

### **3.9 Gender and Fisheries**

#### **Introduction**

The important involvement of women in natural resource-based livelihoods and resource management in the developing world has long been acknowledged, but rarely been valued equally with the contribution of men. In fisheries, women have traditionally been occupied in pre- and post-harvest processing of seafood products and marketing the catch.

Women and men are engaged in complementary activities in fisheries. In most regions, the large boats used to fish off-shore and in deep-sea waters have male crews, while women manage smaller boats and canoes. Many more women engage in fishing with rudimentary equipment, wading along the shores collecting shellfish and seaweed. In artisanal fishing communities, women are mainly responsible for performing the skilled and time-consuming tasks that take place on-shore, such as net making and mending, processing the catch and marketing it.

#### **Gender Aspects of Fisheries**

In many countries, it is mostly rural women who are engaged in inland fishing. In Africa, they fish the rivers and ponds. In Asia, where fish and seafood are an integral part of the diet of many cultures, women are active in both artisanal and commercial fisheries. In parts of south India, women net prawns from backwaters. In Thailand and Laos, they fish in canals. In the Philippines, they fish from canoes in coastal lagoons. Women have also assumed a leading role in the rapid growth of aquaculture. They often perform most of the work of feeding and harvesting fish and shellfish, as well as in processing the catch. Women in Lesotho and other southern African countries participated in an [Aquaculture for Local Community Development Programme](#), sponsored by FAO, and became managers of small household ponds. The fish produced in these ponds are either eaten by the family or sold to purchase other foods. Often elderly women and children collect shellfish along the shores, adding to family income and nutrition (FAO, 2004).

In some regions, women have become important fish entrepreneurs. For example, in the European Union, women control 39 per cent of the fish industry, administering and controlling significant sums of money and generating substantial returns for their household and community (Aguilar, 2002). As such, women earn, administer and control significant sums of money, financing a variety of fish-based enterprises and generating substantial returns for their household as well as the community.

#### **Key Issues about Gender and Fisheries**

The lack of documentation on women's role in fisheries can be explained by a number of factors. First, production goals continue to dominate national policy agendas. Thus, research attention continues to be focused on the catching sector (male dominated) rather than the processing and marketing sector (female dominated). Second, research is often 'gender-blind' and fails to see the broader livelihoods picture. This is compounded by researchers who are often unable to include women in interviews and discussions for cultural reasons, or because they are persuaded that male family members are best placed to speak for them. Third, at the national level, fisheries data is often aggregated with the agriculture sector and there is no sex-disaggregated data,

making it doubly difficult to extract information pertinent to the fisheries sector in general, and to gender in particular.

The sexual division of work in the fisheries sector means that women are predominantly responsible for downstream activities (including pre-financing fishing activities), but they are rarely present in the main catching activity. Nevertheless, reduced catches and the worsening economic situation of fishing communities have implications for women in fishing activities.

The problem of direct access to the resource is complex: more often than not there is no real cultural reason for preventing women from fishing, save that as a hard, physical activity it is considered more suitable for men. It might also be uncomfortable for women to be present on the male-dominated fishing trawlers for days at a time. One can find women active in some inshore fisheries or lagoons, such as in Sao Tomé, the Gambia, and Senegal. However, even when they are owners of dugouts, women may employ men to fish in order to supplement their supply of fish during the lean season. This then poses the problem of how to control the men, who sometimes try to cheat them by landing their catch at other beaches, or abandon the dugouts or the nets at other sites. Examples from the Tanji community in The Gambia and the Ipata-Jebba communities in Nigeria show that the women have vocalised their need for a jetty to force men to land fish at designated points (Horemans and Jallow, 1997).

Bennett et al. (2004) noted the gender differentiation over the control of property and assets where women often earn more than the men. These women often reinvest their resources into the fisheries sector, not only because they consider it a family heritage, but also in hopes of being the first recipients of the catch. Nevertheless, experience has shown that women often find themselves in a no-win situation because of their lack of control and decision-making power.

