

## **Fisheries and gender equality**

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Poverty, limited access to all types of resources, and political, social and educational constraints has led to the subordination of women generally. This dynamic is entrenched in countries around the world, as women find it difficult or impossible to access those opportunities that might be available to their male counterparts, to improve their quality of life.

This includes access to natural resources and land, which may be more limited or even non-existent for women. This leads to enormous differences in the benefits that women and men are able to derive from the use of resources, and results in important inequalities that need to be confronted on the road to fair and sustainable development.

The unequal conditions experienced by women also make them more vulnerable to environmental change and natural resource deterioration, with multiple implications at the local level, including reduced food security and diminished access to water and clean energy. This in turn impacts on families' and communities' health.

In addition, women's work in natural resource-related production chains is intense, but barely recognized. Women are involved in the diversification of production in the agriculture, forest and fisheries sectors, with important implications for food security and food sovereignty, and the management of coastal, marine and forest resources.

More generally women are involved in natural resource-related knowledge transfer, decision-making at both household and local levels, and managing the sustainable use and conservation of scarce natural resources.

Women's roles in maintaining food security and adapting food production in response to climate change is also frequently overlooked or even denied.

Furthermore, even when women are continuously involved in managing and conserving natural resources, they often have restricted access to the spaces where environmental and economic policy decisions are being made.

These factors all need to be acknowledged and addressed. The direct relationship between the use, deterioration and reduction in availability of natural resources, and the feminization of poverty, underscores the importance of addressing the relationship between gender, environmental sustainability and development. It also highlights the fact that this is a particularly important avenue for poverty eradication.

### **Women in fisheries<sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> The information included in this section has been adapted from the meeting organized by ICSF in June of 2000. "Proceedings of the workshop on Gender and coastal Fishing communities in Latin America. Prainha do Canto Verde Ceara, Brazil. 10-15 Junio 2000 ( 2002) 152 pags. Information has been enriched by other sources cited in the references.

Coastal regions are amongst the most productive ecosystems in the world. In these areas, important cultural biodiversity intertwines with the richness of the sea and its resources. For women and men living in coastal and marine communities, fisheries are much more than just a means of employment. Small-scale fishing is a source of food for their families, and supplements their earnings from other activities such as farming and tourism. Fish is caught, processed, consumed and sold. Fishing provides food security, contributes to food sovereignty and a productive way of life, as well as an important nutritional service for non-coastal communities.

However, there are very few sex-disaggregated statistics available about the number of women involved in fisheries-related work, and it has been difficult to introduce the concept of gender to any relevant decision-making platform. Furthermore, the data that *is* available fails to capture the multidimensional nature of the work. This is surprising since women engage in a wide range of activities in the fisheries sector and in fishing communities all around the world. They engage:<sup>2</sup>

- as workers (paid and unpaid) within the fisheries, in pre- and post-harvest activities, including seafood processing plants
- as the main fishers in inland fishing and aquaculture in many countries around the world
- as caregivers in fishing families and communities, maintaining social networks and cultural identity
- as workers in non-fisheries sectors supplementing the household income from fishing, which is often erratic
- as members of fishworkers' movements and fishers' organizations

While the exact nature of women's work differs by culture and region and between rural and urban areas, the common factor is that it is rarely seen as 'productive'. It has low social value and is normally seen as an extension of the 'domestic' space.

In general the characterization of men as fishers and women as fish processors and sellers is largely correct, but a closer examination of gender in fisheries reveals a more complex situation according to local and cultural contexts. In some countries, for example, it is common that women fish or collect seafood, such as mussels and clams, in coastal or inland waters. This is sometimes done as a side-activity but is very important for the nutrition of their families. Women also participate as entrepreneurs and as fish buyers; it is not unusual for them to advance money to finance fishing trips or give loans to fishers against a guaranteed supply of fish when the catch is landed (*Westlund, Holvoet, & Kébé, 2008. In ILO-FAO, 2011*).

However, these important roles are often overlooked when it comes to resource rights and decision-making and women's role in small-scale fisheries continues to be hidden. In many national laws, for example, women are not considered artisanal fishermen, because the definition of this activity usually excludes the pre- and post-capture activities in which women are actively involved.

