

Guest Editorial: Gender and Fisheries

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The journal *Development* is committed to 'the search for alternative paths of social transformation towards a more sustainable and just world'. As you read the articles on gender and fisheries papers, you will find a natural fit with this commitment. Fisheries face daunting ecological sustainability challenges, produce profits from the booming global trade in fish products and yet give livelihoods to millions of poor fishworkers and their communities. The sector is erroneously perceived to be a 'male only' domain, apparently offering little opportunity to women. The articles, which consider complete fish supply chains, show that women's and sometimes youth contributions are substantial but largely invisible and could be greatly enhanced with suitable assistance. 'Development' fits in also because developing countries dominate world fish production from natural fish stocks and aquaculture, but women in developing countries are in the labour intensive, poorest paid and least recognized jobs in the fish supply chain, while the better-off people in developed countries benefit from their production. A 'just world' is thus relevant in many dimensions, including gender and in the unequal competition between large scale and small-scale enterprises for declining fish stocks and farm spaces.

Gender and fisheries studies are overdue for development attention and yet the road to this special focus in *Development* has been too short. As a reader of *Development*, accustomed to rich discussions, abundant data and well-developed frameworks for examining development issues, you may find our papers preliminary and tentative. Nevertheless, this selection of research reports, largely from papers presented at the November 2007 Asian Fisheries Society 2nd Global Symposium on Gender and Fisheries, seeks to create a solid basis for understanding gender and gender differentiated roles and development needs in fisheries and aquaculture, and for providing improved, just and gender sensitive development policy and practice.

Fisheries and aquaculture are usually overlooked in global development statements, often notionally lumped together with agriculture and rural development, with which they have commonalities and significant differences. Yet, despite the lack of visibility

and even isolation from other social and economic developments, fisheries have been influenced by post World War II development thinking. Thus, in the 1950s and 1960s, fisheries development concentrated on technology transfer such as boat mechanization, promotion of modern fishing gear and surveys of fishing grounds (Nauen, 1998; Williams, 1998). Anthropologists and historians studied more traditional fishing gear, methods and existing resource management but their knowledge was little accessed by fisheries scientists who were typically biologists, oceanographers and mathematicians. However, the diverse discipline backgrounds of the Special Editors of this issue are one good indication that the gap between spheres of specialist knowledge is breaking down. We comprise a fisheries and aquaculture technical specialist and ecologist (CPS), an anthropologist (BSN), a gender specialist (KK) and a fisheries biologist and statistician (MW).

In the 1970s and 1980s, based on lessons learned and emerging ideas, development concepts and methods encompassed 'basic needs' approaches, structural adjustment and private sector promotion. From the mid 1980s, under the influence of such global products as *Our Common Future* (Brundtland, 1987) and Agenda 21, from the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, the environment and development gained attention. Yet, none of these movements penetrated far into fisheries development, although the general trend to community-based and co-management experiments for managing common resources was ignited and caught on in fisheries (Dietz *et al.*, 2003). But even these more participatory management movements paid scant attention to gender, focusing rather on governments and users sharing fisheries management power.

The 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea granted national sovereignty over fish stocks within 200 nautical miles of the coasts and generated a surge in fisheries exploration and exploitation, unfortunately just when most exploited fish stocks were approaching their limits. Depleting stocks (FAO, 1992), increasing demand for fish as food, clear designation of

national responsibilities and general concerns over sustainable development generated inquiry into better ways of managing fisheries and reinforced the trend towards more responsible management approaches, for example, as described in the 1995 FAO Code of Conduct on Responsible Fishing. The demand for fish also stimulated fish farming and motivated a continuing growth in aquaculture production. In 2006, farmed fish and other aquatic products represented nearly half of that eaten by people (FAO, 2006). The end result of this focus on fisheries in the environmental debate was that fish and fishing went from being a relatively minor focus of Chapter 17 (Protection of the Oceans, all kinds of Seas, including Enclosed and Semi-Enclosed Seas, and Coastal Areas and the Protection, Rational Use and Development of their Living Resources) of Agenda 21, to being a major focus of the 2002 Plan of Action of the World Summit on Sustainable Development. The major conservation non-governmental organizations now all support strong fisheries programmes.

