

Guest editorial: Gender in aquaculture and fisheries – Navigating change¹

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A Special Issue of *Asian Fisheries Science* journal has been published, which includes 20 papers and a report based on the presentations and posters of the 4th Global Symposium on Gender in Aquaculture and Fisheries (GAF4) held during the 10th Asian Fisheries and Aquaculture Forum, May 2013. GAF4 was the sixth women/gender Symposium organised by the Asian Fisheries Society. For each event, the proceedings or selected papers have been published (Williams et al. 2001; Williams et al. 2002; Choo et al. 2006; Development 2008; Williams et al. 2012a). Worldwide, this is the longest continuous series documenting women and gender issues by a professional fisheries society.

In this Guest editorial of the Special Issue, we build on our reflections in the Guest editorial of our last Special Issue (Williams et al. 2012b). In that editorial, we identified that gender: (1) was not usually on fisheries and aquaculture policy agendas and action plans and therefore minimal resources were committed; (2) was not amenable to a single epistemology, little conceptual thinking about gender had developed and diverse and sometimes conflictual ideas are held about its role and importance; and (3) required that stronger conceptual foundations be developed, disseminated and applied in the fish sector.

Where are we now?

In our previous Guest editorial, we expressed both optimism and pessimism as to how much progress was being made in efforts to achieve greater gender equity in fisheries and aquaculture. In our present overview, we will continue our discourse on the three issues above, but using a slightly different structure. In the current editorial, first we explore the progress that gender is making on the fisheries/aquaculture policy and action agenda; second we reflect on the quality of work and level of engagement of the Asian Fisheries Society GAF events; and

third we express some views on the development of methods for gender research.

Our first element concerns trends in attention to gender in aquaculture/fisheries. If we start by looking at the broader issue of attention to gender in society, then we note that recent media attention has been given to pronouncements by high profile leaders and news headlines on the importance of gender equality to world and national economic and cultural progress. The topics typically covered have been women in the workplace, safety on the streets, in education, on the sports field, in health, in the home and women's basic human rights. Specific news items have focused on stories about the education of girls, domestic violence, how women's equality will be addressed in the post-2015 development agenda and in the Beijing plus 20 process, the low political representation of women and the plight of women in wars and disease crises such as the Ebola outbreak. While many of these issues resonate with gender and women's issues within fish value chains, most discussions and policy issues take place on more general scales such as those of the community, society or the nation. Thus, they fail to take account of the specific conditions that shape gender relations in fishing and aquaculture sectors.

The more universal gender issues, however, do influence and penetrate sectoral processes. For example, women's greater uptake of tertiary education in general is also happening in professional courses in fisheries and aquaculture (Williams et al. 2012c), which, in turn, questions why more women are not now entering senior professional positions (Egna et al. 2012).

We have seen some signs that development agencies are showing interest in women/gender issues in the fish value chains. For example, Norad

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conducted a study in Mozambique with a view to identifying entry points for assistance in two value chains and creating greater opportunities for women (Brugere and Maal 2014). Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) (2012) released a succinct statement called “Gender and Fisheries & Aquaculture,” expressing the basic premises for the benefits of giving women opportunities, the approaches and constraints to successfully promoting gender equality in German development assistance. USAID aims to “improve the role of women as economic actors and leaders in communities” (R. Bertram quoted in NRC 2014:44), through such projects as the COM-FISH project in Senegal which works to improve the businesses and organisation of women fish processors in Senegal (McCarthy 2014).

In the main, the development assistance donors seem to be linking their gender work closely into existing programs or in carefully chosen priority countries. This carries with it the chance for long term commitments and capacity building, but it may also mean that special steps will be needed to ensure that cross-project and cross-site learning takes place.

