

# Expanding the Horizons

Nalini Nayak and Cornelia Quist reflect on the 7th Global Conference on Gender in Aquaculture and Fisheries (GAF7), held in Bangkok during 18-21 October 2018

46

Having been pioneers in the setting up of the Women in Fisheries (WIF) Programme of the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF) 25 years ago, and having been actively involved since then in gender issues in fisheries, we were particularly attracted to GAF7. Its theme was 'Gender in Fisheries and Aquaculture: Expanding the Horizons'. It promised a thinking that will go beyond descriptive papers on what women do in fisheries and gender-disaggregated data, to a more in-depth feminist analysis. We, therefore, decided to organize a workshop and share the long work of ICSF's WIF Programme and the tools of feminist analysis of fisheries we had used. Our proposal to organise such a workshop aimed at deepening feminist perspectives in fisheries was accepted and hence we went to Bangkok.

We were among the 120 participants of the conference, who came from more than 25 countries and from diverse backgrounds, including a woman Chief Executive Officer of the world's largest fish-processing company, representatives of women fishworker organizations, researchers, practitioners, consultants, social activists and media persons.

There were more than 95 presentations and nine special workshops at the conference. Of the many presentations we attended, we would like to mention a few we found inspiring from the perspective of 'Expanding the Horizons'. It must be said that there were several parallel sessions and what we reflect on here might have missed out on other good presentations. Moreover, the time allotted for presentations was generally too short to impart sufficient insights.

One of the inspiring presentations was by Meryl Williams, chair of the Gender in Aquaculture and Fisheries Society, titled 'Time to Connect GAF Research to the Political Economy of the Fish Value Chain: Revolution that is Shaping Women's Inequality'. She called for setting up "feminist political economy think tanks". She said that using a gender lens is useful but it does not pick up the contextual understanding of women's discrimination. She said that the State and the global market have a persistent focus on fisheries as a foreign exchange-earning sector and on production, while neglecting reproduction, which has a huge impact on the status of women in fisheries, further marginalising them. It is important, therefore, to look at gender through a fisheries political economy lens.

An interesting presentation was by Nadine Vanniasinkam and Nirmi Vitarana of the International Center of Ethnic Studies in Sri Lanka, titled 'Lives on the Move: Gendered Aspects of Migration in Fishing Villages in Sri Lanka'. They presented an analysis of a survey of 800 households of a traditional seasonal out-migrating area, Puttalam, and a traditional seasonal migrant-receiving area, Trincomalee.

## Development goals

For the analysis, they had used both the Social Well-being Approach, which analyzes the strategies employed by women and men who act on socioeconomic, political and ecological factors to achieve material, rational and subjective well-being goals, and the Social Relations Approach, which analyzes where development goals should increase human well-being and focus on the social—power—relations between women and men, and how

*This article is by Cornelia Quist (cornelia.quist@gmail.com), Member, ICSF, The Netherlands and Nalini Nayak (nalini.nayak@gmail.com), Trustee, ICSF Trust, India*



Cornelie Quist and Nalini Nayak presented the 25-year-long history of the WIF programme of ICSF at the 7th GAF held in Bangkok during 18-21 October 2018. The workshop was attended by 22 participants

they are connected and affected differently. The complementary use of the two approaches ensures they mutually reinforce each other. Interestingly, their study threw up climate change and ecosystem impacts as factors which make the Social Well-being Approach more robust. Regrettably, they had not focused on the impact of the war in Sri Lanka that lasted more than 30 years and created numerous war widows, traumatised people and destroyed livelihoods in the study area. That would have given them another important factor for the analytical framework of the Social Well-being Approach, namely, peace and human security.

Another inspiring research approach was presented by Sarah Harper in her presentation titled 'Indigenous Women Rising: A Spotlight on the Role of Indigenous Women in Transforming Fisheries Governance on Canada's Pacific Coast'. The approach was particularly interesting because it brought together theories of governance transformations in social-ecological systems (SES) and insights from the literature on women in environmental justice activism.

Furthermore, an intersectional lens explored ways in which social identities, such as gender and indigeneity or ethnicity, influence how

**...an intersectional lens explored ways in which social identities, such as gender and indigeneity or ethnicity, influence how people experience, articulate and respond to environmental struggles.**

people experience, articulate and respond to environmental struggles. With this approach, the researchers were able to identify essential elements for social-ecological system transformation, supported with empirical evidence of how women of the indigenous Heiltsuk community responded during a recent herring fishery conflict to catalyse a system-wide shift in the fisheries governance on the Central Coast of British Columbia, Canada.

#### **Information flow**

Heiltsuk women took on key leadership roles, creating intergenerational

solidarity, increasing social cohesion, facilitating the flow of information and negotiations among holders of power, which resulted in transforming fisheries governance in a more socially just and environmentally sustainable way. Women had brought strength and cohesion to the struggle of their community by calling upon both traditional and contemporary roles and responsibilities.