The researchers (Bennett et al., 2004) acknowledged that the ability to influence how those resources are managed is a problem. Women rarely have access to the process of management, although their downstream activities also depend on these resources. Indeed, it was acknowledged that women were rarely represented in the formal institutions of fisheries management or in the local village councils, which manage fisheries resources. In the case of Niger, following a project on facilitating gender equality between men and women, two women were finally admitted to the council of village elders. What this made clear was that access to the resource and access to financial capital are secondary in importance to access to power structures and information. The latter can ultimately be a very powerful tool for those engaged in market and commerce-based activities. In Senegal, many fisher-women are ostensibly in a far stronger position than men. They often own the capital and the means of production, and men are in their employment. The problems arise in the ability of women to be able to exercise their power in a fruitful way and to access the real power structures that influence the decision-making processes related to fisheries management at local, regional and national levels.

### **Gender-Sensitive Measures in the Fisheries Sector**

Since the beginning of the International Decade for Women in 1975, efforts have been made to improve the living conditions of women and to correct the imbalances between men and women. The approach concentrated on:

- providing formal education, adult literacy classes, training and extension services;

- providing informal education in child care, sanitation, and nutrition;
- introducing improved technologies and methods to ease women's burdens and increase their efficiency;
- developing opportunities for more income-generating activities and access to credit; and
- encouraging women to be active in community activities, decision-making, and project implementation and monitoring.

Such support activities have been directed to fishing projects for women in fishing communities. Fisheries projects have contributed to women developing and exercising leadership and sharing in decision-making that affects their future and that of their community.

#### *Improvements in infrastructure*

Some assistance has been directed to improving the technology and facilities available to women. The improvement in road and market infrastructure in several African countries has eased the burden on women in their marketing and distribution of fishery products. Some of the infrastructure development has been directed specifically at women. The improvements have shortened the travel time and transaction periods, which not only made their operations more efficient, but also gave them more time to take care of their families. The efficiency has increased their incomes which are spent mainly on food and other household needs. Technical and financial supports are important elements for domestic, social and economic activities. The support can be in technological research, extension and training, banking services, or credit facilities.

#### *Management initiatives*

Another way to get fisher-women actively involved is by introducing management initiatives into fishing areas used specifically by women. For example, implementing management strategies in mangrove areas, sand-flats and lagoons along the shore can assist women to identify the types of species available, the changes affecting them and how these problems may be addressed. They will also be able to contribute to solving the identified problems by taking individual actions.

#### *Networking*

Women can also actively take part in national and regional networks of practitioners working in the area of community management. Through these forums there can be avenues for exchange of information and lessons learnt from the field.

#### *Research*

Areas of research that could contribute to improving gender balance in the fisheries sector are:

- Assessment of country needs, especially in gender aspects of fisheries management;
- Documentation of traditional knowledge, institutions and skills on women's participation in the fisheries sector;
- Assessment and documentation of customary management systems and how these have changed/ or have been modified;
- Fishing trends and seafood consumption patterns in rural coastal communities;
- Development of success indicators from management projects already implemented;
- An inventory of targeted species and distribution patterns at the local level; and

- Assessment of factors that affect fish abundance and distribution and ways of addressing identified problems.

## References

Aguilar, L, 2002. *Fisheries and Aquaculture in Coastal Zones: Gender makes the Difference*. Geneva: IUCN Briefing Notes.

