Good morning!

It is a great honour for me to be here amongst very great and committed partners in our society - the Women!

The challenges we face in the next millennium are tremendous and it will take concerted and dedicated efforts for us and the younger generation to focus on the issues that beset not only our countries but also the region as a whole.

I wish that the women and men who will be interacting in this very important meeting will take up a relevant issue - that of food security - for us, the young generation, and those that are yet to come. It will certainly benefit not only the women of the world but the men as well if other issues of concern in our homes and societies are discussed since the roles women play definitely set directions for our everyday lives. Let us also in passing consider aspirations, and issues like career paths. Let us be guided, without prejudice, so we can see a wider scenario where there is active and effective interplay between men and women.

Let us all join hands and transform our dreams into reality.
Mr. Benitez, Director General Prakoboon, and colleagues.

I am proud to be associated with this special Symposium of the Fifth Asian Fisheries Forum (FAFF) and very pleased to see the Asian Fisheries Society giving prominence to this topic. The Symposium provides the opportunity to consider the issues of women in fisheries at the Asian regional level.

Today's Symposium has developed out of several earlier events, the first of which was the 1994 workshop on Women in Fisheries in Cambodia convened by PADEK, an NGO based in Cambodia. In 1996 PADEK organized a three-day seminar on women in fisheries in Indo-China countries, which I was privileged to attend. Dr. M.C. Nandeesha, then with PADEK, was the inspiration behind these two events, and in 1996, we realized that the topic should be addressed regionally, and when better to do this than at FAFF?

Fortunately, we have been able to hold this Symposium through the support of NORAD, PADEK, AFS, ICLARM and the Philippines Centennial Committee - Women's Sector.

Let me start with a disclaimer - I suspect that many of you would make the same disclaimer - I am no expert on women in fisheries. Rather, I am here as part of a voyage of discovery on this topic.

We at ICLARM recognize the importance of gender in our research program for aquatic resources management. We believe we have much to learn in this important field. The field itself is still underdeveloped.

There is a dearth of papers that concern women in fisheries in the scientific literature. Before 1975, for instance, less than one article on the topic was published per year. Between 1975 and 1979, the record improved slightly with roughly one paper a year published. From the 1980s onwards, about 17 papers have been published each year. Overall, however, only 0.25% of all published papers are related to women in fisheries, which shows the sorry state of women-focused research in fisheries.

Women in fisheries are also marginal in overall gender studies. For example, the Asian Development Bank published a sourcebook on gender and development in Asia which listed over 300 references. Only 1% of them relate to women in fisheries.

Why the low interest in women within fisheries studies? One reason proposed has been a certain amount of antagonism from within the sector for women's issues, maybe more so than in other sectors. As recently as the 1990s, women in fisheries were described by one fisheries officer in the Pacific region as a "mad aberration among aid agencies" because "women don't fish!".
Because women in fisheries is such a young field of study, its concepts and methods need further elaboration. On the question of concepts, for example, do we have the appropriate title for our Symposium today? Let me explain the dilemma.

The women in fisheries (WIF) perspective may be considered an offshoot of the women in development (WID) framework that arose in the 1960s. The WID, which was officially adopted by the United Nations in 1975, calls for the 'integration' of women in development. Women, of course, have always been part of these historical processes. Their contribution, however, is largely unrecognized and is made invisible by existing socio-cultural and economic institutions that have accorded women a subordinate status to men in society. A further limitation to the WID approach is its failure to address the need for substantial changes in these structures to improve the condition and status of women.

One alternative approach is the women and development (WAD) framework - and consequently a 'women and fisheries' (WAF) framework - which arose in the 1970s. WAD focuses on the relationship between women and the development process, and delves into such issues as social inequity and oppression based on class and gender, among others. The WAD framework also advocates the empowerment of women to bring about changes in gender roles and relations. The WAF framework perspective, therefore, would look at all factors that affect women's 'productive' work in the market and 'reproductive' work at home to meaningfully define women's contribution and role in fisheries.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the gender and development (GAD) concept emerged, which proposes a holistic view of societal organization that looks at the gender division of labour and women's access to and control over productive resources.

Gender-disaggregated data, for instance, will show us that as a general picture, men and women engage in different tasks in small-scale fisheries and aquaculture. In fisheries, men build the boats and catch the fish whereas women make and mend the nets, process and sell the catch. In aquaculture, men dig the ponds and stock them with fingerlings, while women tend the ponds and feed the fish. Men and women harvest the fish while women usually sell the harvest.

However, beyond roles and gender-based activities, other key factors come into play in a GAD perspective. Differential access to and control over the means of fisheries and aquaculture production by men and women, for instance, should be a major consideration when assessing the benefits of improved production techniques.

If we had used the GAD concept earlier on, this may have overcome the perception expressed to us by many male colleagues that this Symposium was not for them! In academia, however, the move to gender and fisheries (GAF) is not fully accepted. Some women fear that this approach will divert attention from women-focused issues such as women's multiple burdens, the increasing 'feminization' of poverty, and the need for empowering women.