In 2012, we were starting to see some signs that more fisheries and aquaculture organisations were paying attention to gender and women’s roles and putting gender into their programmes. We continue to see some steady progress, but still not enough resources and attention committed. As some of the following examples show, however, this slow and steady progress may be a good approach if it leads to deeper institutionalisation in women and gender programs than would fast and less considered growth. For example, in 2012, the Network of Aquaculture Centres in Asia-Pacific (NACA) committed to add gender as a cross-cutting theme in their work plan. At GAF4, the Norad-NACA workshop (see “Gender and change in the spotlight,” this issue) paved the way for new project at NACA, funded by the USAID-MARKET project, namely “Thematic Studies on Gender in Aquaculture in Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Vietnam.” In due course, similar studies are expected to be conducted in more of NACA’s 18 member countries.

In 2012, the Fisheries and Aquaculture Department of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) undertook a gender stocktake (Reantaso 2012). The exercise was based on the question: “To what extent are gender equality and women’s empowerment principles taken into account in fisheries and aquaculture development research, projects and policy support?” The results identified a lack of common understanding among professionals, a lack of information and lack of human and financial resources.

FAO led the development, consultation and adoption in 2014 of the Voluntary International Guidelines on Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication [SSF Guidelines]. Among the guiding principles, the fourth principle states: “Gender equality and equity is fundamental to any development. Recognising the vital role of women in small-scale fisheries, equal rights and opportunities should be promoted.” The sixth addresses equity and equality, including between genders, but also acknowledges differences. Women are mentioned in many parts of the SSF Guidelines, such as in relation to access to resources, management voice, decent work, support services, women’s roles in the post-harvest sector, and their exposure to violence. How these provisions will be taken up in national policies and programmes is a critical next step. In another normative exercise, FAO developed new emergency guidance which contains specific recommendations on gender as a key requirement, e.g. Cattermoul et al. 2014. FAO also has ongoing project in the Philippines targeting gender and fisheries.

One major regional FAO project (the Regional Fisheries Livelihoods Project for South and South-East Asia; see Lentisco and Lee, this volume) that included a gender component ceased in 2014, but in several other regional activities, FAO has included gender. In Asia, the FAO Bay of Bengal Large Marine Ecosystem project undertook a gender audit and aims to follow up with action (Brugere 2014).

In Africa, it prepared “The Pan African Fisheries and Aquaculture Policy Framework and Reform Strategy: Gender and youth in fisheries and aquaculture” which was presented at the Conference of African Ministers of Fisheries & Aquaculture (CAMFA) meeting in May 2014 for integration into the policy framework and reform strategy. This gender policy was developed with inputs from the 2012 Nepad-FAO Fisheries Programme (NFFP) Gender Strategy after FAO and Nepad agreed that a gender strategy to guide Programme implementation was required. The elaboration of the Strategy itself was found to be a useful exercise, creating and reinforcing networks and the Nepad Planning and Coordinating Agency Gender Team.

The FAO project called “Strengthening the Knowledge Base for and Implementing an Ecosystem Approach to Marine Fisheries in Developing Countries”, generally referred to as the “EAF-Nansen Project,” is currently undertaking a gender audit led by Cecile Brugere.

Another UN report, that by the High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition, “Sustainable fisheries and aquaculture for food security and nutrition,” also contained a substantive section on

gender. The report recommended to the UN Committee on Food Security (CFS) that (paraphrased):

- ✓ States should ensure policies do not create negative impacts on women, enshrine gender equity in all fisheries rights systems;
- ✓ the FAO Committee on Fisheries (COFI) should develop policy guidance on gender equality and economic contributions;
- ✓ the CFS should urge international and national fish sector organisations to fully address the gender dimension of the fishery and aquaculture sectors; and
- ✓ development assistance programmes should be gender-aware and give priority to gendered projects.

Other UN agencies have also engaged in the fisheries/aquaculture sector, such as the UN Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO) that has projects on compliance with labour laws in fish processing factories (see Nuruzzaman, this volume).

