

All Hands on Deck: Reducing Gender Inequality in Ocean Related Fields

By: Vanessa DiDomenico

The Third International Women’s Conference organized by the World Maritime University met from April 4-5, 2019 in Malmo, Sweden. The theme of this year’s conference was “Empowering Women in the Maritime Community.” Currently, women only comprise 2% of the seafaring workforce. This conference provided insight into why women are underrepresented at sea, recognized those women who participate in the maritime community, and recommended further actions to promote gender diversity among the industry.



The United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development were adopted by more than 150 world leaders during the September 2015 UN Summit in New York. Empowering women in the maritime industry is a

cross cutting opportunity to strengthen multiple goals including: Goal 4: Quality Education, Goal 5: Gender Equality, Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth, Goal 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure; Goal 10: Reduced Inequalities and Goal 14: Oceans.

Shipping is the lifeblood of the global economy. With over 50,000 ships carrying a diverse array of cargoes, the maritime industry connects people, goods and ports. How can such a large industry, where 80% of goods by volume and 70% of goods by value are moved by sea, be comprised of only 2% of women seafarers? The answer is deep rooted and widely dispersed among structural and cultural barriers. However, because the industry is interconnected, small local changes can make a large global impact. Governments, academia and industry leaders and professionals all have a key role to play in empowering women at sea, and ashore. I found that the conference presented this large challenge, which seemed daunting at first, as an opportunity to participants to take action. The conference inspired me to continue promoting maritime awareness and allowed me to gather these key take-aways.

The conference highlighted the importance of sustainable shipping and ocean related industries as well. The role of women in fishing is large in developing countries, however their access to cold storage facilities and other loans or funding is severely limited compared to males in that area. Governments and academia should work together to highlight the importance and underutilized potential of women's contributions to the workforce. Conference panelists reiterated the findings of a 2015 McKinsey Institute report, titled [The Power of Parity](#), which found that \$12 trillion could be added to global GDP growth through the participation of women in the workforce. Developing nations and emerging markets should embrace the opportunity. Diversity in the workplace adds competitiveness and innovation. Men and women can have different ways of approaching challenges and new perspectives can foster new ideas and growth.

Socio-Economic Benefits of Women in Fishing & Seafood Harvesting

The diagram illustrates the socio-economic benefits of women in fishing and seafood harvesting. At the center is a circle labeled "Harvest, Smoke, Package & Distribute". Five other circles are arranged around it, connected by arrows, representing the following benefits:

- Economic Growth**
- Nutrition (Protein) (2.2KG per animal consumption)**
- Job Creations (40% direct employment)**
- Value Addition**
- Food Security**

A woman in a red jacket is speaking at a podium in front of this slide. A red cushion with a female symbol and the text "WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT" is visible on the left.

OCEAN & MARITIME PROGRAMME

The infographic titled "OCEAN & MARITIME PROGRAMME" features a central illustration of a coastal community with boats and people. It is surrounded by several key areas of focus:

- Coastal Hazard & Risk
- Green Ports
- Ocean & Climate Monitoring
- Oceanography
- Maritime Boundaries
- Energy Efficient Shipping
- Shoreline Change Assessment
- Safety of Navigation
- Habitat Mapping

A woman in a blue patterned dress is speaking at a podium in front of this slide.

Recommendations: Regional & Global Actions for Women Empowerment in Fisheries

Global Actions	Regional Actions	Local Actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> [1] Women must be allowed to participate in decision making progress; [2] Access to physical and capital resources; [3] Training and Formal Education to increase productivity; [4] Access to global market instead of being small scales 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> [1] Knowledge Transfer / Exchange Programs for women in Fisheries and Aquaculture; [2] Support regional women groups to establish educative programs for women in fisheries and aquaculture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> [1] Establishment of the Liberian Chapter Women in Maritime / Fisheries; [2] Formulate stronger policies and initiative that adequately address women's issues.

Global governments and international organizations are working to develop, adopt and enforce gender-responsive policies and related programs. Representatives from the International Labour Organization (ILO) promoted the 100th anniversary of the organization and highlighted its [Quantum Leap for Gender Equality](#) report, published on March 7, 2019, which examines women's engagement in work worldwide among all industries. The ILO representatives also urged member states to ratify and implement the [Maritime Labour Convention, 2006](#). This convention, also known as the Seafarers' Bill of Rights, entered into force on August 20, 2013 and established social justice through policy implementation regarding minimum living and working conditions onboard ships.

