

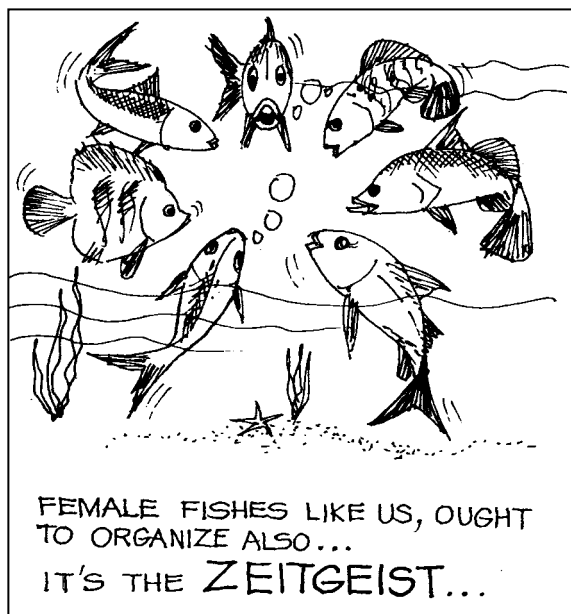
Women do fish!

Women and children make highly significant but undervalued contributions to fisheries aquaculture, fish processing, retailing and fisheries sector services, according to the experts who gathered on November 13, 1998 in Chiang Mai, Thailand at the first *International Symposium on Women in Asian Fisheries*.

Appropriately, the Symposium was conducted in Thailand which is the biggest exporter of seafood in the world today. Women play a big role in the Thai fisheries sector, including holding 33% of professional positions in the Central Directorate of Fisheries, according to the Director General of Fisheries, Mr. Dhammarong Prakobboon, who spoke at the opening ceremonies.

Men and women from diverse specialist backgrounds gathered for the Symposium. They included rural bank managers, non-governmental organization staff, university chancellors, research managers, international and regional bureaucrats, fish product inspection experts, biologists, social scientists and fisheries information specialists. The keynote address was delivered by Senator Helena Benitez, who is renowned internationally and in her home country, the Philippines, for her contributions to women's rights, rural development and environmental conservation. Presentors came from Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Italy, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Taiwan, and Thailand.

Knowledge of the contributions of women in the fisheries sector is only evolving slowly and still lags behind that of other rural sectors in Asian countries. The experts concluded that one way to help rectify this situation would be for the governments in Asia to cover gender questions on fisheries and aquaculture in their regular agricultural censuses. Participants were urged to go back to their ministries



of agriculture and alert them to this vehicle for data collection. Despite the lack of comprehensive data, the Symposium learned from several programs and studies in India, Bangladesh and the Philippines that agricultural banks and non-government organizations are already helping hundreds of thousands of women entrepreneurs and fish producers through technical assistance, loans and credit and fostering self help groups.

The Symposium recognized that Asian women in fisheries usually carry multiple roles in their lives and careers, thus making time allocation a critical issue to address when developing assistance programs. Men's and women's sense of confidence and self-worth were intrinsically linked and embedded in their culture. Therefore, social support systems need to be organized to help bring about changes that may be resisted at first. Gender relations should not be seen as competitive but rather as complementary and mutually reinforcing. Support systems should also help to raise the aspiration levels of women. More generally, formal service

and delivery agencies are realizing that they can only do their jobs if they are gender sensitive and more participatory with their clients, such as involving fish farmers in designing curricula for field schools. In most cases, this means a major internal effort in organizational transformation. The workshop learned how some non-governmental organizations have already embarked on these internal cultural changes.

Women in the sector are marginalized in planning and policymaking and unless this is changed, they will continue to suffer inequalities and discrimination. Even some Asian women fisheries scientists and academics rated their chances of making a significant

policy contribution as 'hopeless'. Several speakers stressed that community-based coastal resource management was one activity related to fisheries that would only be successful if both men and women are active. Although such management was becoming more inclusive of stakeholder groups generally, women were still rarely involved.

Women frequently participate in the fisheries sector under conditions of great inequality, bordering on blatant exploitation, even through they do gain economically from their participation in the labor force. Young and unmarried women were often preferred because they were cheaper to employ and have fewer family responsibilities. Studies showed that women laborers in some offshore fisheries in the Philippines and in fish processing plants in India were paid below minimum wages, received little in basic health and welfare benefits and, because they lacked power and legal protection, could even be exposed to sexual harassment on the job.

