

## **GENDER ISSUES OF THE FISHERY COMMUNITIES IN THE CENTRAL REGION OF VIETNAM**

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Based on both the participatory approach and household interviews, the gender issues of the fishery communities in the Central region of Vietnam are overviewed and analyzed. The findings indicate that in recent years, gender disparities have significantly reduced and both men and women now have better access to education, health services and economic opportunities. However, the existing gender gap between men and women of the fishery communities in the Central region is wider than the gender gap for other regions of Vietnam. Generally, many disadvantages are still specific to women, particularly poor women. Traditionally, cultural beliefs give very strong value to the necessity to have a boy child in the family. These beliefs sometimes generate major difficulties, particularly for women whose husbands want to have a boy. Although family planning and birth control policies were introduced many years ago, most sites had a high frequency of families who have more than three children. Women are responsible for reproduction and are also overloaded with housework which is traditionally considered as women's duty. Women rarely have opportunities to engage in fishing and aquaculture activities because either they are mainly engaged in housework or they are regarded as bad luck to these activities. The majority of women in the fishery communities are underemployed because alternative jobs are limited. Consequently, women lack jobs and are considered as dependant because of their lower cash income. In the field of social capital, although women's unions have considerably improved women's positions in social and economic life, they have fewer opportunities accessing other sources of social capital, particularly informal ones. As a result, their voice is limited in the processes of decision making in the family as well as in society due to traditional beliefs and stereotypes in which women's status is either subordinate or they have to be respectful towards men. In the coastal central region, many women are widows and they are rapidly trapped into poverty. In many cases, their husbands have been killed by the annual storms, for example, Chanchu storm in 2006 killed 257 fishermen in the region. Finally, women are also lack opportunities to access health services, education and professional training.

In order to improve gender equity in the fishery communities, some recommendations are 1) create more innovative solutions for better access to education, health care, social services, professional trainings for alternative jobs; 2) take gender equality into account in rural development policies related to access to resources, income generation, development planning and trainings and decision making process; 3) more support policies for women in economic activities such as credit, training on starting new business, business skills and transferring technology and 4) raising awareness about gender for local authorities.