

The Importance of Gender in Fisheries: The USAID Oceans Experience

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In the fisheries sector, gendered divisions of labor and the invisibility of many actors, particularly women workers, and migrants, may lead to policies and programs that ignore people's needs and welfare, including social protection. One of the reasons why gender has been long overlooked by the fisheries sector is the perception that it is a masculine industry. However, fisheries research has shown that the sector is not only a domain for men, but also it has a heavy participation of women (Sison *et al.*, 2002; Kleiber *et al.*, 2014; Satapornvanit *et al.*, 2016). Although capture fisheries have been associated with men, women also contribute significantly in post-harvest, processing, and marketing (Williams, 2008; Weeratunge *et al.*, 2010). Women often have varied important roles such as onshore laborers, traders, buyers, and financiers in small-scale fisheries in the Southeast Asian region.

A number of international and regional organizations recommended that gender issues in the fisheries sector should be addressed, such as through the implementation of guidelines like the FAO Voluntary Guidelines for Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries (FAO, 2017), Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (UN, 1979), UN Sustainable Development Goals (UN, 2015), USAID Gender Equality and Female Empowerment (USAID, 2012), and the Committee on World Food Security (CFS). The CFS urged States to ensure that fisheries policies and interventions should promote gender equality and should take care not to result in negative impacts on women (CFS, 2015). In addition, the CFS also recommended that the FAO Committee on Fisheries should develop policies to guide member states on the implementation of gender equality and economic contributions. More importantly, development assistance programs were required to be more gender-aware and to give priority to initiatives that promote gender equality.

A number of development organizations have developed policies around gender equity and have incorporated gender equality into their developmental goals. The Gender Equality and Female Empowerment Policy of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) takes notice of the fact that “*Societies with greater gender equality experience faster economic growth, and benefit from greater agricultural productivity and improved food security*” (USAID, 2012). This facilitated the inclusion of a specific goal in the United Nations’ 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG): SDG 5, which aims to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls (UN, 2015).

There are several natural entry points for gender integration within the fisheries sector, such as in research, policy development, project design and implementation, education, extension, capacity building, markets and trade, and media and communications. What is needed is an understanding of what constitutes gender equity and equality (see **Box 1**) and how these could be achieved in the context of fisheries.

Box 1. Simplified gender terminologies

- **Sex and gender** - sex is biologically determined, more constant across time and cultures; gender is socially ascribed, and changes across time and culture.
- **Gender analysis** - a process of gathering and analyzing sex-disaggregated information in order to understand gender differences and to identify major issues that contribute to gender inequalities. It uncovers how gender relations affect a development problem, and examines the differences in women's and men's lives, including those which lead to social and economic inequity for women. The ultimate aim is to achieve positive change, particularly for women who are mostly at a disadvantage.
- **Gender equality** - a state in which the allocation of resources, programs, opportunities, and decision making is equally given to women and men so they have the same, and could also refer to the state or condition in which women and men have equal enjoyment of their human rights, socially valued goods, opportunities, and resources.
- **Gender equity** - is the fair allocation of resources, programs, opportunities, and decision-making to both women and men without discrimination on the basis of sex, as well as addressing any imbalances or inequities in the benefits available to both sexes. To ensure fairness, compensation must be considered to cover economic, social, and political disadvantages that prevent women and men, boys and girls from operating on a level playing field.
- **Gender sensitive** - awareness of the ways people think about gender, so that individuals rely less on assumptions about traditional and outdated views on the roles of women and men.
- **Gender mainstreaming** - a strategy which makes women's as well as men's concerns and experiences a vital aspect of the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of policies and programs at all levels and spheres *i.e.*, political, economic, and societal, in order that women and men can benefit equally, and inequality is not continued or promoted.
- **Gender integration** - taking gender aspects into account in program design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation, to compensate for gender-based inequalities.
- **Gender responsive** - recognizing and addressing the particular needs, priorities, and realities of women and men so that both of them can equally benefit, with gender-sensitive indicators to track progress in closing the gender gap.
- **Gender-sensitive indicators** - indicators disaggregated by sex, age, and socio-economic background, which are designed to determine changes in relations between women and men over a period of time.

