crucial. Gender analysis reveals context in a fishing community and promotes gender integration and responsiveness in fisheries development plans.

In the period 2017-2018, the Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center (SEAFDEC), supported by the Government of Sweden and in partnership with the Mangroves for the Future project under the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN/MFF) as well as the Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI), conducted an important regional gender study in South and Southeast Asia. SEAFDEC selected the study sites in three areas, namely, Kep in Cambodia, Kawthaung in Myanmar, and Trat in Thailand. The study aimed to understand the state of women and men in the fisheries value chain of each study site. The study brought to light several interesting findings with respect to women and men's roles in the fisheries value chains in each of the three study sites.

At Okra Sa and Thmey Villages, Kep Province (Cambodia), both women and men were involved in various fisheries activities. While men ventured to sea for fishing, women supported fisheries with onshore activities such as cleaning nets and vessels, cleaning, segregating processing and marketing the catch.

In Pu Lone Tone Tone, Kawthaung (Myanmar), women prepared food to supply men who conducted the fishing activities on board seagoing vessels and also maintained the fishing gear and the vessel. No women worked onboard the vessels at sea. The reason appeared to be due to the long periods involved in such fishing operations, ranging from a week to even a month at sea. Later, the catch would be unloaded and transported, with women responsible for the sorting, processing and selling of the fish.

In Mairoot Sub-district, Klong Yai, Trat Province (Thailand), husbands and wives participated in the fishing activities together because the fishing ground was not too far

SEAFDEC

Cutting fish for processing in Myanmar. Women's contributions in the fisheries value chain are not well recognised, even though there are many tasks in the fisheries value chain involving women

SEAFDEC

Street fish sale, Thailand. Fishery policymakers are required to better recognise the diverse roles and perspectives of men and women in fisheries to achieve equitable outcomes and livelihood sustainability goals in fishing communities

from their houses. They shared several activities together from cleaning and mending fishing gear, fish sorting on land, processing, and selling products to the middleman. However, only women prepared the food for onboard operations. There was no activity that men did alone in the Thai case study.

During the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, SEAFDEC conducted a rapid study on the impacts of the pandemic. The results found that many women became jobless and lost their incomes from shore-based activities because of the limited fishing periods in some areas or, in other areas, from markets closing during the pandemic. Online business platforms have become a significant adaptation of the family businesses to help them cope with the pandemic. Online business was mainly facilitated by women or younger family members and increased the interaction between family members.

Women take part in all the activities and processes of the fisheries value chain. However, women's roles are dominant in gear mending and cleaning, catch segregating, product processing, and marketing. Based on our findings, both men and women are involved in all the fisheries value chains. That is, we did not come across even one value chain in which all the workers were of one gender only. However, equal participation of men and women in terms of access and rights is still a distant dream.

The effect of the COVID-19 pandemic shows that women have high adaptation and resilience even under challenging pandemic circumstances. Therefore, women should be the target of focused efforts to develop human capacity in development programmes, such as by empowering women to generate and increase their fisheries incomes. Along with support for a greater economic role, women's attention to conservation also should be reconsidered so that they can help strengthen the sustainable utilisation of fishery resources.

In conclusion, fishery policymakers are required to better recognise the diverse roles and perspectives of men and women in fisheries to achieve equitable outcomes and livelihood sustainability goals in fishing communities. A key recommendation of this study, which was carried out before and after the pandemic, is better documentation of women's roles through the collection of sex-disaggregated data and through gender analyses of women's and men's roles in value chains. This will support fisheries project managers to plan realistic development programmes in fisheries management based on gender roles and needs. It will lead to more gender-sensitive and gender-responsive projects towards gender equity and equality in the fishing community.

