

THE AFS JOURNEY TO GENDER EQUALITY IN AQUACULTURE AND FISHERIES

Meryl Williams

*AsiaPacific-FishWatch, 17 Agnew Street, Aspley Queensland 4034, Australia
E-mail: MerylJWilliams@gmail.com*

This presentation will examine how institutions and people can strengthen and support gender equality in aquaculture and fisheries. It is aimed especially at new gender project leaders and participants on the journey to greater gender equality; and how they can mobilise new resources such as grassroots and research partners, technical experts, donors and advocates.

The modern journey to realise gender equality in aquaculture and fisheries (GAF) may be conceived to have started in 1980, just after the United Nations (UN) passed the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). This starting point ignores that women often had a greater role in historic and pre-historic fish supply chains and that CEDAW had very little impact on women in aquaculture and fisheries. For Asia, however, 1980 meshes well with the creation of the Asian Fisheries Society (1984), the AFS Indian Branch (1986), and more broadly the expansion of fishing after the signing of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (1982) and the start of the aquaculture boom.

The GAF journey began with small steps, such as the 1990 AFSIB Women in Fisheries in India workshop, and rippled through other country and sub-regional workshops in the lower Mekong region. After testing the waters with women in fisheries photographic competitions, the Asian Fisheries Society launched its first of two Women in Fisheries symposium. Later these became triennial GAF symposia, of which this symposium is now the fifth.

Field and institutional action has been slow to follow, although some studies were carried out in universities and some government research agencies. Occasionally, a large fisheries project or a regional agency has undertaken gender activities.

Last year, Choo Poh Sze and I took stock of progress of the GAF journey in AFS and beyond. Our survey revealed that the journey is still in its early stages. In addition, GAF progress by aquaculture and fisheries research and development institutes over the last 30 years has been sporadic, with a general failure to institutionalise gender equality efforts in programmes and staffing. More people and more institutes, however, are now enrolled in the GAF journey. How can these small early steps be turned into confident strides?