

Understanding the Gender Roles in Small-scale Fisheries and Aquaculture in Southeast Asia

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The SEAFDEC Training Department implemented the project “Gender Dimension in the Value Chain of Small-scale Fisheries and Aquaculture in Southeast Asia” from 2020 to 2022 with support from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). Under the Project, a series of gender analyses were conducted in selected Member Countries, namely: Philippines for marine capture fisheries, Thailand for mariculture, Myanmar for inland capture fisheries, and Lao PDR for inland aquaculture. The activity profile of the respondents in each study site was described which was categorized into reproductive, productive, and community involvement. It was found that women and men were both essential in the value chain of fisheries and aquaculture based on their knowledge, experiences, and time allocation.

the different cultural contexts and challenging practices that are discriminatory against women (FAO, 2015). In relevance with the Strategies of SEAFDEC Towards 2030, Strategy 5 indicates the importance of “Addressing cross-cutting issues, such as labor, gender, and climate change, where related to international fisheries” by giving “cognizance of the importance of small-scale fisheries, the welfare of labor in fisheries, safety at sea, and gender equality in the fisheries and aquaculture sector.”

The SEAFDEC Gender Strategy adopted in 2019 aims to mainstream and integrate gender perspectives into the SEAFDEC organization, and in its programs, projects, and activities. One of the projects that promoted the SEAFDEC Gender Strategy was the “Gender Dimension in the Value Chain of Small-scale Fisheries and Aquaculture in Southeast Asia” of the Training Department of SEAFDEC implemented from 2020 to 2022 with support from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). Under the Project, a series of gender analyses were conducted in particular fisheries sub-sectors in selected Member Countries, namely: Philippines for marine capture fisheries, Thailand for mariculture, Myanmar for inland capture fisheries, and Lao PDR for inland aquaculture (Figure 1). The data were collected from 2021 to 2022 through semi-structured interviews.

Generally, in Southeast Asian societies, women’s roles in fisheries are not well recognized and are usually overlooked or underrepresented in official documents and statistics. Documentation of women’s contributions in each component of the value chain in small-scale fisheries and aquaculture continues to be a challenge because of the informal nature of their work. Thus, the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines) recommend that gender mainstreaming should be made an integral part of all small-scale fisheries development strategies, which should take into consideration