*"In the case of marine customary rights, gendered aspects remain silent either because the marine domain is historically considered as an exclusive male domain or due to the*

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<sup>2</sup> Adapted from ICSF web page [http:// www.icsf.net](http://www.icsf.net)

*stigmatized nature of certain coastal property, e.g., the mangrove clam gathering areas used by women in Ecuador” (Kuhl and Sheridan, 2009).*

In most cases, the role of women in small-scale fishing communities is limited to the domestic arena, and their work is hardly recognized as being productive. Traditional supposedly ‘ancillary’ jobs include preparing and baiting the fishing lines (by ‘lujadoras’ in Costa Rica, and ‘encarnadoras’ in Chile), beachcombing, and shellfish and seaweed collecting. In some coastal communities, women also market and process fisheries products and keep account of the resources generated by the sales. This might include cleaning shrimp and crab, for example. In more recent years women have also found employment in aquaculture, including fish farming (see Case Study 3 below).

In general, however, women are not rewarded financially for their work, or they are extremely underpaid, even though they usually work for extended periods of time. In Mexico for example, women may work 18-hour days (Salazar Hilda, 2000) and in Costa Rica the ‘lujadoras’ are paid minimal wages (see Case Study 1).

In addition women near the coasts and sea have generally had to assume the position of ‘head of household’ and take on the additional role of food providers during the prolonged absences of the fishermen while they are at sea.

Furthermore, the deterioration of coastal ecosystems and lakes affects communities’ quality of life, and this is also experienced in different ways by women and men. The reduction in income due to declining fish stocks, as a result of pollution, overfishing, climate change etc. is felt most keenly by women, who are already in a more vulnerable position financially. Women and their families may also suffer ill health as a result of the pollution of lakes and seas. There are serious health problems amongst the women of fishing communities located in oil-producing areas for example.

#### **Case Study 1: Women line organiers (‘lujadoras’) in Tárcoles, Costa Rica**

*(Summary from: CoopeSoliDar R.L 2008)*

The organization and baiting of the fishing lines is a slow and hard job. In this community, located on Costa Rica’s Pacific Coast this pre-capture job is the work of women and young girls. It is a low-paid job and the women rarely have social security backup. Remuneration is only on the basis of fishing trips undertaken and is dependent upon the catch. Because of these uncertainties the job is not highly valued. Nevertheless, a large number of the lujadoras are also heads of households. In addition to the low pay, the women have no legal or social support, and most of them are not part of a union or cooperative (which would help to protect their interests and facilitate their access to various support systems).



Young lujadora working in Tárcoles – Costa Rica. CoopeSoliDar R.L, 2012.

#### **Case Study 2: The role of women in Senegalese fishing communities**

*(Summary from: Rajagopalan Ramya. 2012. An evaluation of the Roles of women in fishing communities of Dakar, the La Petite Cote, and Sine Saloum In: Yemaya No. 40. July 2012 page 12)*

Research undertaken in September 2011, amongst twelve fishing communities, compares and contrasts the conditions facing Senegalese women trading and processing fish in Dakar, La Petite Cote and Sine-Saloum. The study recorded an increase in the numbers of women involved in trading and processing fish, even though the type of fish traded and processed has changed from species such as the grouper and croaker to the less profitable sardinella. It found that men do not earn enough and that women's income is essential to meeting the costs of basic necessities such as providing for their children. The study also found that women have little or no access to the formal credit system. Improving leadership capacities as well as organizational and communication skills are viewed as important priorities. One of the key suggestions from women in the fishing communities was for outreach aimed at building leadership at the community level.

### **Case Study 3: Young girls' involvement in fisheries**

In accordance with common gender lines among adults in fisheries, boys tend to be involved in fishing and girls more in post-harvest activities. While data on child work and labor in fisheries is limited, and even more so for the aquaculture sector, it is likely that girls help in feeding fish, in particular at homestead ponds, and collecting fish seed, while boys may be more involved in the harvesting of fish. However, as in the adult world, gender roles in child work and labor are variable and should be understood in the local context (ILO-FAO, 2011).

### **Case Study 4: The participation of women in pre-capture, capture and post-harvest fisheries activities in Caletas in Chile**

(Conapach, 2000. Women in the Caletas: A reality in the Chilean coastal Zone. In: "Proceedings of the workshop on Gender and coastal Fishing communities in Latin America. Prainha do Canto Verde Ceara, Brazil. 10-15 Junio 2000 (2002) pag. 21.)

