

WOMEN’S CONTRIBUTIONS TO FISHERIES AND AQUACULTURE IN THE DEVELOPING AREAS: PRESENT ACHIEVEMENTS AND FUTURE PROSPECTS FOR WOMEN RESEARCHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS

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Meryl Williams received her undergraduate degree in Science from the University of Queensland, first class honors in Marine Biology from James Cook University, and masters in mathematical statistics and doctorate in Zoology, both from the University of Queensland. Dr. Williams has over 40 years experience in Australian and international fisheries, aquaculture, conservation and agricultural research and development. Currently, she is focusing on research and advocacy on women and gender in aquaculture and fisheries, and information and science for fair and responsible fish production for food security and nutrition.

She is the Chair of the Asian Fisheries Society’s (AFS) Gender in Aquaculture and Fisheries Section, Vice Chair of the Scientific Advisory Committee of the International Seafood Sustainability Foundation, a member of the board of Aquaculture without Frontiers (Australia), and sits on two journal editorial boards. She was formerly Director General of the WorldFish Center (1994-2004), during which time she concentrated the focus of WorldFish on eradicating poverty, improving people’s nutrition, and reducing pressure on the environment. She was previously the Director of the Australian Institute of Marine Science, Executive Director of the Bureau of Rural Sciences, tuna fisheries statistician at the Secretariat for the Pacific Community and fisheries biologist in the Queensland state government service.

Finally, Dr. Williams is a Fellow of the Academy of Science, Technology and Engineering (ATSE), awarded an Australian Centenary Medal, made an Honorary Life Member of AFS, an Outstanding Alumnus of James Cook University, Australia, awarded the Crawford Medal, Australia, and the Prof. M.C. Nandeesha Gender Justice & Equality Award, India.



ABSTRACT

Women are slowly becoming recognised as the backbone of the fisheries and aquaculture sectors (Gopal et al. 2017). Researchers and women's representative groups make the case that, from catch to consumer, gender matters and women must be empowered, counted and given voice in decision making (Williams et al. 2018). The case for gender is based on evidence that: the fish sector benefits when women's contributions are valued; gender-blind policies and data undermine women's contributions; and society and the environment benefit when women are empowered. In developing areas where most of the world's fish is now produced, fisheries and aquaculture are undergoing major transitions that increase the challenges to gender equality, and also offer opportunities.

Women researchers and administrators have been at the forefront of gathering the evidence and making the case for gender sensitive policies and development interventions. Sometimes they have been joined and supported by their male colleagues, but frequently their gender work has been ignored, denied or even suppressed within their institutions. My own deeper interest in women and gender in fisheries came about through the initiatives of two of my male colleagues, Dr M.V. Gupta, and the late Prof M.C. Nandeesh. As women become more prominent in many societies, the future prospects for women researchers and administrators in fisheries seem brighter, but will depend ultimately on the directions taken by their societies and economies.

Many researchers promote the need for gender transformative change, but also realise that technology change and the political economy of fish production and trade, from local to global scale, also govern the possibility for transformative change. I will draw from over 40 years of experience as a woman working in mainstream fisheries and aquaculture research agencies in developing and developed regions, and bring together the big trends in the fish sectors and women's roles and contributions, with a focus on the outlook for women researchers and administrators. My conclusions converge on those from recent political and public gender debates - that gender does not explain everything, nor does it explain nothing, but it does explain many of the future prospects for women researchers and administrators.

KEYWORDS

Gender transformative change, Political economy, Women in fish value chains

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- Why gender matters? <https://www.genderaquafish.org/>
- Prof. M.C. Nandeesh: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/M.C._Nandeesh
- Dr. Modadugu Vijay Gupta: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Modadugu_Vijay_Gupta



Women's contributions to fisheries and aquaculture in the developing areas

- A journey - formalising the contributions of women researchers and administrators through the Gender in Aquaculture and Fisheries Section
- Along the way, we found why gender matters in fisheries and aquaculture
- And we formed a new perspective on where gender research needs to go

Equal contributor: Catching fish using gill net from a river in Indian Sundarban. Photo by Ranjan Manna, India



The journey: Two early influencers

Asian Fisheries Society linked events initiated by Dr M.C. Nandeesh

WorldFish engagement with women in aquaculture began with Dr M.V. Gupta

A 28 year journey: forming the Gender in Aquaculture and Fisheries Section (of the Asian Fisheries Society)