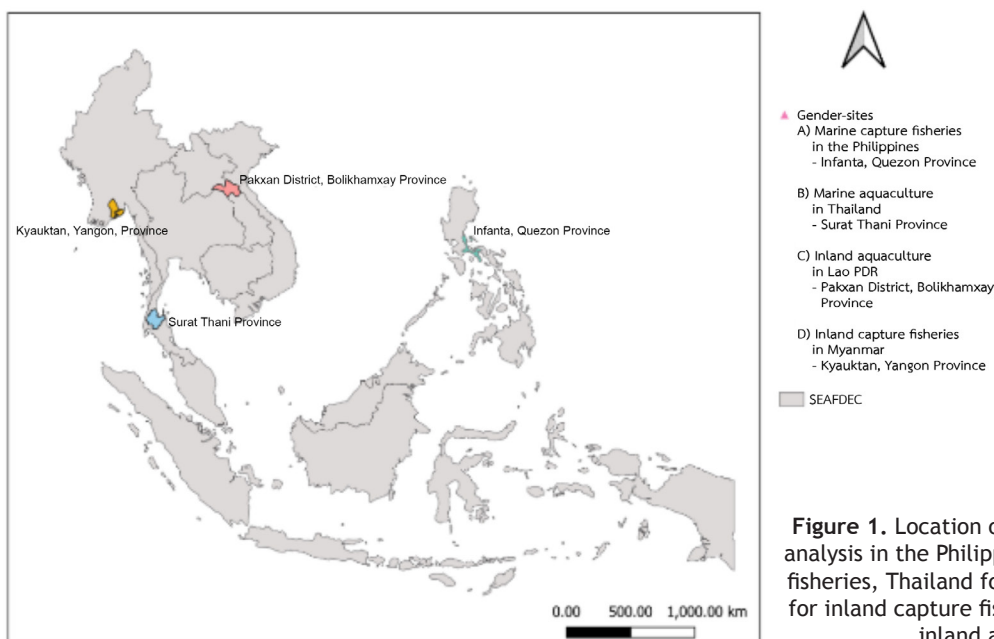


Figure 1. Location of study sites for gender analysis in the Philippines for marine capture fisheries, Thailand for mariculture, Myanmar for inland capture fisheries, and Lao PDR for inland aquaculture

The activity profile of the respondents in each study site was described following the Harvard Analytical Framework, which is categorized into reproductive, productive, and community involvement. Reproductive activity involves the care and maintenance of the household and its members, productive activity produces goods and services for home consumption and sale, and community work involves activities for the management and well-being of the community that are voluntary and unpaid (FAO, 2011).

Marine capture fisheries in the Philippines

In Infanta, Quezon, Philippines, the data collection (Figure 2) was conducted in November 2021–March 2022 with a total of 40 respondents including 18 females and 22 males. The respondents use hook and line (87%), set nets (5%), gillnets (5%), and miscellaneous gears (3%). The species caught are skipjack tuna, yellowfin tuna, sardines, dolphin fish, herring, red snapper, threadfin bream, clown fish, goatfish, grouper, round scad, big-eye snapper, hardtail mackerel, Indian mackerel, bangus fry, milkfish, moon fish, among others.

Results of the survey indicated the local perspective that women work for light jobs and men for heavy jobs (Figure 3). Women work mainly as cleaners taking charge of washing clothes and dishes and cleaning the house, while men work for house maintenance as well as fishing and raising livestock for household consumption. Women and men work together in childcare, as well as caring for the elderly or sick family



Figure 2. Interview with the respondents in marine capture fisheries in Infanta, Quezon Province, Philippines

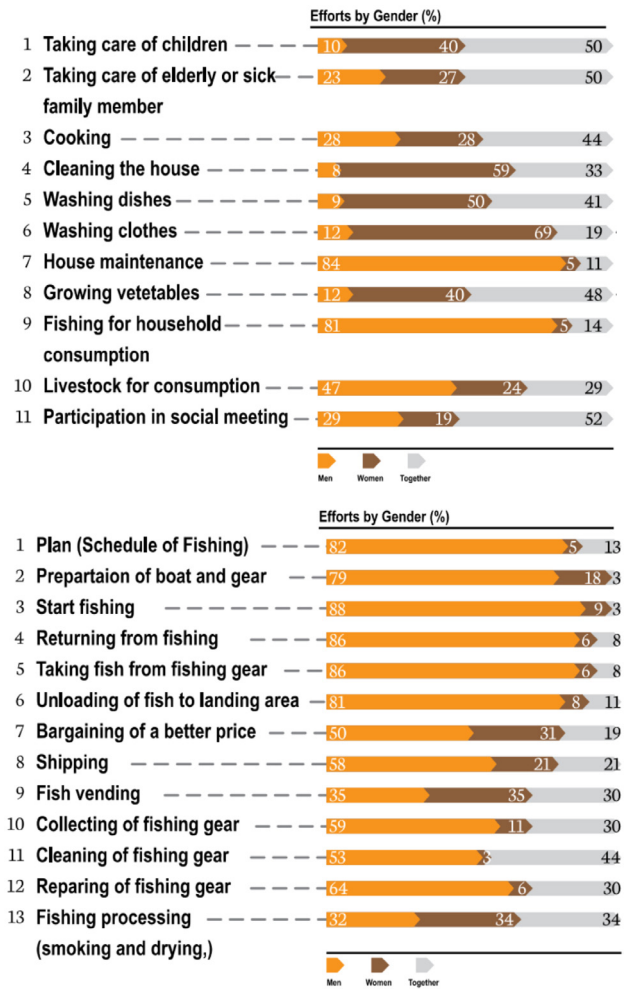


Figure 3. Reproductive (top chart) and productive (bottom chart) roles of women and men (n = 40) in marine capture fisheries in Infanta, Quezon Province, Philippines