Source: Arenas and Lentisco, 2011; IGWG, 2016; March *et al.*, 1999; UNDP, 2007



Women tuna buyers checking the quality of fish at the fish port in General Santos City, Philippines

USAID Oceans’ commitment on gender integration

The USAID Oceans and Fisheries Partnership (USAID Oceans) encourages equal participation and access to program activities by women and men in interviews, meetings, trainings, technology development, research and testing, and as resource persons. As it has been established that women are oftentimes the most disadvantaged in fisheries, USAID Oceans tries to engage with women’s groups and associations in various activities to increase their capacity for leadership and empower them to realize their roles as important components in the fisheries value chain and in their communities. To further gender integration, USAID Oceans tries to give opportunities to stakeholders with gender and/or women empowerment strategies, particularly women’s/gender groups, networks, and private sector partners. USAID Oceans has also worked with local stakeholders to co-draft the Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management (EAFM) plans, particularly strengthening the plans’ gender components to balance social well-being with ecological well-being, supported by good governance.

USAID Oceans and SEAFDEC joint gender programs

The importance of a gendered approach to project implementation was recognized in the conception and design of the USAID Oceans, a collaborative project between the Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center (SEAFDEC) and the USAID Regional Development Mission for Asia, which is working on the ways and means of combating illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing and promoting sustainable fisheries management among the ASEAN Member States (AMSs) and the Coral Triangle Initiative on Coral

Reefs, Fisheries, and Food Security (CTI-CFF) countries. As part of its strategy, the USAID Oceans has woven gender interventions throughout its activity structure. Gender integration has been included in the design of the activity since the beginning, with strategies set in place to enable a biodiversity and fisheries activity focusing on technology development and fisheries management to apply a gender lens during its implementation.

In promoting the program’s strategic approach, USAID Oceans established two learning sites in Indonesia and Philippines, and conducted gender analyses of the fisheries value chains in these two sites. The analyses conducted by the National Network on Women in Fisheries in the Philippines (WinFish), and the Sam Ratulangi University (UNSRAT) in Indonesia, employed USAID’s Gender Dimensions Framework overlaid with a gender-responsive value chain analysis framework (Mayoux and Mackie, 2008). The findings of the analysis enabled the program to understand the gender differentials across various nodes of the value chain, identify gender-related key data elements to be captured by the program’s electronic catch documentation and traceability system (eCDTS), collect sex and/or gender disaggregated data, and provide inputs to capacity building activities, interventions, and communication materials. The analyses also looked at existing national and local gender initiatives, identified strategic areas of intervention, and provided recommendations for various stakeholders to promote gender equity in fisheries (Table 1 and Table 2).

Way forward

For development practitioners, fisheries management experts, and as participants in fisheries initiatives, assessing the impact of the USAID Oceans’ work in gender in fisheries is important



A small-scale woman trader buys fish from fishermen and sells them to a wholesale trader in Kiamba, Sarangani, Philippines

so that further improvements or corrections could be made. In addition to human welfare drivers, there are also increasing market incentives to responsible fisheries, as consumers are interested in seafood products which give considerations to human welfare such as gender and social equity, women empowerment, and human well-being. It is therefore necessary

for the fisheries industry, including government, private, and the civil society sectors, to be equipped in this aspect of human welfare, particularly in the gender dimension. Such actions must ensure that women, youth, and other marginalized groups are benefitting from improvements brought about by sustainable fisheries initiatives, such as the USAID Oceans.

Table 1. Summary of recommendations for stakeholders in Indonesia to promote gender equity in fisheries

Stakeholders group	Policy	Research	Actions/Interventions
Local and national government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supporting the formation of women fisher and fish processor groups, and developing women-friendly policies and procedures particularly in financing, marketing of products, and business permits issuance to encourage women in fisheries entrepreneurship Advocacy for women-friendly and safe workplaces in fisheries, and development of local ordinances to ensure that women and youth involved in fisheries work feel safe in their communities and workplaces 	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Capacity building and extension among women stakeholders in fisheries on relevant skills Recognition of and provide incentives to fisheries businesses and establishments where gender equality and women empowerment are being upheld. Information drive and extension of regulations on gender equality, and women empowerment, fisheries regulations and relevant information Provide financial support for start-up businesses by women
Private sector/fisheries industry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop and adopt a gender equality policy in the companies to ensure women are not excluded in recruitment, promotion, being part of the board of directors, salary increases, opportunities for capacity building, travel, among others 	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development and/or implementation of the gender equality policy of the company Support the formation of groups of small-scale women fish processors and provide them with technical skills Provide opportunities to women small-scale fish processors to supply the companies with their products
Research institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advocate for gender sensitive research methods to be able to extract sex and gender disaggregated data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understanding women's and men's roles and relationships in the fisheries sector Women-friendly and appropriate technologies for fish processing Documentation of gender-sensitive indigenous technical knowledge for sustainable fishing practices 	-
Civil society, NGOs, associations	-	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop or support networking of women's groups to enable them to contact each other to gain experiences, share skills, obtain information on various fisheries related activities including market opportunities, prices, resources, and financial aids/supports
Development assistance agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote gender integration among development partners and project proponents Prioritize assistance to organizations and projects with gender integration strategies 	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support the initiatives that promote gender equity and women and youth empowerment in fishing and coastal communities through provision of start-up capital, training, sharing of information, and other activities related to coastal community empowerment