In Caletas' women are primarily responsible for mending nets and traps, and cleaning boats; baiting longlines for fishing and crabbing; collecting seaweed and shellfish along the coast; setting nets and traps for fish and crabs in small boats; storing seaweed, shellfish and fish; all stages of processing such as drying, salting, smoking and cooking; and selling seaweed, shellfish and fresh and processed fish. They also own boats. The men are primarily engaged in boat-building; the maintenance of motors and fishing equipment; and most of the fishing.

### **Case Study 5: Female labor in industrial fish plants in Peru**

(Nizama Claudio, 2000. From: "Proceedings of the workshop on Gender and coastal Fishing communities in Latin America. Prainha do Canto Verde Ceara, Brazil. 10-15 Junio 2000 ( 2002) pag.111.)

Women work in large numbers in factories canning tuna and sardines, and filleting, salting or shelling fish and shellfish. Women get paid either a minimum wage or by piece-work. Women

working in these processing plants suffer sub-human conditions, with a workday that can stretch from 8 to 24 hours, with shifts day or night, including holidays.

### **Recommendations on women's rights, sustainable use and equity related to marine and coastal resources access**

We already know that achieving genuine gender equality can be a real driver of change and efforts to achieve sustainable development (IUCN, 2008). Women — in all their rich diversity, and through their productive work including as peasants, indigenous people, afrodescendants and fisherwomen — have a collective but differentiated traditional knowledge about natural resources that is crucial to the future sustainable management and conservation of those resources.

At the same time prioritising sustainable use approaches,<sup>3</sup> including community-based natural resource management and policies that give resource and tenure rights to women, is vitally important for women, since it allows them to increase the benefits they are able to derive from natural resources, with significant implications for poverty reduction. This approach involves promoting conservation based on a long-term vision of the sustainable use of nature, maximizing the value of common pool wild resources, and increasing local governance of natural resources.

There is also a specific need to recognize women as important participants in small-scale fisheries, not only because of their unrecognised or under-rewarded fisheries-related activities, but also because of their role in maintaining the social and cultural activities of fishing communities (Salazar Hilda, 2000). In particular, initiatives that provide women with credit, training and leadership development improve the efficiency, profitability and sustainability of their activities.<sup>4</sup> Women also benefit from more secure access to resources for craft-making, establishing small- and medium-sized enterprises and tourism; this in turn leads to more sustainable use of mangroves and other types of wetland areas, and protection for fish breeding grounds and wetland recovery.<sup>5</sup>

To this end, there is an urgent need for better data. Baseline studies with a gender perspective provide more exact and precise information about the use of coastal and marine resources, allowing planners and policymakers to make better decisions. The importance of using gender-based demographic and production data, especially for development projects and programs in artisanal fisheries and marine conservation needs to be recognized.<sup>6</sup>

It is also crucial that women are involved in decision-making related to these issues, based on recognition of their biodiversity-related knowledge and work. Women have strengthened fishworkers' organizations and broadened their agendas. When fishers' organizations include women in decision-making and leadership roles, the organizations are more likely to include

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<sup>3</sup> “Use, if sustainable, can serve human needs on an ongoing basis while contributing to the conservation of biological diversity”, Sustainable Use Policy Statement, IUCN, 2000, [http://www.iucn.org/about/union/commissions/sustainable\\_use\\_and\\_livelihoods\\_specialist\\_group/resources/res\\_supolst\\_at/](http://www.iucn.org/about/union/commissions/sustainable_use_and_livelihoods_specialist_group/resources/res_supolst_at/)

<sup>4</sup> Adapted from ICSF web page [http:// www.icsf.net](http://www.icsf.net)

<sup>5</sup> Adapted from ICSF web page <http:// www.icsf.net>

<sup>6</sup> Adapted from ICSF web page <http:// www.icsf.net>

activities like the provision of childcare, which benefits all members of the organization.<sup>7</sup> Even more significantly, apart from bringing in issues of concern to themselves as fisheries workers, women have raised concerns about the quality of life in fishing communities, focusing on access to health, sanitation and education.<sup>8</sup>

Effective governance and respect for women's rights are key prerequisites that enable women to engage in these processes. A serious shift towards sustainable development requires gender equality and an end to persistent discrimination against women at all levels of biodiversity and cultural resources use.

