

# Panel Discussion

Moderator:

*Marcy Wilder, JIRCAS*

Speakers:

*Meryl Williams,*

Gender in Aquaculture and Fisheries Section, Asian Fisheries Society

*Kaoru Nakata, Japan Fisheries Research and Education Agency*

*Yumiko Kura, WorldFish Cambodia*

*Evelyn Grace de Jesus Ayson,*

Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center/Aquaculture Department

*Bong Jung Kang, JIRCAS*

*Izumi Seki, Tokai University*

*Bonnie Waycott, The Fish Site, 5M Publishing*



**Marcy Wilder:**

Thank you for the introduction. Thank you, ladies and gentlemen. On behalf of JIRCAS, once again I would like to thank you for your participation and we hope that you have enjoyed today's presentations from our seven distinguished speakers. Briefly, to reiterate the goal of today's symposium, we at JIRCAS are determined to further promote women's contributions to scientific and technological advancement in agriculture, forestry and fisheries. With this goal in mind, we have convened today's symposium in order to showcase how women can contribute to the advancement of fisheries-related research and industry. I would like to take this opportunity once again to thank our speakers for sharing with us today their research findings and views on the need for the active participation and involvement of women and their leadership contributions to realizing the sustainable development goals in fishery science and industry.

So, without further ado, I would like to initiate the panel discussion. Briefly, today's format will be, first we will have one round of questions from the moderator to each panelist and then an additional round to the keynote speakers only. Next, panelists will be invited to follow-up in more detail among themselves. And then finally, we will open up questions to the audience. Please feel free to ask your question in either English or Japanese, but before starting your question, I would like to ask you to please identify yourself in terms of name and affiliations, as that will help our speakers, and to wait for the hall attendant to bring you a microphone. The first question will go to Dr. Meryl Williams.

In your presentation you have emphasized that fisheries and agriculture-related endeavors are viewed as masculine and that in developing areas women's enterprises are smaller, they have lower pay and their work is riskier. So, for example, given the situation compared to 30 years ago, would you say that this situation has vastly improved or do we still have a long way to go? And what should all of us who are engaged in international development bear in mind when carrying out our work?

**Meryl Williams:**

Thank you very much for that question. I really don't think we know whether we are more advanced than 30 years ago. And I think, if we did have the statistics, they would show a very mixed outcome. For example, in Dr. Kang's presentation on the global shrimp industry, we saw that between 2000 and today we have gone from one million tons production to over five million tons production. Every one of those shrimp has to be processed and most of that processing is done by women. So, there is five times as much shrimp produced in the last 20 years, which means a lot more jobs in the processing sector for women. In other sectors we have, and other countries, we have very different outcomes. For example, in the Norwegian salmon industry, between 1990 and 2010, a 20-year period, the percentage of women working in the salmon industry went from 20% to 9%, mostly because of the aggregation of small farms into much bigger enterprises. So, the picture is very mixed and as I said, and as many speakers have said, until we have good data, it is very difficult to know where the balance lies. So, there really is a big plea to have some of the basic information to know the situation.

In terms of what we should do about recognizing women in the sector, I think that in research institutions it is very important to have gender equality recruitment and retention practices and policies, targets, as Dr. Nakata pointed out, can work very quickly. Women see the opportunities when targets are there and if there is a population of graduates who can come into the research centers, then the percentages can change very quickly. Development projects, my final point. Development projects really should think right from the start of the design as to what women are doing or could do in the area that is being considered for development intervention and, having diagnosed the situation, then build, design the project to make maximum use of not just the men that are there, but the women and the whole community as well.

**Marcy Wilder:**

Thank you. Our next question will go to Director Nakata. You have told us about the current situation for women in aquaculture and fisheries in Japan and their achievements up until the present. And we have also received through your presentation an understanding of the Japanese government's policies and desire to further promote women. Yet, you have stated that many women are reluctant to be engaged in managerial or decision-making positions. So, going forward, what do you think we can do? Could elaborate a little bit more as to the most important factor in remedying the situation?

