



**FROM CATCH TO CONSUMER**

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# WHY GENDER MATTERS IN AQUACULTURE AND FISHERIES

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*Fish is the Earth's most highly traded food, much of it caught in developing countries for sale in the developed world. Every year human beings consume an average of 20kg of fish per person across the globe. That's about 235 meals of fish annually -- double the amount of fish we ate six decades ago. And our fish consumption continues to rise.*

*Traditionally, the fishing industry has a man's face but women's efforts also are behind every bite of fish we taste. Without women's work, the fish catch would drop, fish processing and delivery to the consumer would not function, and households would have less access to fish and food. Women's contributions to fisheries and aquaculture have long been disregarded.*

*In the many steps from catch to consumer, about half of fish production workers, traders, and marketers are women. Frequently, women who play a part in fish production and trade have little say over the benefits available to them and receive little support in their fish work. Their practical and long-term needs are often neglected. They have weak bargaining power to change their situation due to historical gender biases normalized in the workplace and society.*

*For women working in fisheries and aquaculture, gender inequality affects their food and financial security, personal safety, family nutrition, and the stability of whole communities. These problems are worsening as the industry experiences pressure to minimize labour costs and leans toward fishing and aquaculture practices that degrade the environment and fish stocks. This creates a vicious cycle of worsening environmental and social conditions on which all women and men depend.*

*By supporting the status quo in this catch-to-consumer chain of production and trade, all fish consumers are complicit in perpetuating this injustice.*

*This is why gender matters.*

*What is to be done and by whom? Here is what is needed to make a start.*

**COUNT WOMEN AND MAKE THEM VISIBLE:** *FAO's Committee on Fisheries can put gender equality on its agenda. Fisheries agencies can collect regular and accurate gender-specific catch-to-consumer employment data to track trends and progress.*

**INCREASE FUNDING TO GENDER HUNDREDFOLD:** *Make greater investment in targeted gender projects, research and educational outreach. The present quantum is so small and needs a hundredfold increase to achieve impact.*

**SUPPORT WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT:** *Women can collaborate, assert their rights and upgrade their capacity, if necessary with funding and support for education, advocacy and legal resources. Men's and male-led organizations can become allies in enhancing women's autonomy over their lives and livelihoods.*

**COLLABORATE ON GENDER:** *To make the invisible visible, gender equality must be a stated priority in policy, research, and programs, and expertise built in the key agencies along the catch-consumer pathway.*

*The critical players in advancing gender equality in fisheries are: fisheries agencies, including national and leading international organizations, especially the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO); development assistance funders; private companies, small and large, in all parts of the catch-to-consumer pathway; fisheries, aquaculture and gender researchers; and grassroots women, community groups and civil society.*

*The evidence on where we stand now, and what would be gained by taking action is compelling. Here is an overview.*

## **(1) THE FISH SECTOR WINS WHEN WOMEN'S CONTRIBUTIONS ARE VALUED**

### **Women have smaller enterprises, lower pay, and riskier work**

*Along the path from catch to consumer, gender limits the roles women play in the fishing industry.*

*At the industry's front-end, an estimated 86% of workers in fishing and fish farming are men. But in post-harvest, processing and marketing, the majority of fish workers are women. During processing, women's roles regularly involve long hours of standing and repetitive work in wet and cold environments -- conditions that contribute to a suite of health problems.*

*Women's roles vary with scale. Female-led fish production, processing, and marketing enterprises are usually small-scale. Men dominate leadership of large-scale fishing operations -- like industrial fishing vessels and fish farms. In seafood factories, there are few female supervisors, managers, and CEOs, but women make up the majority of factory floor workers.*

*Treated as a reserve army of labour in large scale enterprises, local women and migrant workers of both sexes often have the most dangerous jobs. Sea fishing ranks as one of the deadliest occupations on Earth. Working with heavy moving equipment aboard vessels heaving in the waves, ship-board accidents often include head injuries and loss of limbs. Such serious accidents typically occur far from medical help.*

