

Making women's roles visible

Recent case studies in Cambodia, Myanmar and Thailand explored women's roles in the fisheries value chain

By **Jariya Sornkliang**
(jariya@seafdec.org),
Fisheries Management
Scientist, Southeast Asian
Fisheries Development
Center, Thailand

Women's contributions in the fisheries value chain are not well recognised, even though there are many tasks in the fisheries value chain involving women. To show how important the women involved in fisheries are, gender analysis on women and men's roles in fisheries is crucial. Gender analysis reveals context in a fishing community and promotes gender integration and responsiveness in fisheries development plans.

In the period 2017-2018, the Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center (SEAFDEC), supported by the Government of Sweden and in partnership with the Mangroves for the Future project under the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN/MFF) as well as the Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI), conducted an important regional gender study in South and Southeast Asia. SEAFDEC selected the study sites in three areas, namely, Kep in Cambodia, Kawthaung in Myanmar, and Trat in Thailand. The study aimed to understand the state of women and men in the fisheries value chain of each study site. The study brought to light several interesting findings with respect

to women and men's roles in the fisheries value chains in each of the three study sites.

At Okra Sa and Thmey Villages, Kep Province (Cambodia), both women and men were involved in various fisheries activities. While men ventured to sea for fishing, women supported fisheries with onshore activities such as cleaning nets and vessels, cleaning, segregating processing and marketing the catch.

In Pu Lone Tone Tone, Kawthaung (Myanmar), women prepared food to supply men who conducted the fishing activities on board seagoing vessels and also maintained the fishing gear and the vessel. No women worked onboard the vessels at sea. The reason appeared to be due to the long periods involved in such fishing operations, ranging from a week to even a month at sea. Later, the catch would be unloaded and transported, with women responsible for the sorting, processing and selling of the fish.

In Mairroot Sub-district, Klong Yai, Trat Province (Thailand), husbands and wives participated in the fishing activities together because the fishing ground was not too far

SEAFDEC



Cutting fish for processing in Myanmar. Women's contributions in the fisheries value chain are not well recognised, even though there are many tasks in the fisheries value chain involving women



Street fish sale, Thailand. Fishery policymakers are required to better recognise the diverse roles and perspectives of men and women in fisheries to achieve equitable outcomes and livelihood sustainability goals in fishing communities

from their houses. They shared several activities together from cleaning and mending fishing gear, fish sorting on land, processing, and selling products to the middleman. However, only women prepared the food for onboard operations. There was no activity that men did alone in the Thai case study.

During the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, SEAFDEC conducted a rapid study on the impacts of the pandemic. The results found that many women became jobless and lost their incomes from shore-based activities because of the limited fishing periods in some areas or, in other areas, from markets closing during the pandemic. Online business platforms have become a significant adaptation of the family businesses to help them cope with the pandemic. Online business was mainly facilitated by women or younger family members and increased the interaction between family members.

Women take part in all the activities and processes of the fisheries value chain. However, women's roles are dominant in gear mending and cleaning, catch segregating, product processing, and marketing. Based on our findings, both men and women are involved in all the fisheries value chains. That is, we did not come across even one value chain in which all the workers were of one gender only. However, equal participation of men and women in terms of access and rights is still a distant dream.

The effect of the COVID-19 pandemic shows that women have high adaptation and resilience even under challenging pandemic circumstances. Therefore, women should be the target of focused efforts to develop human capacity in development programmes, such as by empowering women to generate and increase their fisheries incomes. Along with support for a greater economic role, women's attention to conservation also should be reconsidered so that they can help strengthen the sustainable utilisation of fishery resources.