The effect of the COVID-19 pandemic shows that women have high adaptation and resilience even under challenging pandemic circumstances

Women's voice and identity

A development model driven solely by profit is eroding the small-scale fisheries and marine and coastal ecosystems in Thailand

By **Ravadee Prasertcharoensuk** (ravadee.prasertcharoensuk@gmail.com), Director: Sustainable Development Foundation, Bangkok, Thailand

The decades of so-called 'development' and discourses of fisheries modernisation and blue growth have failed to uplift small-scale fishers and address gender inequality. Instead, they have led to environmental damage, social and cultural disruption widened gender inequality, and increased the violation of human and collective rights. The economic-driven policies are unlikely to ensure sustainable development but rather, they will create tensions between the environment and natural resource dependent communities. Employment is reduced; landlessness increased; community commons privatised; food security decreased; health and well-being have been negatively impacted; and acts of intimidation and violence are commonly witnessed. In all this, women in small-scale fisheries and in traditional coastal communities have suffered. Women fishers are still bearing the brunt of the costs of gender differences and inequality. The negative impacts on women have resulted in persistent poverty. Pro-people, gender mainstreaming perspectives are urgently needed on the questions of livelihood, coastal and marine commons governance, social justice, and ecological sustainability, in order to ensure that communities have full sovereignty over natural resources.

Marine and terrestrial ecosystems are an abundant source of social and economic benefits to human societies. They provide livelihood to many small-scale fishing communities whose ways of living have been connected to rivers, coasts and oceans. The communities' wisdom and knowledge of ecology and fishing are integral to the way they govern their ecosystems. Small-scale fisher communities, which support the majority of people in the fisheries sector, are dependent for their living on fishing as a principal source of income and nutrition. They engage in fishing from generation to generation. Some of them also manage small coastal aquaculture enterprises for an additional source of food and income.

The present growth-driven economic approach to fisheries and aquaculture which is based on exploiting ecosystems has caused conflict among resource users. Marine coastal resources have deteriorated as a result of the use

SDF / THAILAND

Women mending fishing gear, Thailand. Women's rights as sea-going fishers have not been recognised, and the roles of women in post-harvest value addition and sales have been ignored

of destructive fishing gears and capital intensive investments in coastal regions including the expansion of large-scale aquaculture in which the participants may be non-fishers. The fishers' coastal common properties are leased out to corporate firms or other private entities for profit-oriented commercial purposes such as manufacturing industries, tourism, power plants, and other infrastructural projects. Export-oriented industrial fishing has looted marine resources leaving fishing grounds to resemble deserts. As a result, small-scale fishers experience food insecurity, insecure livelihoods and low family incomes. Customary rights over the marine and coastal resources of sea, river and land have been eroded as governments now hold the majority of rights. Small-scale fishers, especially women fishers, have not been recognised nor meaningfully involved in either fishery or coastal resource management.

In fishing communities, the household usually functions as an economic unit where the roles of both men and women are complementary. Fishing is however seen as a male activity despite women playing critical and significant roles in fish production. Women work in direct productive activities including collecting, processing, preparing and marketing of fish and other marine resources. In addition, they play an indirect role in the fishing economy in terms of caring for and nurturing their children. However, these contributions are often unacknowledged or undercounted in employment data. Women are not included as fishers in the formal statistics and a large part of their work is unaccounted in economic valuations.

Policy directions promoting the fishing industry have created many problems for the small-scale fishing sector and for women fishers, who constitute the most vulnerable and invisible sections of fishing societies. Industrial fishing has diminished the role of women in fisheries and their involvement in the collection and culturing of molluscs, crustaceans, shells, oysters and other edible products in the coastal ecosystems. Women's rights as sea-going fishers have not been recognised, and the roles of women in post-harvest value addition and sales have been ignored, allowing them to be displaced by more prominent traders in the commercialised harbour-based global fish trade. The overall disempowerment of coastal communities and small-scale fishers impacts women in unique ways as the burden of adaptation falls upon them. Yet, their voices are seldom heard.

The devastation of coastal and marine capture fisheries resulted in unemployment, forced migration and exclusion of women fish workers. Traditional marine fishers were forced into culture fisheries for livelihoods. From being self-employed many fishers have been forced into becoming workers in industrial companies where they generally occupy floor-level jobs, such as in seafood factories, and as contract workers in unskilled categories of work. This has also led to the further marginalisation of women who have no social protection against livelihood loss.

Women who used to be direct producers or sellers of seafood would first keep aside a portion of the fish for family consumption and then sell the remainder. With the decline of capture fisheries and the lack of opportunities in culture fisheries, these once self-employed women are now being forced into daily wage labour. Women in the fisheries sector are worse off as a result of the present economic model and the capital intensive growth in marine and coastal ecosystems that is wiping out marine and coastal resources. In addition to climate change and extreme weather events, these trends have threatened the livelihood and food security of small-scale fishers, particularly women.