At the global level, there are two key agreements that need to be taken into consideration when discussing gender issues related to fisheries:

### **The Convention on Biological Diversity: Marine Conservation, the Aichi Biodiversity Targets<sup>i</sup> and Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Areas (EBSAs)<sup>ii</sup>**

Two of the Aichi Biodiversity Targets relate directly to fisheries and small-scale fishing communities:

- Target 6: "By 2020 all fish and invertebrate stocks and aquatic plants are managed and harvested sustainably, legally and applying ecosystem based approaches, so that overfishing is avoided, recovery plans and measures are in place for all depleted species, fisheries have no significant adverse impacts on threatened species and vulnerable ecosystems and impacts of fisheries on stocks, species and ecosystems are within safe biological limits."
- Target 11: "By 2020, at least 17% of terrestrial and inland water and 10 per cent of coastal and marine areas, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem services, are conserved through effectively and equitably managed, ecologically representative and well connected systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures, and integrated into the wider landscapes and seascapes."

It is important to note that the implementation of both of these targets and the identification of EBSAs will only be developed in a successful way if coastal and marine communities are involved, and social and cultural indicators are taken into consideration. All of these efforts must take gender considerations into account.

### **The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO): International Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries (SFF Guidelines)**

The SFF guidelines are a supplement to the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (promoted by FAO in 1995). They are intended to support the enhancement of the sector's already important role, and contribute to global and national efforts towards the eradication of hunger and poverty. These guidelines have been developed through a participatory and consultative process, involving representatives of small-scale fishing communities, civil society organizations, governments, regional organizations and other stakeholders. Furthermore, in several countries, particularly in Brazil, El Salvador, India, South Africa and Indonesia, participants elaborated proposals to promote gender equity, and the current 'zero draft' does contain a chapter on Gender, Equality and Equity. This document is now under review and this

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<sup>7</sup> Adapted from ICSF web page [http:// www.icsf.net](http://www.icsf.net)

<sup>8</sup> Adapted from ICSF web page [http:// www.icsf.net](http://www.icsf.net)

needs to be strengthened to ensure that the final document includes a comprehensive and cross-cutting vision of gender in fisheries.

## **Recommendations**

### **On women's rights and equity issues, we must:**

- Highlight the contribution of women in fisheries and within the community, recognize the multidimensional nature of their work, and facilitate legal recognition of women workers in this sector
- Take measures against the exploitation of women in their workplace, ensure social security, unemployment and insurance benefits for women and their families, and work towards putting an end to domestic and sexual violence.
- Encourage women to register their organizations so that they have the necessary means to access credit and participate in development programs.
- Strengthen implementation of international conventions relevant to the elimination of child labour in fisheries and aquaculture, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and relevant ILO conventions (including with respect to informal sector household chores).
- Ensure implementation of child labour legislation through the use of incentives, disincentives and enforcement mechanisms.

### **On sustainable use and conservation, we must:**

- Promote ecosystem-based marine and coastal management, and recognise and promote sustainable use as a valid strategy for the adequate conservation of natural resources.
- Promote the role of women in the management of such zones and areas, and their participation in programs focusing on the conservation and restoration of coastal ecosystems. Facilitate information exchanges amongst them.
- Generate gender specific proposals that will permit women and women's organizations to implement their ideas and actions related to conservation and sustainable use.
- Encourage information exchanges amongst involved women, and training programs for communities, especially gender-related events and others that enable fishing communities to carry out their own surveys and produce their own documents, so that they can maintain and improve the responsible management of their resources.
- Use traditional knowledge, with the approval and involvement of the holders of such knowledge (including women), along with the best available scientific and technical knowledge, as the basis for the description of areas that meet the criteria for EBSAs. Indigenous peoples and local communities must be involved in the process of describing EBSAs, by inviting them to regional workshops and consultations. relevant Social and cultural

information relevant to any subsequent step in the process of selecting conservation and management measures, should be implemented.

- Promote the participation of fisherwoman in all relevant the fora to discuss global and national actions concerning the conservation of marine ecosystems.
- Support the process for the approval of the FAO International Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries.
- Eliminate subsidies for industrial fishing fleets and encourage community-based governance models for marine protected areas.

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<http://sites.google.com/sites/small scalefisheries/>

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<sup>i</sup> <http://www.cbd.int/sp/targets/>

<sup>ii</sup> <http://www.cbd.int/marine/doc/ebsa-brochure-2012-en.pdf>