members of the family, cooking, and participating in social activities. For productive roles, women and men work together in fish processing and fish vending. Other activities such as planning for fishing, preparing boats and gear, fishing, removing fish from gears, unloading fish to landing areas, bargaining for better prices, shipping, collecting the fishing gear, cleaning fishing gear, and repairing fishing gear are mainly done by men. However, the women also participate in most activities, especially in fish processing, fish vending, and shipping bargaining for better fish prices, and preparing boats and gear.

Mariculture in Thailand

In Surat Thani Province, Thailand, the data collection (Figure 4) was conducted in August–September 2022 with a total of 93 respondents, including 29 females and 64 males. The cultured species of the respondents include crab (51%), fish (31%), and shrimp (18%).



Figure 4. Interview with the respondents in small-scale mariculture in Surat Thani, Thailand

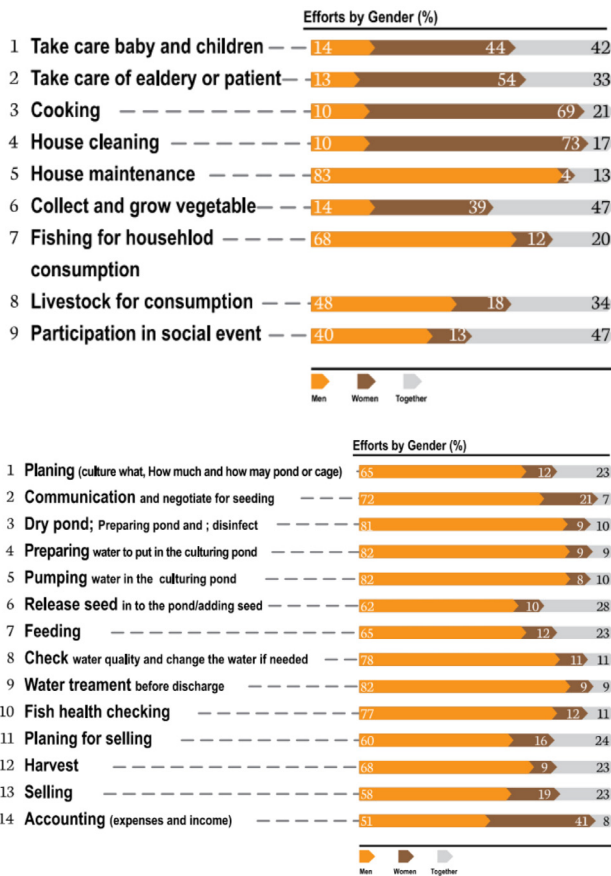


Figure 5. Reproductive (top chart) and productive (above chart) roles of women and men (n = 93) in mariculture in Surat Thani, Thailand

Although men may have their leading roles in aquaculture and the main role of women is in the household, both men and women could help together in the household chores and aquaculture operations (Figure 5). The gender roles in the household showed that women still do the housework such as cooking, taking care of children and the elderly, and backyard gardening. In contrast, men do laborious tasks such as house repair. Men prepare and arrange for the aquaculture operations, while women are also involved in some tasks such as helping to prepare the ponds, communicating with suppliers of fish seeds or fry, harvesting, selling, and accounting. Moreover, women had the same chance of attending community activities as men. For productive roles, men do most of the tasks in aquaculture while men and women share the burden of accounting for expenditures and income. Considering that men are more knowledgeable than women in aquaculture, men are overburdened because the activities usually involve heavy work meant for income generation. Meanwhile, women also take part in negotiations for seeds, planning for product sales, and selling of produce that only needs a little heavy work especially since women are already occupied by their reproductive roles.

