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WOMEN IN AQUACULTURE

— Proceedings of the ADCP/NORAD Workshop on Women in Aquaculture
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
WELCOMING ADDRESS by Dr. A. Lindquist	1
OPENING ADDRESS by Dr. C. E. Nash	3
SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS	7
CONCLUSIONS OF THE WORKING GROUPS	10
WOMEN IN AQUACULTURE PRODUCTION IN WEST AFRICA (B. Trottier)	17
WOMEN IN AQUACULTURE PRODUCTION IN ASIAN COUNTRIES (E. Baluyut)	29
WOMEN IN AQUACULTURE PRODUCTION IN LATIN AMERICA (M. Lizarraga)	41
WOMEN IN AQUACULTURE PRODUCTION IN OCEANIA (R. Busch)	49
HANDLING, PROCESSING, AND MARKETING OF AQUACULTURE PRODUCTS (P. Spliethoff)	57
WOMEN IN TRAINING AND EXTENSION SERVICES IN AQUACULTURE (C. Engle)	67
WOMEN'S ROLES IN INSTITUTIONS AND CREDIT (A. Librero)	83
WOMEN IN THE AQUACULTURE PROFESSIONS (C. Brown)	91
ANNEX I BIBLIOGRAPHY	101
ANNEX II WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS	109
ANNEX III QUESTIONNAIRE (B. Trottier)	115

1. SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The participants in the Workshop recognize that aquaculture is itself an emerging technology. In many developing countries there is no aquaculture sector as yet, or the sector is no more than the extent of an international technical assistance project which is trying to establish its foundations. Consequently, the opportunities for both women and men to participate in aquaculture at all have been restricted.

In those countries where an aquaculture sector has been established, women have rapidly become involved in aquaculture at every level. Not only have they expanded their traditional fisheries roles in marketing, processing, and credit, but they have become active in farming itself (production), and are well established in technological research and education. The degree of participation, however, decreases down the sector towards management, and in many countries women are noticably absent from national management, particularly in aquaculture policy-making and planning - although national management as a whole is a sub-sector of weakness.

The status of aquaculture development varies from country to country. In many countries, particularly in Africa, the aquaculture sector is based almost entirely on extensive farming practices primarily for subsistence and barter, with any surplus being sold in rural markets; in others, notably Asia, Latin America, and most developed countries, it is based on semi-intensive and intensive systems for profit and trade, including exports. The participation of women throughout the industry of aquaculture worldwide therefore covers a broad spectrum, as diverse as the many levels of sophistication attained in each country. Unfortunately, the quantitative data to measure the degree of participation is lacking. This ADCP/NORAD Workshop is the first effort to collect this important information in one place, and structure it in an understandable framework.

The level of support required to enhance the participation of women in the aquaculture sector is clearly determined by the status of national aquaculture development in each country, and particularly by the respective government policy towards the sector. The government, after all, is responsible for the development of all economic sectors in the country, including the emergent sector of aquaculture. However, an economic sector cannot be developed in isolation, and aquaculture is proving to be a sector of far-reaching consequence. It continues to be tied closely to both agriculture and fisheries. It is therefore important that all national policies and plans for economic development include consideration of an aquaculture component, and identify women as key participants among the human resources required.

The Workshop has made a number of recommendations which will benefit the participation of women in the sector indirectly, as they are relevant to the development of the sector as a whole; and certain recommendations which have direct benefits as they concern projects which are specific to women.

1. The Workshop recognizes that the groundwork it has prepared is still far from complete. The present recommendations require continuous refinement, and more constructive proposals can be made as more data become available. As an initial step towards the attainment of these and subsequent recommendations, the Workshop recommends the preparation of a number of

country case studies on aquaculture development in which various levels of participation of women are highlighted. These will serve as models for other developing countries in supporting aquaculture as a sector in national economic development programmes. These studies should be an adjunct of the Workshop and led by ADCP (FAO) and NORAD, and with the assistance of other donors.

2. The Workshop believes that there is a substantial need to communicate its findings to the women in aquaculture at large, and continue the momentum initiated by ADCP (FAO) and NORAD. Communication at present is most timely as the information can influence policy formulation; most developed and developing countries are only now recognizing the increasing importance of aquaculture and are structuring policy and formulating national plans. The Workshop recommends a number of regional conferences on the subject of Women in Aquaculture (possibly in association with proposed regional conferences on aquaculture development as a whole, or other similar events), which would in turn assist in the promotion of national workshops.

3. The Workshop recognizes that there is a need to continue the collection of statistics on the participation and contributions of women to the human resources of the aquaculture sector. A databank, similar to or in association with FARMAP (the Agricultural Farming System) should be established. Such a system would collect and code the activities performed by women in the sector to quantify and identify their labour inputs. In addition, it is a source of information necessary for directing both public and private investment in the sector.

4. The Workshop recommends a significant increase in the number of aquaculture projects which are both specific to women and to women's participation. This recommendation is relevent to all projects, and not only those requiring technical assistance.

However, greater attention is required in the overall identification, execution, and evaluation of all projects in terms of both positive and negative impacts on women. This is especially important for non-aquaculture projects which may impact existing women's enterprises in aquaculture.

In particular, the Workshop notes:

(i) The vital importance of professional market research at base level for production projects cannot be overstated to ensure total viability of each project regardless of size. In particular, handling and marketing are proven fields of acceptable employment of women, and projects aimed at reinforcing and building on these roles should be given priority if there is an existing basis for success.

(ii) Production projects invariably require a credit component. As access to credit and lack of credit management skills are constraints to the participation of women as producers, projects must have the facility to provide resources to meet these needs.

(iii) All projects at all levels (not only those for women) need more prolonged preparation, in particular to develop the baseline on which the project is appropriately planned and executed, and against which the impact

can subsequently be assessed. The baseline should be established in the proper framework (that is, on site in the case of production projects, and in the right institutional location in the case of other projects), and involve qualified women.

(iv) Training and education of women are required at all levels to increase their opportunities for participation in the sector. Although no one area merits higher priority, particular attention should be given to training for women in extension especially in locations where women are active as producers. Promotion of careers for women in aquaculture can begin in the schools. Time is a major constraint for women to receive training, and consequently training should be scheduled with this in mind.

(v) Information prepared and distributed for aquaculture projects (or by projects) should reflect the existing participation of women at all levels. This is common for consumer education, but is equally appropriate for extension materials and training manuals.

IN SUMMARY, the Workshop recognizes a strong economic relationship between the growth of the aquaculture sector worldwide and the growth of employment opportunities for women. Both can profit and benefit mutually. The need is for more well-directed efforts to involve women, and to confirm their impact on the industry.