Source: UNSRAT (2017)

Table 2. Summary of recommendations for stakeholders in the Philippines to promote gender equity in fisheries

Stakeholders group	Policy	Research	Actions/Interventions
Local government units (LGU)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formulate, adopt, and institutionalize a gendered tuna development plan or roadmap, addressing the practical and strategic gender needs identified in the gender analysis Include the attendance of heads of organizations in basic gender sensitivity trainings and on eCDTS/EAFM in the application requirements for renewal of fishing licenses and permits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct impact studies on eCDTS/EAFM related topics as basis for planning and intervention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Include women in the policy making and program development bodies/ units Capacity building, information campaigns, and orientation of women fishers on the eCDTS and EAFM and relevant skills information Give recognition or incentives to women's groups/individuals who advocate greater participation of women Officially designate a focal person for Gender and Development in the LGU
National government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The mandatory use of Harmonized Gender Development Guidelines (HGDG) tools in the review and enhancement of existing policies and programs related to fisheries Inclusion of women/gender in fisheries (e.g., eCDTS/ EAFM) in the national R&D agenda 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide support to research translation and technology transfer activities Engage State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) to conduct study on how to use the latest information technology to strengthen flow of information along the tuna value chain 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthen collaboration with similar and counterpart institutions in the international scene, particularly on the role of women in fisheries management Capacity building activities on various topics as needed
Private sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local resolutions that will open traditionally male-dominated work spaces to women who are capable of performing the work. Details will include provision of women-friendly tools and equipment, among others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Benchmark eCDTS/EAFM strategies and mechanisms in other areas in order to be able to design a gendered framework and mechanisms in the implementation of eCDTS/ EAFM at the local level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Capacity building and Information, Education and Communication (IEC) campaigns to promote gender awareness/sensitivity on the importance of work-life balance in the workplace, on fishery standards, rules, and regulations in the local and international markets, as well as gender policies and issues Provision of better working conditions for women that address their practical and strategic needs to improve their productivity and welfare Full implementation and compliance to laws such as the RA 7877 (The Anti-Sexual Harassment Act of 1995)
Research institutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lobby for the inclusion of gender in fisheries and aquaculture as a separate and major research area under the Philippine Harmonized National R&D Agenda that is spearheaded by the Department of Science and Technology 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct of research on topics such as a gendered database by fishery product/sector and gender relations within the household and in the work sphere 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide the expertise and technical assistance to LGUs, national agencies, and private sectors for capacity building activities
Civil society, NGOs, associations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lobby for gender-responsive policies and regulations at all government levels in order to protect the rights and welfare particularly women workers in the tuna industry, including measures regarding mandatory provision of protective gears for workers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Design women-friendly programs that are dovetailed to address the multiple and inter-sectional situations of women in the tuna value chain Develop a social insurance scheme for seasonal, contractual, and/or self-employed workers/fishers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organize more women's groups in the villages for them to be empowered and own their successes in the industry, to represent women in policy making, project identification/ design, implementation, and monitoring Mentor the women by conducting capacity building and skills training activities on off-the-sea livelihoods in order to provide a wider option to women Monitor the compliance of stakeholders to gender policies and labor laws and regulations

Table 2. Summary of recommendations for stakeholders in the Philippines to promote gender equity in fisheries (Cont'd)

Stakeholders group	Policy	Research	Actions/Interventions
Development assistance agencies	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document the success stories for possible replication • Conduct intercountry research to widen the perspectives on women and fisheries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate with local players so that interventions are more targeted to the needs of the women and men stakeholders • Conduct capacity building to include introduction of women-friendly fishing gears and technologies from other countries; and facilitate/ introduce international collaborative gender-related projects • Encourage sharing of data and skills on best practices in gender integration

Source: WinFish (2017)

As the seafood industry and social development are closely linked together, the human dimension in fisheries development must be excluded. Fisheries management and development approaches should be inclusive of a gendered approach, rather than gender blind and uninformed on the impacts of actions on the well-being of women and men. Through individual work, awareness of gender equity in the fisheries sector and the benefits of women's involvement, especially in decision-making could be raised.

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