*In fisheries and aquaculture, women and migrant workers are also the lowest paid, with little job security. This allows corporations to lower costs and increase competitiveness in global markets. Compared to men, women selling similar fish often receive lower prices for their wares. The expectation is that women are satisfied just to be employed. Male slavery in fishing has recently been under the media spotlight, but everyday exploitation of women's labour -- widespread within the industry --has received virtually no attention.*

*What are the workplace risks for women in fisheries? Many landing sites for boats, fish markets and factories are unsafe working environments. Here, women report facing harassment and gender-based violence from male retailers and local authorities. Some women choose to become mobile fish vendors, avoiding these areas as a strategy to ward off harassment. But this is not an ideal long-term solution.*

## CASE STUDIES:

**India:** (A) In the city of Patna, women have long been involved in fish marketing, mainly as retailers. But the proportion of male versus female fish sellers is increasing, with many women leaving behind this work. A survey of women fish vendors revealed that threat to personal security is the main workplace problem.

(B) In fish markets in the city of Mumbai, women vendors are facing increased competition from men, large companies, and women. Working in inadequate processing, drying and fish handling spaces without access to clean water, they lack the political power to improve occupational conditions. The building of modern markets, offices and condominiums is squeezing fisherwomen out of their former vending sites, with newer spaces often rented out to bigger, predominantly male operators.

**Bangladesh:** Many women who work in shrimp processing plants lack job security. Women typically do piece work with no contracts, and no guaranteed day to day work. In factories with cold, wet conditions, women's repetitive work also brings health and safety concerns. Respiratory problems and musculoskeletal pain are common. Fully implementing the existing labour laws required under trade agreements with the United States and European Union could improve women's working conditions. Solutions involve putting policy into practice.

**Morocco:** Women at processing plants peel brown shrimp (*Crangon crangon*). Caught in European waters, these shrimp are sent to Morocco for processing before re-export back to the Netherlands. New peeling machines have eased working conditions for handling some shrimp species, but not yet for brown shrimp. These women are fighting for better pay and working conditions. Doing arduous work for long hours, they often lack benefits like access to health care. Their low wages make the outsourced peeling profitable despite high transport costs between capture, processing and shipping back for European sales.

## (2) GENDER-BLIND POLICIES AND DATA UNDERMINE WOMEN'S CONTRIBUTIONS

### Policies and data ignore women in fisheries and aquaculture

When it comes to fisheries and aquaculture policies and data collection, the rights and needs of women are ignored. This reinforces the invisibility of women. Some countries do have national gender policies but guidelines for their implementation are lacking and poorly funded. The Small Scale Fisheries Guidelines of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) set a precedent as the first global policy to include gender equity as a guiding principle. But similar gender equity requirements are lacking in market-based certification and auditing schemes. In most countries, a breakdown of fisheries data by gender is unusual. Where such data is separated by sex, it mainly includes employment numbers only from the catching or farming sector, rather than for the whole catch-to-consumer pathway, thus ignoring the majority of women. But the impacts of policies on women cannot be investigated without data on their roles and inputs. Across the whole life cycle of capture fisheries and aquaculture, women are estimated to represent nearly half of all workers.

## CASE STUDIES:

**Global policies:** The Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (1995) is a joint agreement led by the FAO. Its more than 50 instruments and technical guides do not mention women and gender. In the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals for 2030, agreed in 2015, Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) No. 14 (Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources) does not reference SDG #5 (Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls). In 2016, FAO fisheries and aquaculture employment statistics were broken out by sex for the first time. From 2009-2014, only 27 % of FAO Member countries reported sex-differentiated employment data for fisheries. Only 33 % reported them for aquaculture.

**Philippines:** The government agency responsible for fisheries requires that each of its agencies has a gender focal point -- duties for action and reporting to ensure that the central policy of gender equality is implemented at the grassroots level. However, those tasked with managing and implementing focal points typically have no training and little interest in them. In one case, for example, a mandatory 5% budget allocation for a focus on gender was used to fund food and drinks at an outing for staff, rather than for action on inequality.

## Women's fight for basic rights

In many societies, the social norm is to consider women's work secondary and less important than men's. Husbands, employers, and even women themselves may view their work as an extension of unpaid household or community work. Women typically earn less pay than men or receive only partial pay given as a couple's wage. Some women work without any pay at all.