**Kaoru Nakata:**

I'll answer in Japanese. First of all, there are not many women role models in managerial positions yet. So, women researchers who are offered managerial positions, for example, would be worried about how big the responsibility would be, whether they would be able to handle it, etc. I think it's very important to remove such concerns.

As Bonnie Waycott said earlier, we can develop a mentoring system, for example, and develop role models. The number of women in managerial positions is gradually increasing. They can be role models in the near future, and it is extremely important that they encourage other women.

Another thing is that organizations should recognize the merits of women contributing to diversity in society and work towards improvements, instead of just pursuing quantitative goals.

**Marcy Wilder:**

I think we will agree that we have a bright future for women ahead. My next question goes to Director Kura. You have emphasized that women are often primarily responsible for providing for the family's daily household food consumption, yet they are often expected to eat less or last. So, where certain cultural differences exist in various countries, what are some of the things that we, especially scientists can do to help people overcome these differences or address them where such a thing is required?

**Yumiko Kura:**

I would like to answer this question using a very specific example. In Cambodia, more than 30% of all children are suffering from stunting. Stunting means they are shorter than the height they should be for their age. Thirty percent, more than 30%. This is a really, really scary figure. So, consider that this kind of malnutrition issue will have negative influence on these children for the rest of their lives and this is a serious issue and we have some idea what is causing this problem. This underlines the low dietary diversity of children and pregnant women. So, pregnant women, they should be eating a variety of food items, not just rice and some soup, but they need to be eating fish, they need to be eating vegetables and other types of food. Same with small children.

After six months of breast feeding, children need to start eating other types of food like fish, but it is not happening in Cambodia. Why? Because the mothers are busy. They do not have time to prepare separate food for small children. They prioritize; they cook food for the entire family including grandparents, the father, the other older siblings. Then they do not have the time to prepare food for babies. How do we begin to solve this kind of problem? As researchers, we encounter this type of issue all the time. Part of it is cultural and part of it is a structural issue, relating to labor allocation issue within the household.

So, it takes very small steps to start changing the perception of women themselves. They sometimes think that they are doing the right thing, as appropriate behavior as the housewife to provide food for entire family instead of prioritizing themselves, even when they are pregnant. But based on the scientific knowledge, we need to be able to somehow communicate that it is important that women prioritize their own food and their young children's food so that their families, can have healthy, economically productive lives.

**Marcy Wilder:**

Thank you. That is indeed something we need to think more about. Our next question goes to Dr. Ayson. You have discussed SEAFDEC's efforts in having women promote their work and technology and extension and dissemination and you have put forth that the success of your program depends significantly on the contribution of your female workforce. So, having seen from your data, that 50% of all of your researchers are women I would like to ask you at this time, do you see yourselves at the place where you want to be or do you need to make further efforts to maintain things, do you need to make further efforts to promote women in your organization?

**Evelyn Grace de Jesus Ayson:**

I think we should continue promoting women's participation in not only SEAFDEC's R&D programs, but also for other similar initiatives not only in the Philippines, but in the region and beyond. In the particular example of SEAFDEC, it is transitory. The 50% women in the workforce who are currently doing very well eventually retire and we will have to continue encouraging the younger ones through mentoring programs to go into agriculture and fisheries research. Currently we do it; we do this at two levels. We mentor our technical and research assistants to encourage them to go into graduate school and then those who come back, we mentor to help them start careers in agriculture and fisheries research. And it will also help if there are policies within the institution that would help these young researchers integrate into the system.

**Marcy Wilder:**

Thank you. That is very, very useful background information, and a model that we could adopt widely. My next question goes to Dr. Kang. Today you gave us an overview of goal-oriented basic research being done at JIRCAS and how it can be applied to assist food industries in developing regions in context of our mission. You also gave us some concrete examples of published research. However, as pointed out in our second keynote speech given by Director Nakata, in this country the percentage of women in fisheries-related research remains low. What do you see as an important factor in addressing the situation? Is there a need for more role models?