FAO, 2004: Gender and food security. Fisheries. Available at <http://www.fao.org/Gender/en/fish-e.htm>

Horemans, B.W, and A.M. Jallow (eds.), 1997. *Report of the Workshop on Gender Roles and Issues in Artisanal Fisheries in West Africa*, December 11-13 1996, Lomé. Cotonou: Programme for the Integrated Development of Artisanal Fisheries in West Africa. IDAF/WP/97. Available at: <http://www.fao.org/DOCREP/x0205e/x0205e00.htm>

Veitayaki, Joeli and Irene Noaczek, 2003. Filling the Gaps: Indigenous Researchers, Subsistence Fisheries and Gender Analysis, *SPC Women in Fisheries Information*, Bulletin #13, Available at: <http://www.spc.int/coastfish/News/WIF/WIF13/Veitayaki.pdf>

Bennett, Elisabeth. Valette, Hélène Rey Mäiga, Kassoum Yacouba. and Modesta Medard, 2004. *Room to maneuver: gender and coping strategies in the fisheries sector*. Available at: [http://www.onefish.org/servlet/BinaryDownloaderServlet?filename=1114519604671\\_Englishversion\\_report.doc&refID=247648](http://www.onefish.org/servlet/BinaryDownloaderServlet?filename=1114519604671_Englishversion_report.doc&refID=247648)

## Additional Resources

Aramanza Mandanda, 2003. *Commercialization and Gender Roles among Lake Victoria Shore Fishing Communities of Uganda*. Department of Women and Gender Studies Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda. Available at: [http://www.wougnet.org/Documents/CommercialisationGenderRolesLakeVictoria.doc#\\_Toc59246071](http://www.wougnet.org/Documents/CommercialisationGenderRolesLakeVictoria.doc#_Toc59246071)

Houndékon, B.R., Tempelman, D.E. and A.M. Ijff, 1990. *Report of round table meeting on women's activities and community development in artisanal fisheries (projects) in West Africa*. IDAF Working Paper #30, Cotonou: Integrated Development of Artisanal Fisheries in West Africa (IDAF) Project.

ICSF, 1997. *Women First: Report of the Women in Fisheries Programme of ICSF in India – vol. 1*, Chennai: International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (Samudra Dossier, Women in Fisheries Series No. 2).

Rathgeber, Eva, 2003. *Dry Taps. Gender and Poverty in Water Resource Management*. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). Available at:

<ftp://ftp.fao.org/docrep/fao/005/AC855E/AC855E00.pdf>

Satia, B.P. and C.Z. Wétouhossou, (eds.) 1996. *Report of the Working Group on Women's Key Role and Issues Related to Gender in Fishing Communities*. IDAF Working Paper # 79, Cotonou: Programme for the Integrated Development of Artisanal Fisheries in West Africa (IDAF).

Siar, S. V. and L. M. Caneba, 1998. "Women and the question of sustainable development in a Philippine fishing village," *International Journal of Sustainable Development and World Ecology*, 5(1), pp. 51-58.

Touray, I, 1996. *Study on Women's Organisations in Brufut and Gunjur Communities and the Factors that Favour or Impede their Sustainability in the Gambia*. IDAF Working Paper # 88, Cotonou: Programme for the Integrated Development of Artisanal Fisheries in West Africa.

### Spanish Language Resources

*En una situación precaria. Las Mujeres que trabajan en las plantas procesadoras de pescado chilenas afrontan condiciones de trabajo adversas y un futuro incierto* (no date, author)

In this report it is explained in a quantitative way how workers, especially women, have bad working conditions in an industry that has grown extensively in the last years mainly in their production for exports.

Disponible en:

[http://www.icsf.net/jsp/publication/samudra/pdf/spanish/issue\\_22/art09.pdf](http://www.icsf.net/jsp/publication/samudra/pdf/spanish/issue_22/art09.pdf)

*Trabajadoras versus modelo exportador: Las estrellas sin Brillo* (no date, author)

La agroindustria y la salmonicultura son los sectores más dinámicos de la economía chilena. Sus utilidades alcanzan cifras que hipnotizan a los promotores del libre mercado. Sin embargo, sus cuantiosos retornos se explican por el bajo costo de la mano de obra que utilizan. Sus empleados, principalmente mujeres, son sometidos a tratos inhumanos, que vulneran los derechos más básicos consagrados en el Código del Trabajo.