In conclusion, fishery policymakers are required to better recognise the diverse roles and perspectives of men and women in fisheries to achieve equitable outcomes and livelihood sustainability goals in fishing communities. A key recommendation of this study, which was carried out before and after the pandemic, is better documentation of women's roles through the collection of sex-disaggregated data and through gender analyses of women's and men's roles in value chains. This will support fisheries project managers to plan realistic development programmes in fisheries management based on gender roles and needs. It will lead to more gender-sensitive and gender-responsive projects towards gender equity and equality in the fishing community. 📌

The effect of the COVID-19 pandemic shows that women have high adaptation and resilience even under challenging pandemic circumstances

Women's empowerment through climate action

In Myanmar, FAO's FishAdapt project is strengthening the adaptive capacity and resilience of fisheries-and aquaculture-dependent livelihoods

By **Angela Lentisco** (angie.lentisco@gmail.com), Marine and Coastal Specialist, FishAdapt Gender Advisor, Thailand

Women's empowerment and gender equality have been recognized as necessary conditions for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development. The SDG Goal 5 – 'Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls' – has 14 related indicators, and there are an additional 39 gender-related indicators across the other SDGs, including those that track the elimination of poverty and hunger, the reduction of inequality, the promotion of health, education and decent employment, as well as those related to sustainable cities climate change action, and peace.

Under SDG Goal 14 – 'Life Below Water – Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development' – which also looks at the management of the fisheries and aquaculture sectors, there is no direct gender target. However, one of the key targets is 'Target 14.b Support Small-scale fisheries – Provide access for small-scale artisanal fishers to marine resources

and markets'. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) tracks this indicator while analysing the efforts made by countries to implement the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines). The SSF Guidelines were developed to address the needs of small-scale fisheries as part of the implementation of the 1995 FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries. These Guidelines strongly emphasize the need for gender mainstreaming as an integral part of small-scale fisheries development strategies, calling on states to meet their obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, urging countries to address any existing discrimination against women in the fisheries sector, and encouraging women's participation in fisheries organizations.

Women's contributions to the fisheries sector are significant, with women representing

ROBERTO SANDOVAL/FAO



A woman working at a shrimp paste processing factory, Myanmar. Due to high insecurity in jobs in fisheries, women (mainly young women) are migrating to Yangon, Mandalay and abroad, searching for potential jobs, including as factory workers

about half of the workforce, as estimated by the 2012 World Bank report titled 'Hidden Harvest – Global Contributions of Capture Fisheries'. Women's roles in fisheries are often concentrated in processing and trading of fishery products, though many women also mend nets, sort catch, glean and fish, and are usually the main care givers of the fishing households. Not taking gender issues into account leads to discrimination against women fishworkers; further, it also leads to productivity and income losses, and food and nutrition insecurity, especially in poor households.

To address these imbalances, interventions in the fisheries sector must recognize gender issues and include measures that empower women and enhance their participation in decision making. Calls for achieving gender equality in the fisheries and aquaculture sectors must be articulated into context specific gender guidance for fisheries and aquaculture projects working on the ground, including those trying to improve the sustainability and resilience of these sectors against climate change. One such example is the FishAdapt project in Myanmar.

The FAO project 'FishAdapt: Strengthening the adaptive capacity and resilience of fisheries and aquaculture-dependent livelihoods in Myanmar' is being implemented in Myanmar to address climate change issues and to promote resilience and climate change adaptation in fisheries and aquaculture. The main objective of the project is "to assist government to enable inland and coastal fishery and aquaculture stakeholders to adapt to climate change by understanding and reducing vulnerabilities, piloting new practices and technologies, and sharing information". The project is working towards strengthening national, regional and local regulatory frameworks and enhancing adaptation practices through fisheries co-management, integrated mangrove fisheries and aquaculture, inland fisheries and small-scale aquaculture, and addressing critical issues related to land and resource tenure.

The project builds on existing government and partner programmes and emerging good practices, following the Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management (EAFM) and the Ecosystem Approach to Aquaculture (EAA). These approaches provide practical guidance to implement sustainable development in the fisheries sector by identifying and encouraging balance between ecological and human well-being through good governance. The goal is to enhance the resilience of aquatic ecosystems to climate change impacts, reducing the vulnerability of fishing and fish farming communities. The project has a strong gender component to ensure that both women and men benefit from the project outcomes, and that project interventions directly contribute to

women's empowerment in the fisheries sector to reduce vulnerability and improve resilience.