Among prominent fisheries and aquaculture professional associations, several are beginning to programme special sessions on women and gender. In 2012, the International Institute for Fisheries Economics and Trade (IIFET) held gender sessions in its 2012 biennial conference (Anon 2012). Similar sessions were held in the IIFET 2014 conference. In 2014, the World Aquaculture Society's conference, World Aquaculture 2014 also held a session on women in aquaculture. This session included a panel discussion that urged the Society to pay greater attention to gender equity in all their activities including fellows, plenary speakers and awards. Panel members are also leading efforts through the non-government charity, Aquaculture without Frontiers, to create an effective and active Women's and Gender Network.

More broadly in international agricultural research, including fisheries/aquaculture, the CGIAR Consortium has developed a Consortium Gender Strategy, set up a Gender and Agriculture Research Network and requires all CGIAR Research Programs (CRPs) to have gender strategies. Part of the CGIAR approach includes building the Consortium's capacity to address gender in research and development. Part of the outputs from the CGIAR gender work has been methods development, largely targeted to crop agriculture and livestock sectors.

Aquatic Agricultural Systems (AAS) CRP takes a "Research in Development" approach, which embeds research into on-going development processes and through participatory processes identifies research topics that would respond most to the needs of the farmers with a complex set of livelihood

systems. AAS CRP takes gender equality as one of the research themes, and integrates gender perspectives in all its themes. The Gender Strategy of the AAS CRP takes Kabeer's social relations approach (Kabeer 1994), and emphasises investigation on rules (gender norms), activities, people, resources, and power. Control of assets, inputs, decision making and benefits by women and other marginalised groups in aquatic agricultural systems is its intermediate development outcomes.

Our second issue to update is that of the quality of work presented on gender in aquaculture and fisheries, especially at the AFS GAF events, and the level of engagement. Gender and fisheries/aquaculture research of the Gender and Fisheries Symposium has shown development over the years. Initially, the work was more focused on gender roles and access to technology. For example, in GAF3, the technical papers focused more on gender roles. Many studies looked at what women do and what men do. These have been an important series of research papers recognising and describing the differences between women and men in how they are engaged in fisheries/aquaculture. However, although a focus on roles is interesting, it does not lead us to understanding social structures and power relations and the implication of gendered differences.

On the other hand, there has been research that has highlighted the nutrition and food security effect of aquaculture, for example, Goswami (2007), as well as how aquaculture has led to women having improved access to ponds and independent incomes (IFAD 2009). With a growing concern among both scientists and the general public about the issue of climate change, important research is needed to examine the effect of climate change on women and men in fishing communities, building on the work of Nowak (2008) and Bagsit et al. (this volume).

Gender analysis can be done in the spheres of economy, politics, health/nutrition, society, culture and many others. GAF literature has so far focused more on economic and health/nutrition issues. Analysis can also be done at micro/meso/macro level. There have been more studies at the level of households and community, including issues of female headed households, compared to the other two levels. Meso level studies include the impact of privatisation at the organisation and factory level (for example, Gopal et al. 2007), and also the importance of value chains, for example, Kusakabe et al. 2008; Hapke 2012; Sumagaysay in this volume. These studies of value chains are important in providing a useful tool to connect the micro to macro level in its analysis. The macro level includes changes in environment including climate change, as well as macroeconomic changes such as economic crisis.

Although we have had many small scale case studies from various locations, we have less understanding on how these all link together. We still have little understanding of how women's work in fisheries and aquaculture are inter-related with other livelihood activities in the growing economies of many developing countries. How are macro level environment changes such as climate change experienced differently by women and men in different contexts? How are fisheries affected by global economic changes and how do these changes shape women's involvement in fisheries? For example, migration is changing the circumstances and opportunities of fishing communities, but how has that influenced women's engagement? We also have little understanding on how fishing is linked to various markets where the link is predominantly provided by women through trade and fish processing. Linkages to technological changes in aquaculture, as distinct from fishing, have not been studied much – how have the expansion or changes in aquaculture technologies shaped gender roles and women's access to technology and market?