The disproportionately negative impact on women is due to gendered cultural stereotypes that ascribe greater working burdens to women while restricting their access to resources, decision-making and participation in collective governance.

The prevailing development paradigm has shifted power away from traditional community-level governance mechanisms and into the hands of nation-state mechanisms driven by market interests. Fishing coastal communities have lost their sovereignty and are reduced to the status of environmental refugees in their own nations.

The prevailing development paradigm has shifted power away from traditional community-level governance mechanisms and into the hands of nation-state mechanisms driven by market interests

Evidence shows that the macroeconomic development paradigm has gradually resulted in a massive dislocation and displacement of traditional coastal communities towards harbour-based capital-intensive fisheries. This has damaged rivers, and riverine and coastal ecosystems, impacting the ways of living and livelihoods of small-scale fishers. Their exclusion from decision making processes has increased their vulnerability and workload and generated greater stress for women fishers looking after the health and nutrition of families and communities.

The result is a sea-change in the systems of knowledge, ecology and political economy vital for the prosperity and well-being of coastal communities and small-scale fishers, including women. The integrated nature of riverine, coastal, land and marine ecosystems has been totally absent in the mainstream public and policy discourse. Discussions on fisheries stock depletion and 'over-fishing' have overlooked these on-land anthropogenic factors. Resource depletion is a result not just of bad policy and destructive projects but also of the erosion of the right of local communities to govern resources

of which they were once the traditional custodians. Closely related to community governance of resources is food sovereignty. With the gradual destruction of small-scale fisheries, scores of families go without essential nutrients, and the reasonably better off become dependent on external markets for food. Thus, households are no longer in control of their own nutritional needs, and are increasingly dependent on markets or government welfare schemes. This brings into focus the question of food sovereignty where control of nutrition is being snatched away from the primary producer and the end consumer.

If national policies, plans and measures lack a gender perspective, they fail to recognise that women and men while sharing some basic needs also have other, divergent needs, interests, knowledge, skills and responsibilities concerning the use and management of coastal and marine resources. Practical strategies are therefore needed to make women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an important part of marine and coastal policies and plans. Without these, the gender gaps in marine and coastal biodiversity management will only widen.

These challenges need a multi-pronged and holistic set of responses. Alternatives to the current paradigm of macroeconomic development are needed, as are workable solutions and strategies for the struggles that lie on the path. It is towards this goal that small-scale fishery networks envision the need for greater sovereignty over coastal commons for their primary stakeholders and advocate for an overall restructuring of resource governance. This aims at reversing the role of the state from ownership to custodian by bringing policy and legislative changes to protect and promote the traditional rights of coastal communities under international conventions such as the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (the SSF Guidelines), as well as national and state-specific legislations.

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

By **Meryl Williams**, MerylJWilliams@gmail.com, Co-Chair GAF6 Organising Committee; **Katia Frangoudes,** katia.frangoudes@univ-brest.fr, University of Brest, France; **Arlene Satapornvanit,** arlene.satapornvanit@oceans-partnership.org, Gender Specialist at the USAID Oceans and Fisheries Partnership; and **Nikita Gopal,** nikiajith@gmail.com, Chair GAF6 Programme Committee

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

AMONRAT SERMWATANAKUL

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

"...the struggle for gender equality will be a continuous struggle"

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."

Half the fishers in the world

Tracing the road ahead for women in fisheries in Asia, a continent that produces the most fish and supports the largest number of fishers in the world

By **Nikita Gopal** (nikiajith@gmail.com), Principal Scientist, ICAR-Central Institute of Fisheries Technology, Cochin, India

Fishing and the fisheries are a major source of food and livelihood for millions of people in Asia. Many Asian countries like China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Thailand and Vietnam are major fish producers. The fisheries policies in these countries have centred on increasing production over the last two decades. This has resulted in investments in centralized infrastructure development, along with introduction of bigger sized crafts, gears and different fishing systems. In many developing and less developed countries in the region, this has had government funding.