Inland capture fisheries in Myanmar

In Kyauktan, there was a total of 40 respondents including 12 females and 28 males (Figure 6). All respondents use licensed fishery vessels with outboard motors and use drift nets in rivers. Their catch is multispecies composed mainly of



Figure 6. Interview with the respondents in inland capture fisheries in Kyauktan, Yangon Province, Myanmar in May-June 2021

threadfin (*Polynemus* sp.), catfish (*Arius* sp.), croaker (*Johnius* sp.), hilsa (*Tenualosa ilisha*), and basa fish (*Pangasius* sp.).

For reproductive roles, the women perform the tasks of taking care of elderly or sick family members, cooking, and cleaning the house (Figure 7). Women and men together to take care of children, do house maintenance, grow vegetables, raise livestock for consumption, and participate in social meetings. Men have no dominant work for reproductive roles. For the productive roles, men work to prepare and arrange for the fishing operations, decide on the species of fish to be captured or the fishing gear to be used, check the boat engine before going to fish, check gear and all equipment needed before they go fishing, drive or steer the boat to the fishing ground, set out the fishing gear, and bring fishing gear and boat or engine for maintenance. Meanwhile, the women assist men in the maintenance of fishing gear and nets and repair fishing gear if necessary. Women also help the men by checking the weather and tide which could support information for decision making to go fishing. Furthermore, women produce fish paste and help the men dry fish. Men have more roles in fisheries post-harvest than women, e.g. chilling fish with ice, sorting fish by species, size, and weight, drying fish, and selling fresh fish.

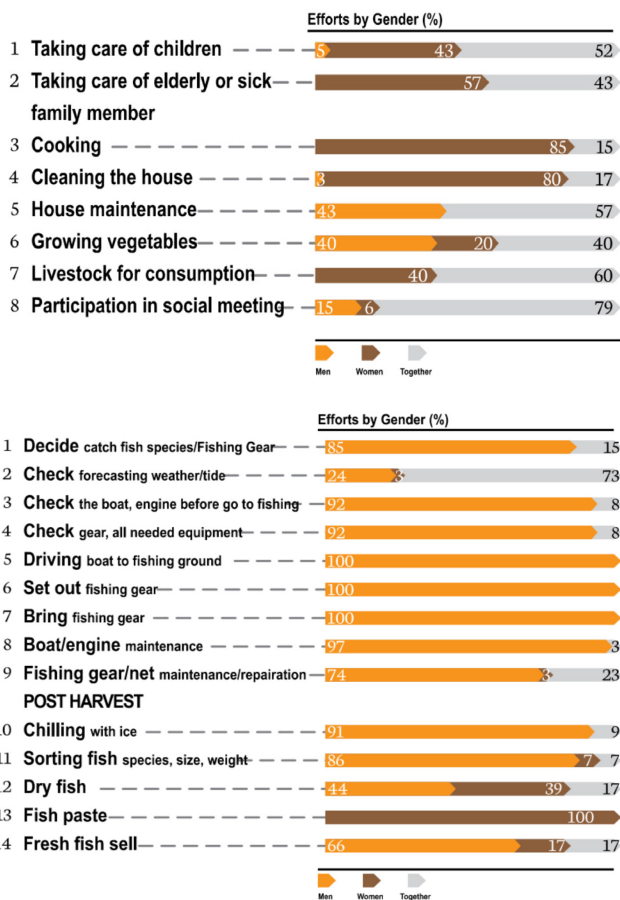


Figure 7. Reproductive (top chart) and productive (above chart) roles of women and men (n = 40) in inland capture fisheries in Kyauktan, Yangon Region, Myanmar

Inland aquaculture in Lao PDR

In Pakxan District, Bolikhamxay Province in Lao PDR, the data collection (Figure 8) was conducted in January–March 2021 with 28 respondents (8 females, 20 males). Among the respondents, 96 % engaged in small-scale inland aquaculture. The two main freshwater cultured fish species are tilapia (53 %) and catfish (47 %).