1990	• Workshop on Women in Fisheries in India, AFSIB
1994	• National Workshop on Women in Cambodian Fisheries, PADEK
1995	• Italo Resolution on The Role of Women in Fisheries Development in the Asia-Pacific • 4th UN World Conference on Women, Beijing, China
1995	• Women in Fisheries photo competition, AAF, China, PADEK & AFS
1996	• Women in Fisheries in Indo-China Countries Seminar, PADEK
*** 1998	• International Symposium on Women in Asian Fisheries, SAFF, Thailand, AFS and ICLARM.
2001	• Global Symposium on Women in Fisheries, GAF, Taiwan, by AFS & ICLARM - The WorldFish Center
2004	• GAF: Global Symposium on GAF, 7AFF, Malaysia, AFS and WorldFish Center
2007	• GAF2, BAFF, India, GAF network meeting
2011	• GAF3, 9AFAF, China, GAF network meeting
2013	• GAF4, 10AFAF, Korea, GAF network meeting
2014	• GAF5, 10IFAF, India, GAF network meeting • Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small Scale Fisheries***
2015	• United Nations Global Goals for Sustainable Development***
2016	• GAF6, 11AFAF, Thailand, GAF network and Partners; GAF-101 training
*** 2017	• Gender in Aquaculture and Fisheries Section, Asian Fisheries Society formed • GAF-India, 11IFAF, India, AFSIB, by GAF5, AFSIB and ICSF
2018	• GAF7, Asian Institute of Technology and GAF5, GAF-101 training

On our journey, we documented a typical feminist pathway

- Noticing that fisheries/aquaculture are seen as masculine
 - Women do fish! [WIF Asia 1998]
- Investigating omissions and "adding women"
 - Where are the women in fisheries? [WIF Global 2001]
- Adding women and adding gender
 - From women in fisheries to gender and fisheries [WIF Global 2001]
 - ...the first global look at the gender dimensions of fisheries [GAF1 2004]
- Seeking greater equality, recognising intersectionality and social norms
 - gender & development [GAF2 2007]
 - moving the agenda forward [GAF3 2011]
 - navigating change [GAF4 2013]
 - the long journey to equality [GAF5 2014]
 - engendering security [GAF6 2014]
 - expanding the horizons [GAF7 2018]



Why gender matters in fisheries and aquaculture

WE FOUND LARGE CONSTRAINTS FOR WOMEN

- Women have smaller enterprises, lower pay, riskier work
- Gender-blind policies and lack of sex-disaggregated data undermine women's contributions
- Women have to fight for their basic rights and decision-making power
- Fisheries and aquaculture modernization has downsides for women

AND LARGE OPPORTUNITIES FOR SOCIETY

- Women's empowerment and group action help overcome constraints
- The whole fish sector wins when women's contributions are valued
- Society and the environment benefit when women are empowered
- Women fish workers are the key to fish as nutrition
- Integrating women into action on climate change and natural disaster relief benefits households and communities

www.genderequality.genderaquafish.org

What is to be done?

- Count women and make them visible in policy and programs
- Increase funding to gender research and educational outreach a hundredfold
- Support women's empowerment
- Collaborate on gender research

Fish market in Assam, India.
Photo by Deepjyoti Baruah, India

We have a new perspective on where gender research needs to go

gender in aquaculture and fisheries research has been small scale, like women's enterprises; it needs to upgrade and connect to the political economy if the SDGs are to be achieved

From current gender research approaches to new directions

- Looking at fisheries through a gender lens, seeing the fisheries/aquaculture problems more clearly
 - the gender lens focuses on gender differentiation of roles, power, access and opportunities
 - Place/fishery based studies can reveal gaps in current priorities, e.g., post-harvest activities
 - May not address why the existing priorities emerged
 - And the fisheries agencies have not responded
- Looking at GAF through a gender lens, seeing gender inequality
 - Mainly interests gender actors who see patriarchal social norms and focus primarily on a Gender Transformative Approach

Cover: Mending lives together at a fishing harbour in West Bengal. Photo by Pradip Kumar Mahato, India.

From current gender research approaches to new directions

- Should we look at gender through a (fisheries) political economy lens and see the world that is?
 - Political economy is the study of production and trade and their relations with law, custom and government.. (Wikipedia)
 - Stresses the importance of historical processes, structural forces and institutions in shaping economic outcomes (Henderson 2015)
 - Where the state meets the market; how economics and the state interact in structuring each other
 - Offers an approach to contextualising GAF and the constraints and opportunities to achieving equality and change
 - Helps identify where specific change needs to be negotiated, as an ongoing process, to achieve SDGs+SDG14

Cover: Mending lives together at a fishing harbour in West Bengal. Photo by Pradip Kumar Mahato, India.

Sample political economy research questions

- How does industry policy affect women's work?
 - Via government support for exports industries, industrial trawling, intensive aquaculture, central markets, over small scale fisheries/aquaculture
 - Labour policy in factories – work security, pay, conditions, location, resistance/suppression
- Why studies on women in seaweed farming should not focus only on what happens in the water and on the shore, but also on the global seaweed hydrocolloid industry that determines the price
- Why complete sex-disaggregated statistics should be collected
 - Fisheries agencies current statistical collections are very incomplete; women's fishing is often not recorded; traditional and modern fish processing industry statistics are rarely reported
 - Statistics on reproductive economies are totally ignored
- What gender equality criteria should be included in sustainability certification and auditing schemes?
- What indicators on gender equality should be incorporated in SDG14?

Gender in fisheries and aquaculture research has to connect to the political economy whose forces shape women's contributions



A new research and training agenda, of greater scale, is about to be launched to address these challenges