Disponible en:

<http://www.clasecontraclase.cl/scripts/documentos-descargar.php?id=108>

*El papel de la mujer en la pesca. Comisión Europea.* (no date)

The study addressed the promotion of equal opportunities and rights for men and women. The rationale for the study was to analyse gender mainstreaming in fisheries development by:

- Examining the roles of women in the fisheries sector of the communities dependent on fisheries
- Providing an analysis of the obstacles and the potential related to women's contribution to the socio-economic development and diversification of these communities; and
- Identifying ways and means for the promotion of equal opportunities for women in the fisheries sector.

Disponible en:

[http://europa.eu.int/comm/fisheries/doc\\_et\\_publ/liste\\_publi/studies/women/summary\\_es.pdf](http://europa.eu.int/comm/fisheries/doc_et_publ/liste_publi/studies/women/summary_es.pdf)

[http://europa.eu.int/comm/fisheries/doc\\_et\\_publ/liste\\_publi/studies/women/index.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/fisheries/doc_et_publ/liste_publi/studies/women/index.htm)

(English)

Beltrán Turriago, Claudia Stella [El rol de la mujer colombiana en la pesca y la acuicultura](#). Disponible en:

<http://www.laneta.apc.org/cgi-bin/WebX?230@229.G0WiaPGuxlc^0@.ee738e8>

Morales Flood de Ramos, Dra. María Esther, *La mujer en la industria pesquera y acuicola ecuatoriana*. Disponible en: <http://mujeres.infopesca.org/articulos/art003.htm>

Ayala Galdós, María Estela. *Situación de la mujer peruana en la pesca* Disponible en: <http://mujeres.infopesca.org/articulos/art002.htm>

Fernández, Sonia. *La mujer en el sector pesquero uruguayo* . Disponible en: <http://mujeres.infopesca.org/articulos/art001.htm>

*"Diagnóstico sobre la situación del trabajo femenino en el sector pesquero y acuícola argentino - Región Patagónica"*. Disponible en: [http://mujeres.infopesca.org/publicaciones/pdf/pub\\_argentina.PDF](http://mujeres.infopesca.org/publicaciones/pdf/pub_argentina.PDF)

*"Informe Preliminar de la Segunda Reunión de Puntos Focales de la Red Latinoamericana de las Mujeres del Sector Pesquero - Acuícola"*. Disponible en: [http://mujeres.infopesca.org/publicaciones/pdf/pub\\_informe\\_final.pdf](http://mujeres.infopesca.org/publicaciones/pdf/pub_informe_final.pdf)

*"Primera Reunión de Puntos Focales de la Red Latinoamericana de las Mujeres del Sector Pesquero - Acuícola"* - Informe Final - 5 y 6 de octubre del 2000. Disponible en: [http://mujeres.infopesca.org/novedades/nov\\_1\\_resumen.htm](http://mujeres.infopesca.org/novedades/nov_1_resumen.htm)

## Key Web Sites

**FAO** The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations leads international efforts to defeat hunger. The gender and food security page offers information on diverse subjects: agriculture, division of labor, environment, forestry, nutrition, fisheries, rural economies, population, and education.  
[www.fao.org/Gender/](http://www.fao.org/Gender/)

**ICSF-Women Program** The International Collective in Support of Fish Workers (ICSF) is an international non-government organization that works towards the establishment of equitable, gender-just, self-reliant and sustainable fisheries, particularly in the small-scale, artisanal sector. ICSF draws its mandate from the historic International Conference of Fish Workers and their Supporters (ICFWS), held in Rome in 1984, parallel to the World Conference on Fisheries Management and Development organised by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).  
[www.icsf.net](http://www.icsf.net)

*Red Latinoamericana de las mujeres del sector pesquero.*

This website promotes the sharing of information, experiences, knowledge and aims to develop specific projects related with women participation in this sector.

Disponible en: <http://mujeres.infopesca.org/articulos.htm>

## Case Studies

The complete case studies are found in the annex of this resource guide

- Senegal: Role of Women in a Model of Community Management of Fish Resources and Marine Environments, Cayar
- Tanzania: Gender and the Protection of Freshwater Resources