**Bong Jung Kang:**

Yes, I think there is a need for more role models. With many role models, it will be easier to imagine the future for young females. In order to realize that, I think that it is important to change the consciousness of women and men. For example, generally in Japan, many people think that women should take care of their family at home. And also regarding the question of my presentation, I never think I am a "female researcher", or I am not a "male researcher", I just think that I am a research scientist. I think there is no need to be sensitive about gender, and people should be accepted as they are individually.

**Marcy Wilder:**

It would be ideal if nobody thought in terms of gender anymore. My next question goes to Professor Seki. You have given us an overview about women who have started fisheries-related businesses in Japan and how their entrepreneurial spirit has helped to revitalize the local economies. Nevertheless, in Japan's Fisheries Cooperative Associations, the majority of leadership positions in these organizations are held by men, but women's contributions are being increasingly welcomed. Are there any specific examples of how being female can work to an advantage? And also as a second question, as an educator, what advice would you have to young women who are still students aspiring to a fisheries-related career?

### **Izumi Seki:**

Well, I don't think being a female can be an advantage or a disadvantage in the world of fisheries. In terms of the Fisheries Cooperative Associations, women can't participate in their management in the first place, so this problem is a little different from being a female working with an advantage or a disadvantage. In fact, this is what I would also like to say to young women; the fisheries is an industry where each person's role is clear—people who fish, people who process, and people who sell their work together to develop one industry. I think it's better to view the fisheries industry this way.

Fishing is physical work and may be easier for men, and that is okay. There are many women who are good at doing work that requires precision on land. Those who are good at processing can do the processing, and everyone can do what she is good at and contribute to the fisheries industry as a whole. I would like to say to young people aspiring to a fisheries-related career that they don't need to do what other people are doing, and that they can do what they're good at to contribute to the fisheries industry. To this end, regardless of gender, we must recognize and respect each other's areas of work, know that everyone is a part of one big wheel, and work together to develop the fisheries industry. I want young people to join the fisheries industry with such awareness.

### **Marcy Wilder:**

Thank you, that was very inspiring. And finally, for the first round of questions, the last question goes to Ms. Waycott. As a journalist, you have investigated the current situation for women who are engaging widely in agriculture-related work all over the world and have highlighted their contributions in the Women in Aquaculture series. Yet, many women have indeed faced obstacles in, firstly, obtaining employment and then secondly, for being recognized for what they have done. So, going forward, what do you see, again as some of the most positive developments that are occurring today?

### **Bonnie Waycott:**

Well, I think that there are quite a few more in the sense of trying to raise awareness of the issues that women have in agriculture and, again, about their roles today. I have a few examples that I have come across during the course of my writing. One of them is Norway, the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation. They are also aiming to increase people's knowledge about the roles that women have in fisheries and agriculture. More recently, they have studied women's role in Mozambique and this study has been followed up by the Norwegian Embassy in Mozambique and some local authorities there. And I have had the impression that Norway itself is supporting international networks of researchers who are working on gender and on women's issues in agricultures and fisheries. They have also been providing some backing for conferences and in 2014 had a conference in India on promoting work on women's rights and gender equality.

I think that has been a very positive move in terms of raising awareness of what women are doing today. Going back to the Women in Aquaculture Series actually, we spoke to a woman in India called Shweta Vakil, and she works on a shrimp culture farm called West Coast. Her company, including herself as well, have set up a regular sort of engagement program for female staff in the company and it allows women to hold discussions, and have some work experience in different sectors of the company. If they are interested in a particular sector of the company, they can move to that sector for a while and try working there and see what areas they would like to specialize in and so on. And they can also hold discussions and share experiences and help to find solutions to the challenges they face not only in their professional lives, but also in their personal lives as well. Such as, for example, balancing child care and taking maternity leave and when to come back and how the company can support them and that kind of thing. And I think that's very positive as well.

**Marcy Wilder:**

Thank you very much. I would now like to direct two brief questions to each of our keynote speakers. Dr. Williams, in your abstract you have stated about women that frequently their gender work has been ignored, denied or even suppressed within their institutions. Can you give us an example how one might deal positively with such an obstacle?