The project has developed a Gender Strategy to enhance the capacity of project stakeholders for a better understanding of the gender issues encountered as part of the project, and to develop gender responsive interventions that meet women's and men's needs in Myanmar's fisheries and aquaculture sectors, and ultimately, contribute to the achievement of gender equality and women's empowerment. The Strategy was developed by the FishAdapt gender team, based on the findings of a gender analysis, to address gender issues as part of project interventions. The goal is to "Ensure that FishAdapt project interventions are gender responsive and contribute to the process of empowering women in fisheries and aquaculture communities in Myanmar".

The gender analysis was carried out between July and August 2019 to identify gender issues in fisheries and aquaculture households in nine pilot villages in Yangon (Chaung Wa, MeePya, and Zwe Bar Kone Tan), Ayeyarwaddy (Ah Mar, BawaThit and Tha Mein Pa Lae) and Rakhine (Kha Yaing, KularYaung and Nat Kan). The gender analysis provided useful information about gender roles and decision making in these communities, that can be addressed through the Gender Strategy of the FishAdapt project.

The gender analysis revealed the following key findings:

The first was that women have limited opportunity to work as wage labour in the fishing sector, especially in commercial fishing business. This could largely be due to the gender stereotypes considering women as physically weak and unsuited to the physical demands of fishing, though more studies may be required to explain the absence of women in commercial fishing boats (not only in Myanmar, but regionally and globally). Due to high insecurity in jobs in fisheries, women (mainly young women) are migrating to Yangon, Mandalay and abroad, searching for potential jobs, including as factory workers.

The second finding was that men, women and youth from fisheries and aquaculture households have poor awareness about action plans, policies and laws related to gender, fisheries and aquaculture, climate change and disasters.

Women and youth were found to have limited opportunities to be involved as participants, representatives or in leadership positions and decision making roles in fisheries and aquaculture bodies, including government administrative structures. This was true in urban and rural areas, both at local/village administrative levels, and at national levels.

Another key finding was that women of all ages from fishery and aquaculture households



Women working on shrimp paste processing in Ayeyarwaddy Region, Myanmar. There is a need to develop appropriate and conducive marketing facilities in areas where women fishers have easy and unhindered access. Credit policy also needs to ensure women's access to microfinance

are involved in pre-harvest and post-harvest activities: fish processing, small-scale fishing, fish selling and fish products distribution in local and other markets. However, they lack opportunities to access technical skills to enhance their livelihoods.

It was found that improving women's access to markets and storage of fish through provision of ice would help improve women's roles in fish processing and marketing. There is a need to develop appropriate and conducive marketing facilities in areas where women fishers have easy and unhindered access. Credit policy also needs to ensure women's access to microfinance without having to provide collateral or recommendation by other household members, such as the husband.

Reduction of post-harvest losses and improving fish processing beyond traditional drying and salting should be addressed. Training and support for women should also be provided to improve storage, packaging and distribution of fish as well as the management of enterprises.

To address the issues identified by the gender analysis, the Gender Strategy includes actions to improve the capacity of project staff and project stakeholders to become more aware of gender issues, and to be able to acknowledge them. The project also supports the implementation of specific gender activities that can identify the gender issues (for example, through the gender analysis mentioned above), and measures to address them, and support awareness raising.

The following are examples of the gender related activities being implemented as part of the Gender Strategy:

- FishAdapt project staff are trained and provided technical advice on gender issues whenever required by team members. Gender-specific data and gender sensitive indicators are collected, analysed and used throughout the project. A network of gender focal points has been set up. Capacity development events on women's empowerment in fisheries and aquaculture communities are conducted at a national, provincial and local level.
- An attempt is made to ensure the participation of at least 40 per cent of women and 25 per cent of youth in all project interventions, with some activities, such as post-harvest training, requiring 70 per cent of women's participation.

There is regular collaboration and coordination with stakeholders to share technical knowledge and policy advice. Women's leadership roles are being strengthened through FishAdapt village committees. Women's empowerment and gender equality awareness raising public campaigns, such as the 16 Days of Activism in Myanmar in 2019, are given support.

There is an attempt to promote gender-sensitive language in all documents, publications, website and peer to peer mobile application system produced by FishAdapt. ❏

Women have limited opportunity to work as wage labour in the fishing sector, especially in commercial fishing business