Researchers and others interested in gender in aquaculture and fisheries are connected by various social media such as Facebook, Twitter and e-mail lists, and materials from the Asian Fisheries Society and other events and news are posted on the website Genderaquafish.org (<http://genderaquafish.org>). The number of subscribers to these media continues to mount slowly, but most users see the media as sources of information and news, rather than active platforms for discourse. In many cases, this lack of strong engagement is due to the secondary nature of the users' engagement with gender/women. Their primary jobs are often in technical fields, and gender is a side interest.

Perhaps surprisingly, our third issue focuses on the issues of methods and methodology. Many biotechnical scientists took for granted that the methods they had developed and used in their fisheries research would serve them equally well when they undertook gender research. But significant differences arise both of theory and practice between investigating fish, seaweed and other creatures and plants, that do not "talk back" or think subjectively about how they act and cooperate with one another, and human subjects. While aspects of human behaviour can be counted, the nature of people's experience and particularly their subjective interpretation of their actions and reactions do not respond as well to quantitative methods. Thus the community of gender and fishery researchers has had to turn to qualitative methodology and methods to find appropriate tools for this new research. Feminist research has contributed theoretical and conceptual discussions about why to select particular methods and careful examinations

of what happens in the research context. Feminists have also been strong advocates of developing careful ethical procedures so as to ensure the protection of the participants in the research, who are often economically disadvantaged and with fewer educational skills than the researcher. The interaction between the researcher and the participant in a research interview is a complex social construction. It needs to be carefully and thoughtfully set up, as well as analysed using theoretical as well as the more conventional analytical tools. All this was new to many of the gender and fisheries researchers and GAF has considered how best to develop appropriate methods to investigate the issues of fishers, both men and women, and their fishing communities. The discussions in the Symposia have been lively and have been carried forward in items posted on the GAF webpage.

As more researchers, many of them trained in the biophysical sciences, enter gender research, practical guidance on the basics is being produced, such as the CGIAR standards for collecting sex-disaggregated information in agriculture value chain research (Doss and Kieran 2014). Mutua et al. (2014) is useful review and summary of development and evaluation tools for gender and value chains, including workshop materials, manuals, guidebooks, handbooks, reports, toolkits and working papers.

The special issue

As GAF4, the event, consisted of contributed papers, this Special Issue also is diverse in its content, ranging from reflections and reviews on development lessons, papers that dealt with the gendered impact of change, the details of women's and men's roles, methods and methodology and papers that asked "where to next?" The papers are also diverse in their form, and are classified as: research papers (as defined for regular volumes of Asian Fisheries Science journal), technical papers (containing significant new technical information gathered from original studies), and short communication (on development work, surveys or projects).

Development lessons

Two papers focused on development issues and examined ways to enhance women's empowerment through the various projects funded by development agencies. In their paper, Lentisco and Lee argued that it is necessary to better understand women's access to fisheries resources, to identify their roles and relationships with others, and to acknowledge the benefits of directly involving them in decision-making. Women's access to fisheries were divided into primary, secondary and tertiary access categories and recommendations to enhance women's participation in each of these categories were made.

Using Longwe's empowerment framework (Longwe 2002), Choo and Williams reviewed 20 papers from the AFS women/gender symposia and examined how these development projects have contributed to the process of women's empowerment. They concluded that most projects only achieved empowerment at the lowest levels of welfare and access and sometimes even these gains were fragile. Women are still far from being able to define their own needs and priorities and to control resources which may help them to challenge their subordinate positions. Feminist concepts of empowerment which should have a place at the core of women's empowerment efforts have been avoided in the fisheries sector. Unless women are able to construct a collective self to define and defend their gender needs, the control (highest) level of empowerment will remain far beyond their reach.