**Meryl Williams:**

There are several examples that come to mind and some I won't promote because they involved giving up and going on to work on other things or other sectors. In the positive sense, one of the words that has come out from a lot of our presentations is "persevere" and I think that is important, but don't persevere in a silly way. Sometimes you have to take a step or two or three back and consider, was this not the right moment to try to get your point across, do you need other collaborators, other people who might be more powerful than you or may have a better inroad to decision making? I personally think that you need to try and link your issue to the issues that are important to the decision makers; There are often economic or institutional issues that are important, and use your networks to get things done.

But I think that at the end of the day, these topics we are talking about are so important for society, not just for women themselves, that it is important that we do persevere to try to get a better balance in contribution in the fisheries and agricultural sectors. So, keep going, but do it carefully and with attention to the right moment, the right time, the right partners.

**Marcy Wilder:**

Yes, absolutely. Couldn't agree more. Thank you. And one more question to Dr. Nakata. If possible, could you give us a personal example of overcoming a challenge, and your own strategy for achieving leadership?

**Kaoru Nakata:**

I used to conduct marine research. I needed to board a ship for the research, so I couldn't do the research alone. I would always explain to people what I want to do and how it can be useful to them, even though it sounded a little pushy. This is the approach I took to conducting joint research.

As part of my position in the Japan Fisheries Research and Education Agency, I re-located to the National Fisheries University two years ago. It was my first experience of working in education, and the first thing I did was to read various reports to know who is doing what, go and meet them, and develop my own network. Having a network of people is really helpful psychologically when starting new things. I think that is my strategy.

**Marcy Wilder:**

That was very, very valuable reference information for all of us. And since now we have completed the questions, I wanted to leave time to have the panelists discuss among themselves. But we will just do a little bit of that so we will have more time to take questions from the floor. So, I believe that Ms. Waycott had a question. Please do ask your question.

**Bonnie Waycott:**

I have a question for one of the panelists, for Professor Seki. What has the reaction been in Japan towards women who have started fisheries-related businesses?

**Prof. Izumi Seki:**

As Japan is promoting women's participation in general as a policy, various activities conducted by women are very well received. But such evaluation does not necessarily mean that there is support for their activities. The support programs that help these women are continually increasing in number, but the structures that can enable them to have direct access to information in the field, for example, are still lacking.

**Marcy Wilder:**

Do any of the other panelists wish to ask a question to the other panelists? Director Kura, please go ahead.

**Yumiko Kura:**

I have a general question to everyone on the panel. In Cambodia, we have a little bit of a backlash towards gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment in general because this agenda was introduced through Western donor agencies. Then, so gender/women's empowerment became the goal in itself without having justified itself sufficiently. And now we are struggling to somehow convince men in agriculture and natural resource management fields that empowering women actually has a benefit towards the greater development goals, such as improving nutrition and alleviating poverty. And this is a little bit of an unfortunate situation, but have you encountered something like this in countries where you have experience? And do you have some suggestions how to address this? That would be very helpful.

**Marcy Wilder:**

Perhaps, is there somebody who would like to answer that question, perhaps Dr. Ayson or Dr. Williams?

**Meryl Williams:**

I think it is a very important issue and not only in the overall pushing by global commitments and donor agencies. Women's empowerment is something that must be done everywhere and anywhere, but it also so happens – there is also backlash when new technologies come in, and I think Director Kura, you also mentioned a little bit of that yourself. It happens in agriculture, it certainly happens in agriculture and fisheries, where women might be especially targeted by the development agencies as the people to introduce a new technology tool to or to give help in small-scale fish farming. And it often happens in a situation where the men don't give much help for anything, where the overall local situation is quite poor. For example, one well-documented case is after the 2004 tsunami in Tamil Nadu on the east coast of India (southeast coast of India) some assistance went into helping women in small-scale brackish water agriculture enterprises and the men actually had very little livelihood opportunity in that same area. They were not getting additional help and they mostly had to migrate to the city to work in very low-paying labor. So, the help that went to the women was useful, but not really good enough because the whole community was at odds. So, I think looking at what all the needs are before coming in with some magic outside solution, we must give women-only help and we must empower women as a way to success, but of course it's quite complex to do properly.

