

# A gender perspective of change in small-scale fisheries, a legacy from the sea cucumber fisheries of Yucatán

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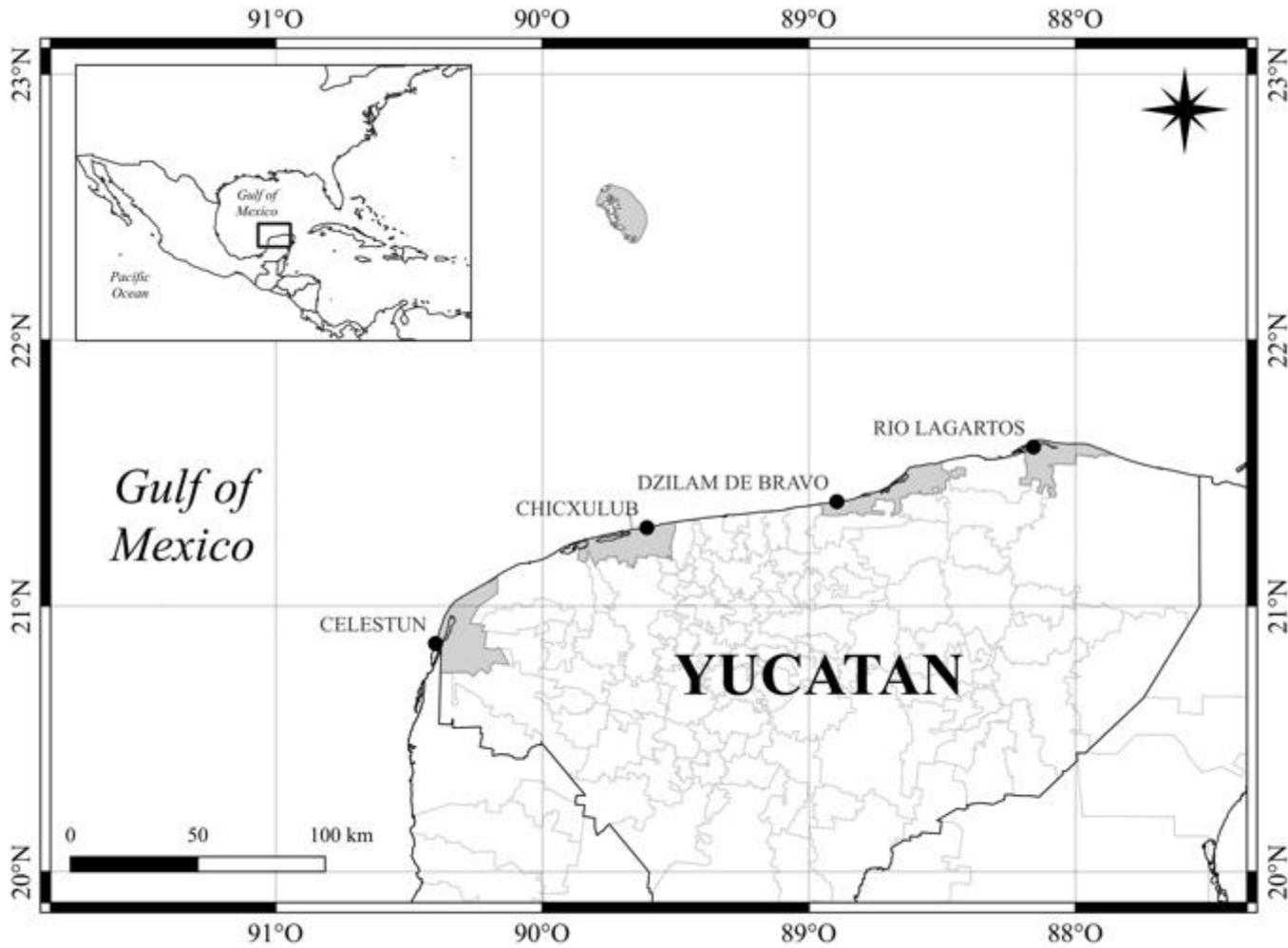


# Background

- Sea cucumber fisheries have been a **socio-ecological driver of change** in many places, as their typical development undergoes rapid boom and bust cycles with stark social and environmental impacts in coastal communities.
- The sea cucumber fishery in Yucatán, Mexico had a surprisingly fast development and decline, from its beginning in 2000 to its closure in 2019.

# Objective

- From a gender perspective of change we want to better understand how women and men experience and are differentially affected by fisheries decline, considering the boom and bust of the sea cucumber fishery in Yucatán.



Location

# Methodology

**Table 1. Number of participants in each focus group**

<b>Community</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Men</b>
Celestún	9	5
Chicxulub	10	8
Dzilam de Bravo	6	9
Río Lagartos	9	15
<b>Total</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>37</b>

**Eight** focus groups across **four** coastal communities in Yucatán took place during May-June 2024.



# Methodology: Focus Group Planning

The main questions were related to how they perceive socio-ecological **changes before, during and after** the sea cucumber fishery took place in Yucatán.

We used four **tematic** axes:

Natural Resources

Ecosistem

Gobernance

Well-being



# Understanding Change Through a Gender Lens

## Socio-Ecological Perspective

Change as an **adjustment and reactive response** to stressors such as resource scarcity or price variability,

Change as a **reconfiguration in rule-making** shaped by market relations, and

Change as a **shifts in livelihoods and social practices**.