Changes

Seven papers analysed how the macro-environment changes have affected women and men's engagement in fisheries/ aquaculture. Soejima analysed the aging oyster farming community in Japan. Oyster shucking was carried out by women and elderly. But with workers aging, their work speed did not make the industry commercially viable. Some farmers started to hire Chinese migrant workers, and with their help, were able to expand their production. On the other hand, those who could not afford to hire Chinese workers had to shrink their production, leading to polarisation of production. Women and elderly workers who used to work in oyster shucking were also affected. The paper showed how the demographic changes impact women's involvement in aquaculture.

In fishing communities in the Philippines, Bagsit et al. analysed how women and men adapt to floods. Climate change has increased the frequency and severity of floods. Bagsit et al. Identified that although women and men have different preferences for adaptation and coping responses, when they actually take action, there is no gender difference. This might suggest that women or men face structural obstacles in pursuing their preferred adaptation strategies, and invites further studies in identifying these obstacles.

Kusakabe analysed the business trajectories of women fish traders at the border between Cambodia and Thailand. Unlike what is normally discussed for women entrepreneurs, different women fish traders faced different obstacles and opportunities that made it difficult to make any generalisation on women's business. Kusakabe described the changes in border trade regulations and how that has affected and shaped women's fish businesses over the years. She emphasised the importance of

context-informed analysis as well as how the fish as a commodity shaped how the business developed.

Gopal et al. studied three different fisheries in the central part of the state of Kerala, India and analysed how women have been marginalised in these fisheries. In the ring seine and clam fisheries, women used to play a role but have been excluded through further commercialisation and changes in technology such as motorised boats. In the stake net fishery, women have never played a large role and were involved only at the shore.

DebRoy et al. conducted a study at a village near the Pichavaram mangroves in the Cuddalore district of the state of Tamil Nadu in India, and found that women are equally willing to pay for mangrove conservation and development as men, highlighting women's important role and awareness in mangrove conservation.

Defiesta and Badayos-Jover described how women and men were affected after the 2006 M/T Solar I oil spill in the coasts off Guimaras Island in the Philippines. They described how women were already economically marginalised even before the oil spill, but the oil spill exacerbated their marginalisation as external aid was more directed towards men.

Analysing the same oil spill from another angle, Badayos-Jover and Defiesta described that after the destructive oil spill, women and men had to make a decision on whether to move out or to change their livelihoods. The study showed that women were marginalised both in the household and in the community in the decision on actions to be taken after the spill.

Methodology

Because this is a relatively new area for GAF symposia there is only one paper in this section. In it, Marilyn Porter tries to lay the groundwork for the process of enabling biotechnical scientists who are interested in integrating gender concerns into their work to understand the background and potential of feminist methodology and methods. She outlines the way in which feminist research has developed, especially over the last 40 years, and looks at the problems feminist researchers encountered when they began to examine the implications of their roles as both women and as researchers. The category of "experience" became key in increasingly theoretical understandings of both the process and the outcome of research by women on women. Apart from sophisticated theoretical considerations, feminist research has brought two key issues to the foreground: that of a sensitive and informed approach to ethical issues in research, and the responsibility to engage with and act on the issues that arise from the participants' experience. The paper suggests the possibilities of applying feminist approaches to the particular

problems of gender in aquaculture and fisheries and the need to both create a knowledge base of the best and most fruitful of the feminist methods.

Contributions and roles of women (and men)

In some depth and detail, seven papers addressed the contributions of women and men, or just those of women alone, drawing out role differentiation, progress and challenges.

Sun-ae Li studied two closely located fishing villages in Miyazaki Prefecture, Kyushu Island, Japan – Meitsu and Odoutsu. She found that the modern fisheries division of labour among women and men could be traced back to different pathways of fisheries development over the past century. Meitsu has a long association with offshore fishing and as resources have declined and become harder and less profitable to access, fishermen have taken to value-adding to local fishery products, with assistance from women in parts of the work. Odoutsu has always relied more on coastal fishing and although the members of its Fisheries Cooperative and the Women's Division are engaged in similar activities to those of Meitsu, women are much more integrated and active in all the post-harvest and value adding activities because of they were always part of the coastal fishing activity that was close to home.