Even when women participate in the traditionally-male roles of fishing and fish farming, they are often denied full rights and benefits. In many places, women are denied access to fishing licenses or fish farm tenure.

To fight for their rights to become legally registered fishers, own fish farm sites, or obtain better terms and working conditions, women have had to organize into advocacy groups. But given that competition between women fish traders in the marketplace is often a stronger motive than collaboration, collective action can be difficult.

### CASE STUDIES:

**Japan:** Ama pearl divers, while registered members of Japan's Fisheries Cooperative Associations, have no say in their fishing rights that are distributed and regulated by the male-dominated Associations.

**Spain:** Women shellfish gatherers in Galicia have organized collectives to achieve professional status as fishers. Co-governance arrangements with government agencies facilitates sustainable management of shellfish.

**Thailand:** On shrimp farms, migrant couples from Laos, Myanmar and Northeast Thailand are given a couple's wage. Women labourers are not considered 'real workers.'

**Cambodia:** Women cross-border fish traders have difficulty teaming up to secure their rights. There is strong motivation for individualistic competition in their trading relationships with Thai merchants.

**Ghana:** Women of some ethnic groups finance fishing vessels and trips, plus process and market their catch, yet have no say in fisheries management. These women are fighting for a voice in fisheries management.

## The downside of fisheries modernization for women

Governments often embrace policies that help to increase exports, modernize and intensify production, and establish offshore farming. Financial investments by the private sector are gender blind. That is, they do not take gender into account when transforming catch-to-consumer fisheries operations by consolidating, scaling up, centralizing and automating operations. In many of the roles that women play— like manual fish processing and small-scale marketing — women are left without work when their skills and assets are not upgraded to adapt to changes like new processing technologies and cleaner local markets that reduce waste.

## CASE STUDIES:

**Norway:** the number of women in aquaculture dropped from 20% in 1990 to 9% in 2010 as many smaller-scale family farms were bought out by larger corporations. With companies amalgamating and operations mechanized and scaled up, local communities faced increasing local unemployment. Many workers were forced to migrate to find work.

**Indonesia and Vietnam:** as shrimp farms get larger, women's participation shrinks. Even where women are involved, they describe the situation as "high involvement, low benefit."

**Thailand:** In response to European Union trade rules on illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing, the Thai government has implemented a new fisheries law that prohibits certain types of inshore fishing gear. In some cases this has led to men fishing in secret with banned traditional gear, supported by wives also shouldering extra burdens to ensure family survival.

**Chile:** In southern salmon farming regions, some groups of women have taken up factory processing jobs, but many from small-scale fishing communities have not. Some women have resisted the farming industry as it built factories for feeds and processing on local land, claiming large tracts in fjords for fish cages.

## (3) Society and the environment benefit when women are empowered

### Women fish workers are the key to fish as nutrition

Fish is a highly nutritious and prized commodity. Yet ironically, fish workers may get very little fish for themselves. Some fishing communities have less food security than the general population. Within these communities, women and infants are often more malnourished than men. Circumstances are similar in aquaculture. Agencies introducing aquaculture often assume that growers will benefit from more fish to eat. However, depending on the value of what's grown, workers often cannot afford to eat what they produce. Innovative aquaculture projects are addressing this issue with nutrition education and polyculture -- adding small native fish species to provide local food, grown alongside those marketed for sale.

## CASE STUDIES:

**Bolivia:** In the Amazon region, a community project increased local fish consumption and incomes by empowering indigenous women and families to diversify and improve fish farming. Better processing of their fish gave better returns in the market.

**Bangladesh:** In the Southwest of the country, highly nutritious fish like tilapia are grown for household use by workers in mud crab aquaculture. This practice is supplemented with nutrition education.

**Thailand:** On shrimp farms, workers are not permitted to consume the shrimp grown in ponds for market, but can consume fish found in canals and wetlands nearby, as well as grow fish in cages.

**Nepal:** Women left to manage farms when men are forced to migrate for work have taken up fish farming. Along with carp and fish grown for sale, they grow small, nutritious, indigenous species that improve household nutrition.