## Gender Dimensions

Women and men perceive **different risks and opportunities** based on their roles in fisheries and households.

**Gender constraints** limit women's access to resources and decision-making, while men are often more involved in public spaces and power positions.

## Resource Access

Women experience change differently due to limited access to resources and decision-making compared to men.



# Before the Sea Cucumber Fishery

## 1 Resource Abundance

Marine resources were plentiful and accessible. Fishing focused on octopus, grouper, and red snapper. Species were larger and more diverse.

## 2 Women's Roles

Women participated through processing, sales, and "gavioteo" (helping at landing sites). In **Celestún**, **Celestún**, fish filleting was a key economic activity for women.

## 3 Community Management

Fishing was locally managed with with respected informal norms. Strong social cohesion existed among among fishers. Communities had sufficient income and food security. security.

# Gender Differences in Pre-Boom Perceptions



Women emphasized **dietary value** of fish abundance. They highlighted food security and community stability.



Men stressed **income and ownership**. They romanticized **diving** as an art connected to identity and freedom.

Community differences emerged in fishing methods, formalization degrees, and cultural attachments to specific practices

# During the Boom: Ecological and Social Social Disruption



## Overexploitation

Severe **damage** to marine ecosystems affecting key species and habitats. Explosive demand led to gear intensification and habitat destruction. Participants reported **biodiversity loss** and chemical damage from illegal fishing methods.



## Social Fragmentation

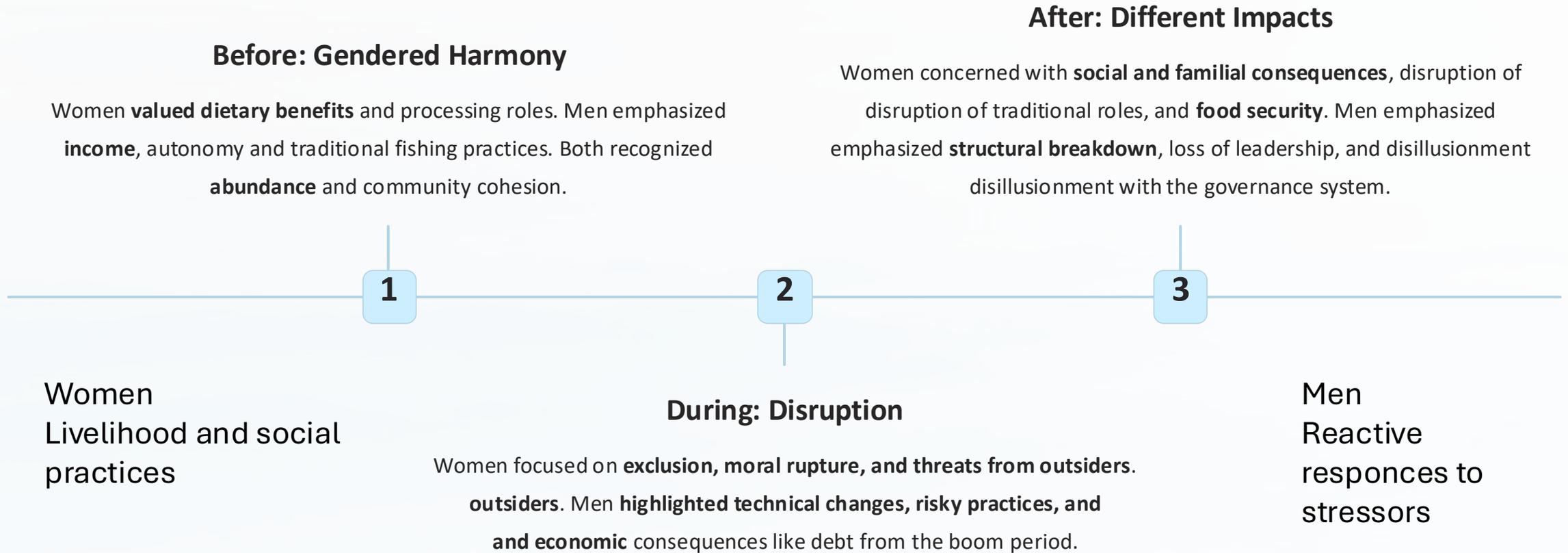
**Arrival of outsiders** disrupted community structures. Women reported exclusion and favoritism toward younger women from other towns. Men described moral collapse, failure of cooperatives, and intensification of illegal fishing.



## Governance Failure

Corruption between authorities and buyers was frequently mentioned. Participants noted absence of sanctions, abuse of fishing permits, and government involvement in questionable practices.

# Gendered Narratives of Change



While both women and men recognized ecological deterioration, social fragmentation, and institutional weakness, **their narratives reflected their different their different positions in the community**. Women's stories centered on exclusion and invisibility, while men focused on technical and organizational aspects of organizational aspects of fishing.

**Both mentioned changes in governance structures based on their roles**

# Conclusions and Implications

## Implications

### 1 Local Context Matters

Gendered experiences of change are mediated by local social, environmental, and political-economic structures.

### 2 Differential Impacts

Women and men experience socio-ecological changes differently based on based on their roles and access to resources.

### 3 Policy Implications

Fisheries management must consider gender-specific impacts to create create equitable and sustainable outcomes.





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Thank you for you attention  
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