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Such labor and personal discrimination was often well hidden because the women could not speak out and their basic human rights were not adequately protected.

Speakers at the symposium revealed the results of studies that showed women were productive and efficient when they had access to the right technologies and opportunities. Studies in Malaysia and other countries showed, however, that more than 80% of rural women's activities were carried out in or close to the home. New technologies and modernization in the sector tended to marginalize these backyard activities. The new development included the introduction of large scale, centralized fish processing aimed at high quality export markets and the mechanization of fishing vessels. However, small scale aquaculture, low capital fish processing, value-added fish products, rice-fish farming and rearing of fingerlings from fry were examples of fisheries activities which were suited to cottage industries. In addition, complementary activities such as tourist lodging, handicrafts and seasonal

farming were showing promise for diversifying, stabilizing and raising family incomes.

Some general recommendations from the Symposium are as follows:

- Training and extension programs in fisheries should specifically target women in areas where they contribute to fisheries activities
- Microcredit programs, along the lines of the successful programs in Bangladesh and India, should be tried to benefit women in other countries
- Networks should be formed at the national and regional levels with the active participation of all the actors. A notable example is the effort of Mekong River Commission to form networks in four countries in the Indo-China region

The Symposium was organized by the Asian Fisheries Society. For more information, contact: ICLARM@cgiar.org (Dr. Meryl Williams) or anrcare@Bangla.Net (Dr. MC Nandeesha).

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milkfish breeders ... from p4

ery of Aquaculture Specialists, Inc. in Guimbal, Iloilo; and other small-scale hatcheries operating near AQD.

The second — *Pond Cooperators' Program* — is intended to encourage milkfish grow-out farms to use hatchery-reared milkfish fry instead of wild-caught fry. The cooperators are given up to 100,000 pcs of hatchery-reared fry for free.

The cooperators include the Gatuslao and Jalandoni farms in EB Magalona, Negros Occidental; Naranjo farm in Carles, Iloilo; Hautea farm in Iloilo; and the BFAR station in Pagbilao, Quezon.

Trial runs in these farms also looked at the issue of higher incidence of malformed stock when hatchery-reared fry are used compared to wild-caught fry.

Initial results from the cooperating farms showed very few malformed fry in the nursery phase (0.23%), semi-intensive grow-out culture (0.05%), and modular grow-out system (0.003%).

mangrove-friendly country ... from p 10

Farmers also raise blood cockle and clam; the seaweed *Kappaphycus*; Nile tilapia, mullet, milkfish, seabass.

Malaysia

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Malaysia has 641,172 ha of mangroves, mostly found in Sabah (57%), Sarawak (26%) and peninsular Malaysia (17%). Of these, 440,400 ha are reserve forests. About 20% of the total mangrove area has been lost to various development activities in the last two decades.

The area under brackishwater aquaculture (ponds) constitutes less than 1% of the total mangrove area; another 30% is utilized for various purposes — human settlements, ports, jetties, airports, tourist resorts, industries, and agriculture. Despite the small hectareage converted to prawn farms, its conversion has taken the

blunt of the criticism on mangrove destruction. This is perhaps due to some of the spectacular reports on the collapse of unsustainable farms all over the world.

Malaysia's mangrove management is focused on the conservation of forests for wood production (fire, charcoal, poles).

The culture of cockles in mangrove mud flats in Peninsular Malaysia is the most important brackishwater culture in terms of production, and contributes to over 90% of the mariculture production. Around 4,700 ha of mud flats are utilized for this culture and the production in 1995 was 100,276 tons. The method and time of collection, as well as the permitted spat size for collection and size of cockle that can be harvested are regulated by the government. The culture of oyster and mudcrab contributes around 1% of total mariculture while fish cage culture contributes 5%.

While it is recognized that the mangrove ecosystem plays an important role in sustaining aquatic resources, it may not be pragmatic to advocate a no-use policy to prevent the loss of this important habitat. It may not be realistic to put a total ban on aquaculture (example, shrimp farming) in the mangroves. It is more realistic to advocate sustainable practices that are not harmful to the environment.

Brunei Darussalam

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The mangrove area utilized for aquaculture is minimal. Out of the 18,418 ha, only 190 ha are developed for shrimp farming. The other aquaculture activity is cage culture of marine fishes.

The late development of aquaculture in Brunei is a blessing because the prob-