In 2000, countries committed themselves to the Millennium Development Goals, drawing together human, institutional, economic and environmental goals for development. Principles and approaches such as participation, environmental sustainability and gender equality were gradually embraced and made explicit by the OECD countries through their policy and performance body, the Development Assistance Committee (World Bank, 1998). Sectoral agencies, including fisheries agencies, embraced the Goals because they provided a general, albeit simplified, statement of development objectives (WorldFish Center, 2005).

During the last 20 years, research and action on women and gender in fisheries began in small ways in different places (see references in *Window on the World*). One of the first consolidated sets of studies was *To Work and to Weep: Women in Fishing Economies* (Nadel-Klein and Davis, 1988). Other volumes and individual studies followed, including those on gender, poverty and fisheries (Harrison, 2000), and gender in West African fisheries (Bennett, 2005).

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Networks began to form. The Secretariat for the Pacific Community undertook gender and community work. The International Collective in Support of Fishworkers instituted extensive analytical and activist work. In Europe, the AKTEA network, composed of members from eleven countries, was formed to improve knowledge and standing of women in European fisheries and to generate better gender-relevant fisheries data.

In Asia, following earlier work in Cambodia and other Mekong countries (Nandeeshha and Heng, 1994; Nandeeshha and Hanglomong, 1997), the Mekong River Commission initiated gender and fisheries work. The Commission's Secretariat supports national networks in Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam and a coordinating network. Recently, its Network on Gender and Fisheries was given full membership in the policy-based development network, the Technical Advisory Body for the Lower Mekong Basin countries. The Network on Gender and Fisheries now works to (1) improve visibility of women's contribution in the fisheries sector and make explicit policy, programme to support their work, and (2) improve women's decision-making power in the household, community, government and policy level (Mekong River Commission, Network on Gender and Fisheries, draft Management Recommendations, 2007, personal communication).

In 1998, the Asian Fisheries Society and the WorldFish Center also began to address the topic through a series of triennial symposia, encouraging contributions from Asia and other geographic areas. The headlines from our last decade of press releases and symposia stories reveal some of the journey.

1998: 'Women do fish!' – our response to the disbelief of many fisheries research colleagues who asked why one would bother addressing women in fisheries because 'women don't fish' (Williams *et al.*, 2001).

2001: 'Where are the women in fisheries?' As fish stocks decline, researchers turned to examine the underestimated and under-recognized roles of women. We reviewed the global picture of where women fitted into fish supply chains and found a much greater contribution than popularly believed, especially

the dominance of women in post harvest work (Williams *et al.*, 2002).

2004: 'Changing Traditions: first global look at the gender dimensions of fisheries' – the studies moved beyond the descriptive and become more issues-based, focusing on not only women but on women, men and children including highlighting the high rates of HIV/AIDS in fishing communities (Choo *et al.*, 2006, see Williams, this issue for a description of the positive consequences of publicizing this finding).

2007: 'Solutions through gender research' and 'Women add value to fisheries' – a deeper analysis of gender and fisheries issues based on original research.

Gender and fisheries research is a potentially rich field because of its relative novelty and the great diversity of issues and situations. For example, 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. Frequently, the definition of fisheries excludes women's small-scale fishing activities for family subsistence. Women often lack decision-making power in community resources management including fisheries management and this deprives women of access to resources in water bodies. Fishing is among the most dangerous of occupations, many male fishworkers are exploited at sea and safety and health risks rebound on families and dependents as well as the men themselves.

Fisheries and aquaculture development assistance and technical training is targeted at men, women being excluded by their lower literacy, lack of daily time and mobility. At the 2007 Symposium, studies reported that enhanced women's contributions, especially where they create more progressive household and family enterprises, add value to the sector. As fisheries resources become more depleted and as aquaculture develops rapidly as either the main or ancillary activity of development projects, women, men and children will all need to contribute to the household.

Gender and fisheries research, however, is hampered by lack of gender disaggregated data and

theoretical research frameworks. In order to develop the field of gender and fisheries research, we believe that fisheries experts need to work much more closely with other researchers, especially

those with expertise in gender and development fields. We hope that, through this special issue of *Development*, we will generate interest in this emerging field of research and development action.

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