The research project was developed with consent and ongoing input from the Heiltsuk community, thereby demonstrating the value of close collaboration of fisher communities, researchers and policymakers. The research demonstrated the value of strong participation, including leadership by women in fisheries governance transformation, since they are also important agents of change in their communities.

The importance of women as change agents in governance transformation was also demonstrated in the special workshop organized by Editrudith Lukanga and Kafayat Fakoya. Their organization, the African Women Fish Processors and Traders Network (AWFISHNET) has taken the initiative to create a pan-African women's network to collectively raise their voices for the recognition and protection of the rights of small-scale fishing communities and women's rights, in particular, and

with the administration to see that the SSF Guidelines are taken seriously.

The issues addressed by AWFISHNET to improve the quality of life of women in fisheries and their households include: tenure rights and access rights (as well as inter-regional and cross-border trade); decent work; and food and nutrition security. AWFISHNET is now in a process of collecting data through local organizations which will help them inform their governments and strengthen their local base to enable their members to voice their concerns and stand up for their rights. Collaboration of researchers and other organizations in support of the aims and strategy of AWFISHNET will be essential.

In our special workshop, titled 'Deepening Feminist Perspectives in Fisheries', we presented the 25-year-long history of ICSF's WIF Programme, how a feminist perspective in fisheries has evolved within ICSF, and the tools of feminist analysis of fisheries that we used. ICSF's feminist perspective in fisheries connects with the larger feminist critique of development. It critiques development models that are patriarchal and exploitive, that benefit the few at the expense of the majority—particularly poor women—increase the vulnerability of local communities, destroy means of livelihood and undervalue and overexploit natural resources.

We had 22 participants from various backgrounds who contributed to a great deal of discussion. Unfortunately, we could not get into group discussions, as we had planned, and so the discourse lost a clear direction. Nevertheless, there was a consensus that a feminist analysis should be able to address the complexity of today's society, and new ideas should be integrated into old debates that critique development models based on power inequalities. For this, we need to connect with new social transformative movements that address issues of social and environmental injustice in the present global context. Inclusiveness is important, in particular of the most marginalized groups in society such as women migrant workers.

**The importance of involving men in the feminist debate in a constructive way was also discussed.**

take ahead the implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines). AWFISHNET was launched in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, in April 2017 and has women's organizations from 28 countries of the African Union as members by now. It was very impressive to see how these women's organizations have got together to develop a charter of demands which they use to interact

The importance of involving men in the feminist debate in a constructive way was also discussed. Quite often, men keep away from the debate because they see feminism as a 'women's issue' and not in their interest. There also exists the persistent misunderstanding that feminism is just a vision that demonizes men.

On the whole, we found it encouraging to see so many young women researchers and students enter the arena of fisheries; many of them were aware of the SSF Guidelines, and several more are working closely with women-in-fisheries organizations, supporting their struggles, and a few others are engaging with the ecosystem approach to fisheries.

Most presentations at the conference were micro-studies that presented interesting evidence about the work, lives and long struggles of women in fisheries, making their contribution and potential visible and showing how, when they are empowered, they benefit the community as well as the environment. Broadly, although the presentations reflected progress towards greater attention for gender in more diverse areas of fisheries, most were still primarily descriptive case studies and pieces of framework and approaches that were not well-integrated.

Approaches that are 'disconnected' to the global context give no insights into the causes of the real problems that affect women. They tend to focus on symptoms and/or outcomes rather than address the root causes of inequalities. A sole focus on women also tends to leave out men and masculinities.

We have mentioned only a few presentations that we found inspiring in the light of 'Expanding Horizons'. The approaches put forward at the conference could be integrated to develop a solid analytical framework which would help us to understand the diverse and changing lives of women in fisheries in relation to the impact of unsustainable global fisheries and aquaculture, and help us home in on the approaches and policy measures needed for achieving socially and environmentally just fisheries that sustain life and livelihoods. In this,

it is critically important to bring together, connect with and link, feminist researchers and activists, women-in-fisheries organizations, the global fishworker movements and policymakers. GAF can play a role in this, perhaps in the establishment of a 'feminist political think tank' for fisheries, as proposed by Meryl Williams. This think tank could also draw on the experience and learnings from the 25-year-long ICSF's WIF Programme, and, particularly, its strategies and discourse. 3

#### For more



[www.gafconference.org](http://www.gafconference.org)

#### **GAF7 website**

<http://www.genderaquafish.org/>

#### **Genderaquafish**

<https://www.icsf.net/en/paper-presentation.html>

#### **Evolving a feminist perspective in fisheries and the history of the Women in Fisheries Programme (1993-2014) of the ICSF, GAF7 Bangkok 18-21 October 2018**

<https://wif.icsf.net>

#### **ICSF Women in Fisheries website**

<https://wif.icsf.net/yemaya/article/EN/45-2028.html?lang=en>

#### **Through the gender lens**

<https://www.icsf.net/yemaya/article/EN/50-2192.html?lang=en>

#### **Widows' struggles in post-war Sri Lanka**

<https://www.icsf.net/yemaya/article/EN/57-2315.html?lang=en>

#### **Enablers, drivers and barriers**