Though there are boundaries defined to differentiate fishing zones for traditional small-scale and larger vessels in the region, policing of the violations is difficult and often inadequate. Conflict situations are also observed between different fishery users in the countries in the region. On the whole, over capacity, increase in population, and decrease in available resources has led to the increased vulnerability of small-scale fishers. Fishing capacity increases have not necessarily reflected in increased per unit catches or better returns to the primary producers. Fisher producers have become fisher labourers working on bigger crafts, or are migrating out of the sector. Fishing trips are becoming longer and less economical. Another key development during the last two decades has been the influx of electronic communication, and the fisheries sector has witnessed increasing use of Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) for both backward and forward link activities.

SIBASIS GUHA / CIFT

A woman feeding in aquaculture pond, India. Women contribute in almost all activities right from pond preparation, stocking, feeding, and to harvesting

A major shift in production has been the emergence of aquaculture as an alternative to capture based fish production. By 2006, most of the production in the sector came from culture. In many countries in the region like Thailand, Vietnam, Bangladesh and India, major fish production comes from aquaculture rather than capture fisheries. Many factors such as unsustainable and over exploitative practices of many capture based fisheries, climate change induced impacts, and development activities along coastal areas have also had an impact on coastal fisheries and aided the growth of aquaculture. Aquaculture is more akin to agriculture and many of the factors of production can be reasonably controlled. Though there are many risks associated especially with regard to disease outbreaks and environmental concerns, this sector is growing and will continue to occupy an important place in future fish production. The past two decades have seen many countries evolving policies to develop aquaculture, with an eye on lucrative export markets. For developing countries in Asia and elsewhere, fish trade is clearly a significant source of foreign exchange. The growth of aquaculture has seen the emergence of a new class of non-fisher entrepreneurs, with coastal farmers shifting from rice cultivation to shrimp farming. This trend was also visible in an earlier era, when the capital intensive mechanization of capture fisheries shifted the ownership of vessels into the hands of non-fishers.

Women have been an integral part of fisheries. All over the world, studies have acknowledged that women form half the workforce in fisheries, especially in Asian countries. With small-scale and often subsistence fisheries and aquaculture dominating, it is imperative for the fishing communities that both men and women engage in the sector, which is a source of food and income for their families. However, the sector has strong gender divisions of labour, hosting much invisible women's work in fisheries and in fisheries production chains, and limiting women's access to the means of

production in fisheries and in aquaculture because of cultural taboos and practices.

Women have always been a dominating presence in marketing of fish, mostly in retail trade. They have been traditional processors of fish and also contribute to the growing labour force in the industrial processing sector. Though not so highly noticeable, a small proportion of women have always been involved in fish capture, often using nets and traps in inshore waters and inland water bodies. They have also gleaned for molluscs, crustaceans and fish. Fry collection for aquaculture is carried out by women in India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka in inter-tidal waters. However, closed seasons in various areas due to conservation efforts have made these areas inaccessible and have affected livelihoods. We also have women diving for crustaceans, molluscs, coral and other fishes and seaweeds in Japan, Korea and India. Evidence from certain countries suggests that women are working on commercial fishing vessels but they form a very small minority. Women as harvesters have always engaged in subsistence fishing to make ends meet for their families. Women are rarely encouraged to take up fishing, as fishing has always been thought of as a male preserve. Post-capture activities are a niche area for women, be it sorting the landed catch, or in processing and marketing and processing. In the industrial fisheries too, commercial processing is dominated by women in most Asian countries, including India, Thailand, Bangladesh and Vietnam.

Women's work in the fisheries, being subsistence and family oriented, remains invisible.

The changes in the fisheries sector have affected women in many ways. The increased mechanization and the centralization of landings to bigger harbours from the beaches have meant loss of employment for the fisherwomen, who once were the custodians of fish after landing. Women took over in the supply chain thereafter, and engaged in the marketing or processing of fish. In India, for instance, fishing operations have shifted from beach landings near fishing villages to more urban based harbours. The landed fish is now auctioned and marketed through institutionalized labour organisations in these harbours. Women find it difficult to penetrate this set up. It has also meant travelling from their fishing villages, disrupting set work regimes and increasing workload. Women have also lost the bargaining power they once enjoyed, when the landings were within their reach. Now they have to depend on the auctioning being carried out in the harbours, and their resources do not permit them to be active in the process. A change that may be noticed, however, is that many women are becoming auctioneers or agents of auctioneers.