Figure 8. Interview with the respondents in small-scale inland aquaculture in Pakxan District, Bolikhamxay Province, Lao PDR

Figure 9 shows that the role of men and women is divided physically regarding sex. Men perform productive roles while women focus on reproductive roles because they believe that women are skillful in caring for their families and that men must work hard for their families. Nonetheless, looking carefully at the reproductive roles, women perform their work daily while men work only occasionally. The daily chores of women make them busy and occupied to the extent that they have no time to attend village meetings. Women only participate a little in aquaculture activities because men are well known to be adept in aquaculture operations while women are busy doing household chores. Nonetheless, women also do their job of helping the male members of the family to be successful in their aquaculture endeavors. Furthermore, the male respondents indicated that they do not perform household chores revealing a strong stereotype that women work for household needs while men work for income.

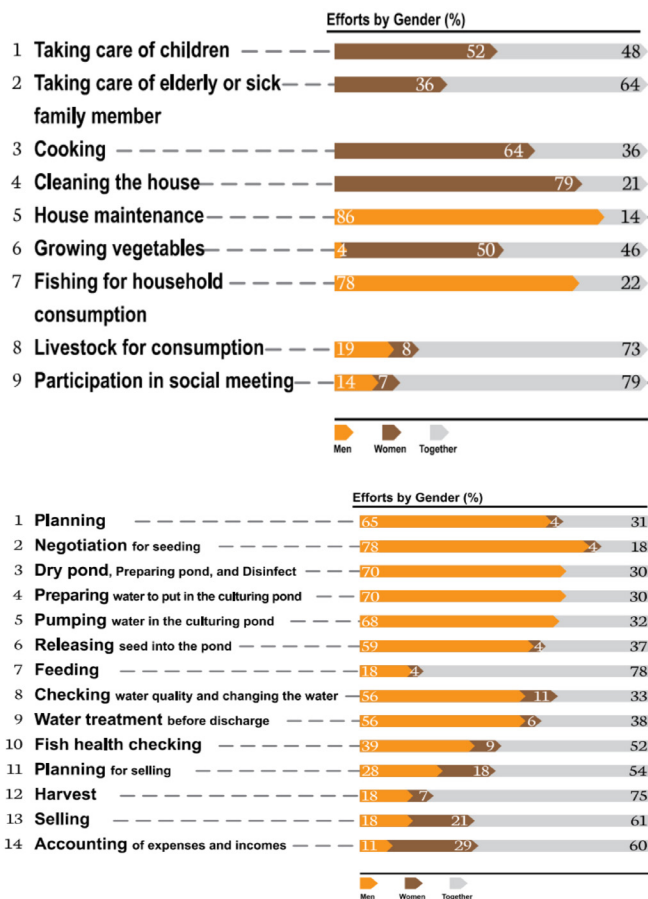


Figure 9. Reproductive (top chart) and productive (above chart) roles of women and men (n = 28) in inland aquaculture in Pakxan District, Bolikhamxay Province, Lao PDR

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study revealed that the female and male respondents were involved in almost all processes of fishing and aquaculture. Nevertheless, the gender-differentiated roles were based on a solid stereotype of gender division of labor that men must work for complex and heavy tasks in productive roles. In contrast, women work for household chores and not-so-heavy tasks in productive roles. The study emphasized that women and men are both essential in the value chain of fisheries and aquaculture based on their knowledge, experiences, and time allocation. Therefore, to approach gender equality, the capability of stakeholders should be enhanced through education and communication to empower the women and men in the community based on their needs and the opportunities for their viable livelihoods. The study suggests that men and women should have more understanding of the gender roles that can change their attitude on working, which is to assist each other in the household work because, in terms of work time spent, women have more workload than men. Capacity building in relevant areas is crucial to empower men and women in small-scale fishing and aquaculture to sustain their livelihoods.

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