### Women contribute to sustainability and healthy ecosystems

Women often have different knowledge and perspectives on resource and environmental sustainability than men. However, women are typically excluded from decision-making in fisheries management and conservation as well as

aquaculture development. In certification schemes for sustainability, gender equality and women's participation are not usually addressed even in the fishery improvement projects that often precede certification.

Some schemes are beginning to incorporate social justice criteria. Women may play important leadership roles in sustainable certified projects. Vietnam's female-led Ben Tre clam fishery, for example, is the first fishery in Southeast Asia to receive Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) certification. Research is revealing that by including women's voices in resource management decisions, better social and conservation outcomes are possible. Sustainable development provides opportunities for gender equality and poverty reduction. In contrast, overfishing, pollution, climate change and environmental degradation threaten gender equality, often in complex ways.

#### CASE STUDIES:

**Philippines:** In San Joaquin, Visayas, research revealed that knowledge and perceptions of marine resources and their protection in marine protected areas (MPAs) varies by gender. Women had a greater awareness and some formal knowledge about MPAs. Women were also more likely to have a mindset of sustainability.

**Northern Ireland, Northern England and Northeast Canada:** Women's involvement in fisheries has decreased over decades of fishery declines. Women have retreated to less prominent, more private roles with increased responsibilities over household coping strategies.

## Integrating women into action on climate change and natural disasters

Studies on tsunamis, oil spills, typhoons, floods and climate change impacts reveal that women and girls experience greater casualties and disaster impacts.

Women's specialized needs are often ignored. After a serious disaster, fishermen may receive boats from aid agencies but fisherwomen often get no assistance in recovering their fishing and processing businesses. The special health and sanitation needs of women, such as their need for menstrual supplies and pregnancy support, are also often ignored. In some cultures, women and girls are not taught to swim. Women's traditional clothing can also make them less agile, compromising their survival. The result: the ability for women to recover their livelihoods is disproportionately diminished when disaster preparedness does not take gender into account.

#### CASE STUDIES:

**Philippines:** After typhoons and floods, women are seldom consulted about their needs, nor included in rehabilitation work. Top down military responses often disadvantage women. Such responses may overlook their immediate needs and not take into account long-term rehabilitation of their fishery-related businesses. Only about half of the women in coastal areas of the Philippines can swim, whereas most men can. That leads to higher mortality for women in the case of flooding or tsunamis. Community-based programs like mangrove replanting, which protects coastal areas, lives and property from flooding and storm damage, tend to be carried out mainly by women, probably because they generate little direct financial return on investment.

**Tamil Nadu, India:** Problems faced after the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami were different between genders. Women often had to walk long distances to fetch drinking water. Many men needed to leave their local areas to find work. Aquaculture technology for brackish waters, developed by local researchers and transferred to women via self-help groups, helped women financially, building their confidence and their status in local management.

## Empowering women benefits households and societies

Although women cannot be expected to shoulder the whole burden of household care plus working in the catch-to-consumer pathway, empowering women in fisheries and aquaculture has positive impacts like better care and education of children and more stable communities.

Social norms around gender roles play a key part in whether women are enabled or constrained in realizing their potential, supporting their households, and contributing to social cohesion. Groupings like women, men, youth, and children are more than just descriptions. These categories interact with factors like race, class, and ability and they affect the quality of people's lives and opportunities.

Women, especially those living in poverty, usually cannot access the same financial, skill building and business opportunities as men. They have fewer options for their livelihoods. Women's work in the fisheries production pathway can expose them to health and safety risks like exposure to cold, wet, repetitive work in factories, and the fish-for-sex trade. When men and women need to migrate for fisheries or aquaculture work, that places extra stresses on households and communities.

Community perceptions of the role of women in society, work and their households must shift to achieve female empowerment and end their victimization by violence.

### CASE STUDIES:

**Lake Victoria, Africa:** The practice of fish-for-sex in fishing hubs has created hotspots for HIV/AIDS and the spread of other sexually transmitted infections. Outreach efforts are underway to engage women traders in business, health, and education. The aim is that empowerment will provide alternative options, replacing sex-for-fish as a survival mechanism. Similar challenges exist in parts of **Asia and South America**.