**Marcy Wilder:**

I hope that answers your question. Thank you everybody. I would like to turn to the floor – we actually have only five more minutes (time goes very fast). Please feel free to ask on the content or to give a comment or your opinion. But please, state your name and affiliation first. Does anybody have a question?

**Male Speaker:**

Hello, good afternoon to all. I have a simple question to Dr. Williams about aquaculture. As earlier in conventional aquaculture we use a lot of water. Regarding what Goal 6 says, water and sanitation for all. And inside the water, a lot of water is used in aquaculture, they use chemicals also, that water pollution, and it causes land and soil pollution by those chemicals. So, aquaculture is really for conventional aquaculture in land fishery, conventional at a smaller scale level for a family or small income generation. Is it feasible? Because we have to use water, so water pollution and so land pollution occur. Or is it feasible or not, technically and economically and environmentally?

**Meryl Williams:**

Are you talking about water pollution in – I am sorry, in offshore aquaculture? I am sorry; I didn't really understand the question.

**Marcy Wilder:**

Maybe Dr. Ayson could answer this more specifically.

**Evelyn Grace de Jesus Ayson:**

You were asking about possible water use conflicts?

**Male speaker 1:**

Too much water is used.

**Evelyn Grace de Jesus Ayson:**

Of course, yes.

**Male Speaker:**

But the water is maybe needed for some other purposes in a small community?

**Evelyn Grace de Jesus Ayson:**

Yes, in certain areas there are issues about promoting or intensification of aquaculture and water use conflicts and also aquaculture activities are polluting water that is used commonly for other uses as well. But there are technologies in areas where there are constraints in water resources. For example, promoting recirculating aquaculture systems where you don't really use that much water. You use a limited amount of water, recycle it and use it in your production systems. So, perhaps in your area or other areas where there are limited fresh water resources, these technologies or innovations can be adopted instead.

**Marcy Wilder:**

Actually, time is going too fast, we can take only one more question. I would like to take a question that has to do with women's involvement.

**Female Speaker:**

Thank you and thanks to all the panelists for their contributions. So, this question goes to all the panelists. Women in fisheries is a topic that actually targets various parts of the Sustainable Development Goals, right? I myself, I do a lot of work on sustainability. I have worked here at the United Nations University. And my question is, what is the current engagement of women working in the different fields of sustainability science in women in fisheries and how, for example, how we can further collaborate with you in future projects or

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capacity building initiatives that you may have? And also another question about the Fish Site series, I am very curious about what is the future of women in the fisheries. How do you see that coming because now with the use of technology, there is a growing network that has a lot of potential, so how do you see what will happen in the future?

**Marcy Wilder:**

Who would like to answer that one? Ms. Waycott?

**Bonnie Waycott:**

Did you ask about the future of women regarding the Women in Aquaculture series? How I see the future of women in aquaculture going forward?

**Female Speaker:**

Yes.

**Bonnie Waycott:**

I think it is positive for women, I think there are a lot of opportunities out there and I think their roles are definitely being increasingly recognized. There are still some challenges, I think, to address. Again, going back to the series that we are working on, a lot of men feel that they are not really included in it because it is very much women in aquaculture and they don't feel so involved. And I think getting them a bit more involved in the discussions and the challenges that women face and asking for their opinions and soliciting their advice as well is definitely a positive step that we can take. I think there is still a way to go in terms of having more women in leadership roles, managerial roles and so on, and I think there needs to be a little bit more work on that. But on the whole, I think it is a positive time for women and I think going forward there will be more opportunities and I think that this topic will be discussed further as well.

**Marcy Wilder:**

Thank you. I am very sorry, I am afraid we are out of time. I would like to thank everybody once again for joining us today and I would like to ask you to please help me in giving a big hand to our distinguished speakers.