Governments must work alongside international organizations, nonprofits, industry and trade associations to share best practices and data collection to measure and track initiatives for female participation and retention in the industry. Governments must also ensure that the policy development process is consultative, participatory and includes all relevant stakeholders. As a majority of seafarer's unions are represented by men, women also need a voice during the legislative process. Also, governments should work with international organizations and associations to ensure quality education standards for maritime training are implemented, access to those programs are visible and granted to women, and funding is supported by fellowships to women in developing countries.



In addition to government support of gender diversity initiatives, policies and programs, academia also has a key role to play in empowering women at onboard and ashore. Women and girls in elementary and grade school should be encouraged to pursue career paths in the maritime and ocean fields, particularly within STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics). The maritime industry and the career opportunities should be presented at career days, science fairs and within curriculum topics. Classrooms should participate in and chose from a wide variety of International Maritime Organization (IMO) maritime awareness programs and similarly created Adopt-A-Ship initiatives for classrooms to gain further insight into the technological advances and future of the maritime industry.

Conference speakers also stated that academic funding should be given to gender research to enable the policies that governments will discuss and adopt. Panelists at the conference discussed how research funding and department boards are heavily male dominated which significantly impacts areas of focus and project proposal funding. Fair representation is needed on boards that set research topics and grants.

Maritime companies, including those in shipping, ports, fishing, energy and other sea-related activities should also work to attract and retain talent from other industries. Maritime hiring managers and decision makers are also mostly male and should have a diverse gender ratio within interviews and board settings to promote different perspectives and solutions.

The Empowering Women in the Maritime Community conference presented numerous opportunities and developed recommendations for governments, academia, businesses and individuals to reduce the gender disparity in the maritime industry. Legislation and national policies, as well as ship owners and educators, can change the visibility, access, recruitment and retention of women in the maritime industry. Encouraging more women to be

present on employment panels and involved as stakeholders in key policy decisions, interviews and research funding will aid in changing structural barriers. Having a zero tolerance for harassment and bullying at sea and onshore and promoting different career paths within maritime companies is also integral to reducing the gender employment gap. There is no one size fits all solution. Cultural aspects need to be recognized and strategies need to be tailored to shift mindsets. The future is exciting, and the new emerging technology and digitalization of ships will provide even more opportunities for women to join the maritime industry. Governments, academia, companies and individuals need to make pledges, policy and take action to continue to empower women in the maritime community.

In conclusion, this conference allowed me to understand the intersection of policy, international law and the role of international organizations and individuals regarding a specific topic. The conference hosted over 300 participants and presented opportunities for me to network with speakers including Ms. Helen Agren, Swedish Ambassador for the Ocean, Captain Kate McCue, the first American female cruise ship captain, Ms. Marie Mckinnon, Senior Policy Officer for the International Seabed Authority, Ms. Chikunga the Deputy Minister of Transport for the Government of South Africa, Ms. Ekwall, Policy Officer for the EU, Ms. Glassco, Director General for the National Fisheries and Aquaculture Authority and many other speakers and participants. I was invited to be on a Shipping Podcast this summer through a WISTA (Women In Shipping and Transportation Association) to discuss my ideas for a youth oriented non-profit that will help young professionals become more involved in policy decisions and have opportunities to interact with the industry through solution oriented competitions.

During the conference, I could not help but notice how my foundation from the Fletcher School was continuously being highlighted. When listening to many of the presenters I was able to follow and engage in discussions because the structure and content of the presentations were policy plans, which I was introduced to during my International Energy Policy class. I saw how

policy decisions and recommendations from senior advisors and ministers could directly impact the maritime community. Attending this conference has inspired me to work towards becoming an influential member of the international community where I can to shape and influence policy decisions to reduce the gender disparity in the maritime and ocean related community. This conference has showed me the toolkits that can be used to collaborate with government, academia and industry and most importantly has shown me the overwhelming passion that is driving gender equality at sea.