**Zanzibar:** Shell-handicraft has been introduced as an alternative to low-earning seaweed farming for women. This has improved women's access to infrastructure like houses, cellphones and electricity, plus broadened their knowledge of marketing and entrepreneurship. It has also improved social cohesion through greater inclusion of women in household and community decision-making. Despite these improvements, most of the decisions are still made by men.

**Philippines:** A lack of education and training in managing finances mean that women are often left out of development, budgeting and decision-making, or sometimes make poor 'investment' decisions. For example, when fishermen are away at sea, their wives sometimes gamble the household's money, leading to further impoverishment and debts.

## WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

### Critical Stakeholders and Key Actions

The key stakeholders in advancing gender equality in fisheries are:

**Fisheries agencies:** Regional, national and international fisheries agencies and organizations, especially the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), aquaculture and environment officers, managers, and policy makers.

**Funders:** Foundations, funding agencies, development assistance agencies

**Researchers:** Fisheries and aquaculture researchers, gender researchers

**Grassroots:** women, community groups, fishing and aquaculture organisations and civil society.

## Key Actions

- **COUNT WOMEN AND MAKE THEM VISIBLE:** *FAO's Committee on Fisheries can put gender equality on its agenda. Fisheries agencies can collect regular and accurate gender-specific catch-to-consumer employment data to track trends and progress.*

*When gender equality is not on the fisheries and aquaculture agenda and the labour contributions of women are not counted in data collection, women's inputs are forgotten. To make the invisible visible, **gender equality must be a stated program priority** in policy, research, and practice, by building expertise within key agencies. **Collection of fisheries data broken out by gender** allows trends and progress to be tracked.*

**Specific actions:** Place gender equality on the agenda for FAO's Committee on Fisheries. Discuss and accelerate programs, especially around data collection, demonstrating leadership to member countries. National and regional fisheries and aquaculture agencies can then learn from these policy actions.

- **INCREASE FUNDING TO GENDER HUNDREDFOLD:** *Make greater investment in targeted gender projects, research and educational outreach. The present quantum is so small and needs a hundredfold increase to achieve impact.*

*Currently, gender work is poorly funded. Much of the current research has small budgets and is funded by piggybacking on aquaculture and fisheries studies where gender is not the primary focus. Development work also requires **greater investment and educational outreach** to make sure policy goals are put into practice and resources are used wisely. Funders can list gender explicitly in their program priorities and pool their resources between funding agencies to work towards common goals.*

**Specific actions:** Interested future funders are invited to participate in and brainstorm solutions to the lack of program and research funding committed to gender in aquaculture and fisheries (GAF) work at side meeting in conjunction with the 12<sup>th</sup> Asian Fisheries and Aquaculture Forum, 8-12 April 2019, Iloilo, Philippines.

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- **SUPPORT WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT:** *Women can collaborate, assert their rights and upgrade their capacity, if necessary with funding and support for education, advocacy and legal resources. Men's and male-led organizations can become allies in enhancing women's autonomy over their lives and livelihoods.*

*Women are rarely organised to advocate for their rights. Collectively, women need to organize, collaborate and assert their rights along the catch-to-consumer pathway, **challenging the status quo and claiming gender equality**, changing laws when necessary.*

**Specific actions:** Make challenging the status quo a requirement of any project or action. Fund and support education and resources such as advocacy and legal assistance to women's organizations. Find ways to gain the support of men as allies and male-led organizations as collaborators in enhancing women's control over their

- **COLLABORATE ON GENDER:** *To make the invisible visible, gender equality must be a stated priority in policy, research, and programs, and expertise built in the key agencies along the catch-consumer pathway.*

*At the research level, the most acclaimed fishery and aquaculture studies rarely include gender issues. Researchers can look to gender experts in the social sciences for ideas, approaches and collaboration opportunities. Research agencies can share knowledge of successes and challenges in creating positive change. At the program level, **partnerships among small organizations and sharing of resources towards common goals** will increase opportunities and reach.*

**Specific actions:** Research agencies should make explicit their programs on gender research and their commitment to supporting a gender equal and safe workplace. Where gender research expertise is lacking, research leaders must take steps to recruit, train and share sources of gender knowledge.

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