While women continue to be active in fish marketing in most Asian countries, the physical conditions are still very dismal. Upscaling their fish businesses is a problem because of lack of resources, and they continue to be small players in the larger scheme of things. Aquaculture, being similar to agriculture, should have seen more participation of women. However, here too they continue to be near invisible. A recent study by the Network of Aquaculture Centres in Asia-Pacific across Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia and Lao PDR that focused on small-scale aquaculture systems (see the article 'Women in Aquaculture' in this issue, based on this study) found that women were present in all the major nodes of the aquaculture value chains. They contribute in almost all activities right from pond preparation, stocking, feeding, water management and healthcare, to harvesting. Since they are seldom categorized as hired labour and contribute mostly in the form of family labour, the invisibility was high. In industrial processing, the shop floor almost entirely comprises women's labour, involving working long hours and standing in cold conditions that are required for processing. However, in all countries, it has been observed that women are disadvantaged as far as the wages are concerned and invariably earn less than the men engaged in this industry. The working conditions also leave a lot to be desired.

On the whole, women take on a range of work within the fisheries and within fishing communities in Asia. The nature of work varies with the social and cultural distinctiveness of their countries, but the underlying similarity is that it is rarely seen as being 'productive'. Though it is acknowledged that women are the custodians of traditional knowledge about their natural environment and resources, women's work in the fisheries, being subsistence and family oriented, remains invisible.

Largely limited to the post-harvest sector and marketing, women in the fisheries face limitations in their scale of operations as a result of low levels of both investments as well as risk-bearing abilities due to lack of access to resources like institutional credit and technological innovations such as ice boxes and proper storage mechanisms. Though initiatives in micro-credit have helped women from other sectors to begin

micro-enterprises, they have largely been under-utilized and not completely effective in fisheries. Studies in India and Philippines have shown that micro-credit can often be diverted to meet family needs. Women need to find ways to exploit the opportunities to tap micro-credit, and utilize it effectively, as credit from other institutional sources may continue to be difficult to obtain.

Even when women are actively engaged in economic activity, it has been observed that their income is not always under their own control, which poses a big social challenge. Poor physical conditions of work have been highlighted quite often, but continue to get little or no policy level attention or field level intervention. This is the case in both marketing and processing. To equip women to meet the changes taking place with regard to electronic devices and applications, skill development training opportunities must be made available. Technical training in other fisheries related areas such as management of aquaculture farms and other fish related businesses are also required.

A larger, but more important, issue is the disruption or displacement of lives and livelihoods due to anthropogenic or natural factors. Development initiatives, climate change impacts and natural disasters call for mitigation strategies that must also include capacity building, especially to help women to meet the emotional as well as physical aspects of the losses they incur. In most natural calamities, women are seen to be the more vulnerable.

For women to be able to articulate their concerns and needs, formation of formal organizations is essential. The one network that was established in the late 1990s and still continues to be active is the Mekong River Commission's 'Network on Gender and Fisheries' active in the Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia and Loa PDR.

This network aims to improve the visibility of women's contribution in the fisheries sector. It works towards suitable policies and programmes to support their work and it tries to improve women's decision making power in the household and community, and at the government and policy level, highlighting fisherwomen's achievements in the region and initiating programmes for their benefit.

Will mere inclusion in fisheries related activities be able to empower women? This is a question that needs thought. Often it has been observed that attempts at inclusion have meant increased workloads which are not commensurate with returns. Sensitivity to gender issues is still low, not only within households and within the community but also among extension personnel who work with fishers. Development efforts by governments and NGOs are inadequate and existing legislation usually poor. The lack of appropriate and relevant sex-disaggregated databases adds to policy blindness—a problem which, if addressed, could serve as a basis for effective planning.

Programmes need not be considered as 'women programmes'; the involvement of the community as a whole is required. The participation of women in all areas in the sector, from resource management to policy decisions, must be ensured.