

MAKING 'GENDER IN FISHERIES' STICK: A STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP OF NETWORKS IN THE LOWER MEKONG BASIN

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Knowledge and its communications are seen as important elements for sustainable development. Networks of like-minded people have been found to be promising forms for knowledge creation and dissemination, and are being supported by national and international development organisations.

Two such networks exist for fisheries development in the Lower Mekong Basin: The Regional Network for the Promotion of Gender and Women in Fisheries (NGF), which brings together national gender networks in each of the four riparian countries developed earlier, and the Technical Advisory Body on Fisheries Management in the Mekong Basin (TAB), both supported by the Mekong River Commission's Fisheries Programme (MRC/FP) since 2000.

Often, less-structured networks such as NGF, though successful in awareness creation, frequently lack a channel into policy-making. Incidentally, the uptake of information on regional fisheries management issues in national policies and action plans is the main aim of the TAB, which has included gender equity as a regional principle of fisheries governance. Not surprisingly then, the TAB has sought the collaboration with NGF, whose chairperson initially had observer status and has been made full member in 2007.

A highlight in NGF-TAB interaction has been the commissioning to the NGF of a study on 'Gender and Fisheries in the Lower Mekong Basin' by the TAB in 2005. The cooperation had two objectives: First, to allow the TAB to develop a better understanding of gender issues in fisheries management and development to identify ways in which the TAB can best contribute in this area; Second, to solve two problems which had challenged NGF since its inception. These problems were i) a need for clarity in the network itself on what "promotion of gender in fisheries" means; and ii) NGF's so far unsuccessful tries to undertake a "project" in promoting gender in fisheries collectively, that is as a network, as opposed to the involvement of individuals who happen to be network members.

Over about a year, the writing up of the study involved each national gender network, identifying available information, information gaps and information providers, bringing everything together in a final regional workshop. The study, which produced important insights, was completed in 2006 and its results summarised in a TAB brief for use by policy makers in the region.

Recognising and exploiting opportunities of cross-level and cross-scale cooperation between NGF and TAB resulted in mutually strengthening both organisations, and in linking up 'issue networks' (NGFs) with a 'policy community' (TAB) for the benefit of sustainable gender equitable, fisheries management and development in the Mekong Basin.