

GENDER IN COMMERCIAL AQUACULTURE IN BANGLADESH - IS THERE A POTENTIAL FOR EMPOWERMENT?

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Due to its abundant water resources and sub-tropical climate conditions, Bangladesh is one of the most promising countries for further rapid growth of the freshwater aquaculture industry. Therefore, there exists enormous potential for women to significantly contribute to and benefit from the aquaculture value chain in the country; realizing this potential remains a challenge due to the many religious, cultural, and socio-economic restrictions within which women and men operate. As in other countries in the region, these socio-cultural norms tend to concentrate women at the lower end of the supply chain compared to male workers, in activities characterized by less power, control, independence, and status.

So while women are involved in various aspects of freshwater aquaculture, their engagement is often concentrated in homestead pond management which may be primarily used for consumption. Their main activities include: fish feeding, on-farm feed preparation, pond fertilization, stocking and harvesting. That said, recent reports point out that fish production has increased by up to 20% due to women's participation in the industry (Shirajee et al. 2010). However, because women tend to be "invisible" in the aquaculture segment in Bangladesh, their role has not been sufficiently recognized and often remains inadequately understood and valued, indicating that their actual aquaculture production contribution could be significantly higher. The nature of women's participation in aquaculture therefore bears further analysis in order to understand how to enhance women's opportunities in the sector, for their own and the sector's benefit.

The aim of this study is to contribute to such an analysis. It will use data on women's and men's participation in aquaculture obtained by CGIAR Research Program on Aquatic Agricultural Systems and Livestock and Fish in six villages in Bangladesh to assess where and how women are involved in commercial aquaculture. This work will provide recommendations on how to improve the range and quality of women's opportunities in the commercial aquaculture (particularly in the feed production sector) both within and outside of the homestead, as well as identify remaining knowledge gaps regarding women's role in the commercial sector and an associated research agenda.