In the Philippines, Alice Ferrer and her colleagues conducted qualitative studies on women and men's roles at eight sites, five in the Visayas and three in Mindanao, as a pre-scoping study for the CGIAR Aquatic Agricultural Systems (AAS) Project. They found that productive, reproductive and community roles were changing under declining productivity in the marginal aquatic systems, exacerbated by changing climate. Women and men were each expanding all their roles in fishing and farming to take advantage, at the household and family level, of any opportunity. In so doing, the people seemed to be gaining greater resilience through diversified livelihoods. As the AAS project develops, this will be tested by research.

Marieta Bañez Sumagaysay studied women's roles throughout the green mussel (*Perna viridis* (Linnaeus 1758)) value chain in Jiabong, Samar, Philippines. She found that women worked in several parts of the value chain but the chain was very male-dominated. Women's work was often unpaid, or poorly paid, acting as an extension of their reproductive work and considered menial and done only in the women's "spare time." This included cleaning, sorting, and cooking mussels. Based on her analysis of the value chain, Sumagaysay presented actions that would help the women of Jiabong meet their practical gender needs, such as providing clean, safe market stalls, and strategic gender needs such as entrepreneurial skills training and capital raising for their businesses.

Sunila Rai and her colleagues built on their earlier paper in the last Special Issue (Rai et al. 2012) of the introduction of polyculture of carp and small indigenous fish in Terai, Nepal and its uptake by women of the Tharu ethnic group, an underprivileged community. The fish farming not only provided income and protein for the families, raising their fish consumption to twice the national level, but also brought the women economic opportunities. Women's fish farmers groups were formed to share technical knowledge and learn new approaches. Women leaders developed from among the ranks of the network members. Two women were included in the team, along with 6 men, who visited Bangladesh to learn and broaden their knowledge of fish farming.

Most West Asian countries are definitely considered to have low women's participation in fisheries and therefore the paper by Khalfan Rashidi and E. McLean about the women invertebrate fishers of Al Wusta Governorate, Oman, exposed a little known but important women's fishery. They interviewed a quarter of the 400 fisherwomen of Oman, and described the methods and products that the women produce, especially molluscs, holothurians and crustaceans, including the snail or "rahas" fishery from which the dried operculums are used in producing frankincense. Despite the obvious value of the women's harvest, they face many challenges and are given little assistance from the government and its services. The authors outline how the women could be helped.

In Bangladesh, where fish exports are the second largest earner after garment exports, Md. Nuruzzaman and his colleagues have been working through a UNIDO project to train fish and shrimp processing factory managers and supervisors to understand and comply with labour laws. They examine all aspects of the labour conditions and treatment of women workers, who, although not well-paid, are saved from the worst of factory safety hazards by the structural upgrades that were made in the late 1990s to meet the HACCP (Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point) requirements for export food standards. Managers often display strong patriarchal views. They believe they are aiding women merely by giving them employment, and give little regard to the conditions of work. The women's conditions can be difficult, with problems from cases of physical abuse through to less opportunity for advancement compared to men. Surveillance of compliance with labour laws is predicated on export market requirements and still faces many challenges in improving women's rights.

Zuzy Anna reported the results of an economic study on women fish sellers from the north coast of Java. She noted that subsidies and credit to fishermen for fishing vessels and gear have been

criticised for having a negative impact on resource sustainability, and credit facilities for women have been studied in terms of loan repayment performance, and income and empowerment. Her study examined the impact on efficiency of the women's fish selling businesses, with loans coming from a public bank, cooperatives and middlemen. A control group of non-recipients was also studied. Loans from cooperatives were found to be most productive to the businesses, due to their efficiency of dispersal, the lower interest rates and the technical and social support also provided.

