

Gender Makes the Difference

- More than 120 million people throughout the world are estimated to depend on fish for all or part of their income. In 2000, according to the FAO, about 35 million people worldwide were directly engaged in fishing and aquaculture, including substantial numbers of women. In the Pacific region alone, it is estimated that women catch about a quarter of the total seafood harvested. In Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Vietnam and the Philippines, there are communities where women have a greater role in aquaculture production and harvesting of littoral organisms than that of men.
- Women are heavily involved in pre- and post-fishing activities, including handling, processing, marketing and distribution. Women's roles range from maintaining nets and preparing meals for fishing trips to selecting and packaging fish for the market.
- Few sustainable development programs in coastal areas have reached out to women as strategic partners due to the misconception that women are not actively involved in the fishing industry. Yet, in Latin America, approximately 75% of the technicians involved in quality assurance are women. These include veterinarians, biologists, chemists and fishing engineers. In the same region, 20% of the fish inspectors and 55% of professionals involved in research and development are women. These differences show us how gender perceptions and opportunities can vary from coastal fishing communities to professional levels and across different geographies and cultures.
- Processing is one area where women are over-represented. At least 50 million women in developing countries are employed in the fishing industry, predominantly in low-grade, unskilled jobs.
- In some regions, women have become important fish entrepreneurs. For example in the European Union, women control 39% of the fish industry; administering and controlling significant sums of money and generating substantial returns for their household and community.

Sustainable coastal-marine zone management and conservation requires a clear understanding of the differences and inequalities between women and men because their needs and interests are so different with regard to aquatic resources. Access to and control over these resources, the resulting benefits and related decision-making are all differentiated by gender. A gender perspective in coastal and aquaculture management helps us to understand that:

- a. Women and men tend to do different work in coastal zones. Women carry out a range of activities in the fisheries and fishing communities. Women perform pre-harvest tasks, such as net making, gleaning and harvesting in inshore areas and intertidal zones, engage in fish processing and marketing activities, and work on aquaculture farms and in processing plants. They also provide shore-side support to their male partners in communication, accounting and quality control, or in preparing meals for fishing trips.
- b. While the exact nature of women's work differs according to culture and region and between rural and urban areas, the common factor is that women's roles are often not seen as "productive." A gender perspective recognizes women's productive work and helps to improve coastal and marine resource use and conservation.



FURTHER INFORMATION ON THIS TOPIC CAN BE FOUND AT:

IUCN-Gender and Environment
www.genderandenvironment.org

Women and Fisheries Bulletin
www.spc.org.nc/coastfish/news/wif/wif.htm

ICSF-Women Program
www.icsf.net

The women's and Aquatic Network
www.womensaquatic.net/

FAO
www.fao.org/Gender/en/fish-e.htm

Intercoast Network
www.crc.uri.edu/comm/htmlpubs/ic/

Coastal Ecosystem
<http://www.icrw.org/>

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San José, Costa Rica. 2001.

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- c. There is a need to redefine what is considered as fisheries, through the valorization of the work and labor of women's labor in the productive chain.
- d. Women should be recognized as equal partners and productive participants in fishery activities. This will improve both personal and family levels of nutrition and living standards. Women and men should be given equitable opportunities to acquire appropriate technologies, credit and training, so that all are enabled to contribute effectively to the sustained development and growth of fisheries.
- e. By increasing and improving women's participation and decision-making in fishery and aquaculture development efforts, the sector as a whole will benefit by having a better informed and empowered stakeholder constituency—that of fisherwomen.

WHY GENDER MAKES A DIFFERENCE IN FISHERIES AND AQUACULTURE INITIATIVES

- Baseline studies with a gender perspective have provided more exact and precise information about the use of coastal and marine resources, allowing planners and policymakers to make better decisions.
- Marine and coastal resources are used more sustainably, catches are more selective and waste is reduced when women are targeted clients for technical assistance training.
- Through their roles in managing estuarine activities, women contribute significantly to economic progress, benefiting both themselves and their families.
- When fishers' organizations include women in decision-making and leadership roles, the organizations are more likely to include activities like the provision of childcare, which benefits all members of the organization.
- Women allocate a larger percentage of their earnings from the sale of marine resources than men do to family expenses such as education and housing. In aquaculture post-harvest management, women allocate an important part to the nutrition of their families.
- Initiatives that have provided women with credit, training and leadership development skills have improved the efficiency, profitability and sustainability of their activities.
- The families of men who have participated in workshops on masculinity and reproductive health experience less domestic violence and have fewer children.
- Including both female and male extension workers and research assistants in coastal management projects ensures better access to a range of locations and activities involving men and women who gather aquatic products.
- More secure access to resources needed by women for craft-making, small and medium-sized enterprises, and tourism has led to more sustainable use of mangroves and other types of wetland areas, as well as protection for fish breeding grounds and wetland recovery.
- Gender equitable wetland planning decisions have included broader and more diverse perspectives at local, national and regional levels, and have better reflected women's needs and preferences (*e.g.*, access to land and other wetland resources, reliable water transport of market goods, more diverse forms of tourism employment).
- Incorporating gender-related wetlands knowledge about biodiversity improves the quality and the implementation of management strategies and plans.

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