

Role for women in aquaculture sector

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KOTA KINABALU: There is a pressing need to empower women for impactful roles in aquaculture activities.

This consideration was highlighted in the paper on "Role of Women In Aquaculture Industry : A Case Study In Taritipan Village, Marudu Bay, Kota Marudu.

The paper was jointly prepared by Master's student Nivasini Tamothran and her supervisor Prof Dr Rosazman Hussin of the Faculty of Humanities, Arts and Heritage, Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS).

Nivasini, who is pursuing a Master's degree in Environmental Sociology, spent five months at Kg Taritipan doing research on women's role in aquaculture. The paper on her observation on daily fish cage activities by the women and men, and research findings with focus on empowering women in aquaculture was a part of her thesis.

In his presentation at the just-concluded International Conference on Marine Science & Aquaculture (ICOMSA 2018) at the Magellan Sutera Hotel, UMS lecturer Prof Dr Rosazman suggested four ways in which to enhance women's role in the aquaculture sector.

These are to upgrade women's skills in fish breeding, increase funding for women, to conduct training in the village itself (and not in the distant town or city).



Prof Dr Rosazman with Master's student Nivasini.

"The other way is to change men's negative perception on women's role in aquaculture activities by awarding women for their achievements. Awarding bodies can be government agencies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or even the universities," he said.

Quoting Principal Researcher Dr Edward Hugh Allison (2003) of the Institute of Aquaculture, University of Stirling, UK, Prof Dr Rosazman stressed that women must have equal control over and access to the fish value chain due to central gender

differences in power positions. Allison had also noted the lack of training among women and less support from development agencies.

"Generally, women have less control over the fish value chain, their activities are less profitable, they have less access to resources and their fish are of poorer quality," Prof Dr Rosazman said.

From his observation, the role of women in aquaculture has been restricted and often ignored because of the socio-cultural taboos against them. Such taboos,

he added, invariably give rise to gender bias in aquaculture activities.

Small wonder why women are not making an impact in the field of aquaculture. A discussion with men and women from the village shed light on the factors that lead to the oversight of women's role in aquaculture activities.

Firstly, as far as asset ownership in the traditional fishers' community is concerned, males have ownership rights while women are denied equal access to assets.

Secondly, women have less access than men to formal sources of credit such as banks or other financial institutions. "They rarely have the collateral required (for a loan), which is usually a land title or other forms of property," said Prof Dr Rosazman.

Thirdly, it was pointed out that the distance factor and long period of training have not considered women's roles and situation as such training is normally conducted away from the village making it difficult for women to attend.

According to the speaker, most of the training courses for villagers in Taritipan are usually held in Kota Marudu town (30km away) or in the State capital of Kota Kinabalu (150km away). "Apparently, the training programme priority goes to the men first."

Last but not least, women are also lag-

ging behind in terms of exposure to new technologies and skills. The conference heard that there are many studies indicating that women are denied access to new technologies and skills, and given limited access to control over assets and resources.

Still, in the context of Kg Taritipan, women are involved in multiple tasks of fish cage production,

"They are breeding fish in cages to increase the availability of fish. Women feed the fish while their husbands clean the cages. I find the women good at administrative jobs such as taking care of sales of the fish cages and taking orders from suppliers. The men would harvest the fish.

"In addition, the women undertake the responsibility of producing fish feed while their husbands catch the crabs and trash fish. On top of it, the women are entrusted with the task of producing salted fish, and the men would deliver the stuff to restaurants," she said.

Meanwhile, Nivasini thanked the Ministry of Higher Education for assisting her with a grant for her research under the Niche Research Grant Scheme (Ecological Aquaculture).

Given the lack of studies on women's role in aquaculture activities, especially in Malaysia, she said her study is intended to fill this research gap.