Feemena Hassan and colleagues studies the uptake by women's Self Help Groups of oyster farming (*Crassostrea madrasensis* (Preston)) and value addition in Vadakkekara Panchayath, Kerala. They found that the enterprises could be profitable, but that they still faced a number of gender and other challenges, such as health problems from the farming work, to social issues such as poaching as harvest time approached.

Where to next?

From looking back and looking forward, two papers examined how the GAF events had developed in the Asian Fisheries Society, and surveyed views of future steps needed.

Looking back in a memorial essay, Meryl Williams examined how Dr M.C. Nandeesha (1957-2012), through his professional interest, vision and ability to get a wide range of experts motivated, stimulated the Asian Fisheries Society to commence and sustain gender in aquaculture and fisheries efforts. One particular focus of his attention was to understand and improve the institutional environment to better support gender equity.

Meryl Williams and Poh Sze Choo surveyed 41 of those engaged in gender in aquaculture and fisheries activities, including academics, students, researchers, non-government organisation staff and development professionals. Whereas most felt that gender inequality issues were better understood now, better communication of strategic messages is needed. Most respondents were not devoted full-time to gender activities, and research is not well connected to grassroots needs. Much more effort is needed to create more champions, leaders and actors so as to have a critical mass for mobilisation. Targeted, dedicated resources, including full time people, institutional support and projects, and are required. The authors concluded that a more revolutionary rather than an evolutionary approach is now needed.

Conclusions

It is evident from all the previous gender events as well as from the GAF4 (that this volume is dedicated to) that awareness, interest and concern are

increasing in this area of research and inquiry. As the body of work on gender in aquaculture and fisheries grows, certain issues have been observed that needs to be put in perspective so that the way forward is clearer.

One of the positive aspects has been that there is a trend to much greater attention to GAF in institutions – both academic and research and development. Also increasingly donors are looking for gender integration or at least insisting that projects look at the gender dimension particularly with regard to the impacts. Specific gender studies are also finding funds. The gender discourse in the policy arena is yet to strengthen, but as international events have shown, gender is now making it onto the centre stage. The next stage will be implementation of the policy aspirations.

As the papers being presented in the GAF events has shown, the number of practitioners in the field is increasing in quality and scope. However actual research work still largely tends to concern micro level studies, with great focus on household and community. This is very important for developing an understanding of the "what is" situation and will be a pointer for the "what should be" as far as specific issues are concerned. However as experts have pointed out, little conceptual thinking about gender has yet been carried out by the practitioners and diverse and sometimes conflicting ideas still prevail about its role and importance, with a focus on the practical, industry-specific gender roles. A great many gaps exist that need to be filled in order to join up existing areas of work. A relatively recent approach through Value Chain Analysis (VCA) is a helpful way to link across micro/meso/macro scales, but there is need for more work on how meso and macro level factors such as privatisation (meso) and climate change (macro) affect women (and men) in the sector.

The lack of or little engagement in development of conceptual frameworks and analyses may be due to the background of the researchers themselves. The experts tend to be scattered, based in many disciplines and often not working full time in the field. This sometimes constrains the development of suitable methods which is very essential to ensure rigour and also ensure replication of studies effectively. On the other hand, it also allows a great diversity of fields from which to choose suitable concepts and methodologies, and prevents single and rigid approaches that would not suit the gender issues that are the focus.

When we wrote the Guest editorial for the GAF3 event (Williams et al. 2012b), we were tending towards pessimism tinged with hope that gender in aquaculture and fisheries was making some progress. In this Guest editorial, we paint a more

optimistic picture of progress. Gender is now more firmly on the policy agenda, is embedded in major normative international documents, such as the Small Scale Fisheries Guidelines, and is receiving early institutional, policy and donor support. Attention is also being given to methodological and methods development as more practitioners engage in gender work. The full institutionalisation of gender into programs and institutions will face implementation challenges such as lack of leadership and resources, and will need to prove its worth to the fish sector. This a much better position in which to find ourselves, however, than still struggling to get gender on the agenda.

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