Let me conclude my welcoming remarks then by posing a dual challenge for this Symposium to consider. Since the fisheries sector is undergoing great upheavals caused by internal and external factors, how can we (a) help shape policies and actions relating to gender in the sector, and (b) engage in women-focused research that needs special attention?
Distinguished guests of the day, Senator Helena Benitez, Chairperson of the Philippines National Centennial Commission, Women's sector, M r. Dhammarong Prakobboon, Director General of Fisheries in Thailand, Dr. Meryl Williams, Symposium Chair and Director General of ICLARM, Professor Dr. Mohammed Shariff, President of the Asian Fisheries Society, ladies and gentlemen.

I am privileged to welcome each one of you to this important event being organized by the Asian Fisheries Society in partnership with various other organizations. With a good representation of participants from various Asian countries and from different disciplines of fisheries, we hope that the output of today's event will help in resolving many of the issues related to gender in Asian fisheries. Well-focused gender development programs in fisheries are still few in Asia and the need to ensure sustained gender programs by developing appropriate process-centred gender activities in fisheries is expressed by many. The Beijing international conference on women recognized the role of women in all facets of fisheries, and it was suggested that policies and programs that would benefit women in the fisheries sector need to be developed.

In Indo-China countries, owing to frequent wars, women are the major group contributing to food production and the economy. In view of the importance of fisheries for the people in the region, in 1996 a regional seminar on "Women in Fisheries in Indo-China countries" was organized by PADEK in collaboration with various government and non-governmental organizations. The participation of Dr. Meryl Williams in that event as the keynote speaker provided new direction to that regional event. Outputs from the Phnom Penh seminar demonstrated the contribution of women to fisheries in all four Indo-China countries, and the need for intensifying and developing programs in the region which were gender sensitive. The participants of the Phnom Penh seminar also took a decision that the dialogue initiated at the Indo-China level should be continued at the Asian level. It was decided that the Asian Fisheries Society triennial events, which bring together large numbers of Asia's best scientists and development personnel should be used to discuss this issue at the Asian level. Hence today's event is organized with a purpose of understanding the progress in research and development programs in respect of gender at the Asian level, and stimulating further development on this important topic. From my experience in the field, I am also of the opinion that there are more social issues related to fisheries development than technical ones. However, very little effort has been made to understand these social issues and develop appropriate programs to mitigate them. Unless available resources are efficiently used to address these social issues, in which gender tops the list, the fisheries sector may not be able to bridge the gap between supply and demand in the Asian region in the coming decades. We are optimistic that this forum will take note of these deficiencies in fisheries development and make coordinated efforts to solve the problems. I once again take this opportunity to welcome every one of you and I seek your active participation and contribution to enrich the symposium proceedings.

M.C. Nandeesha  
CARE Bangladesh
Dr. Mohammed Shariff, AFS President; Dr. Meryl Williams, Director General; ICLARM, distinguished guests; ladies and gentlemen.

It is indeed my pleasure to deliver this speech on the issue of women in Asian fisheries to this gathering. At the outset, let me thank the organizers for inviting me to this very important Symposium. When I received invitation, I did not hesitate, but readily agreed to take part in this event as I have always realized the importance of the roles women play in the agriculture sector, including fisheries.

As we all know, this year the World Food Day, organized by the FAO, highlighted the roles of women under the short but meaningful theme of "Women Feed the World". I believe that all of you will agree with me that women carry many burdens, not only those associated with running a household. In the agricultural countries of Asia, women work hard in the fields as well.

The fisheries sector is regarded as a vital link to food security as well as providing employment and export earnings opportunities for many Asian countries. Asia is the biggest contributor to regional as well as global fisheries production. In 1996, marine and inland capture fisheries were as high as 40 million tons, accounting for 40% of global fisheries production. Capture fisheries in Asia tend to increase at an annual growth rate of 2-4%. Aquaculture production on the other hand reached 34 million tons, with a record of producing 90% of the total global volume. It has maintained an average annual growth rate of over 10%.

The success behind the fisheries and aquaculture development in Asia is partly due to the direct and indirect contributions of women to fisheries and fisheries-related areas. The statistic for women's involvement in this activity in Asia is unavailable. In Thailand, statistics show that roughly 162,000 fishermen are involved in marine capture fisheries.

The need to spend long periods at sea away from home limits the participation of women in deep-sea fishing. We do not expect that many women take a direct part in this difficult task. However, women may play supportive roles on shore and at fish landing ports. In many fishing communities, women make and repair nets, and have the primary responsibility for fish marketing.

According to a survey, there are 164,000 aquaculture farms in Thailand. If at least one woman commits to on-farm activities, then some 160,000 women participate in aquaculture production. Women's contribution to aquaculture may include farm monitoring, feed preparation, fish feeding, general management, and, eventually, fish marketing.

The sector in fisheries where I believe women have high potential is in fish processing.

D. Prakoboon
Director General, Directorate of Fisheries, Thailand

WELCOME REMARKS
and preserve fish products. It can be expected that hundreds of thousands of women work in these enterprises. At a professional level, women show their talents as fishery researchers, fishery lecturers, and fishery extension officials.

Of the 3,000 fishery officials in the Department of Fisheries in Thailand, 1000, or 33%, are women. Therefore, the roles of Asian women in fisheries cannot be overlooked. Women are proud of their dedication and the contributions they make through their various fisheries activities.

I am glad to know that the issues of women in fisheries are once more being emphasized. This Symposium will again reveal to you newer aspects of Asian women in fisheries. I wish this Symposium every success and may it draw more attention to all women in fisheries. Finally, I wish all of the participants good health and a pleasant stay in Thailand.

Thank you.