

Identifying Gender Perspectives in Small-scale Fisheries and Aquaculture in Southeast Asia through Access and Control Profiles

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The Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center (SEAFDEC) is recognized as one of the regional fisheries organizations that promote gender equality, enabling women to participate fully in the fisheries value chain and gain recognition for their work. Women provide significant contributions to the fishery industry. However, limited access to resources has resulted to gender inequalities in economic development, leading to women's invisibility as major players in the fishery industry. Women comprise almost half of the labor force in small-scale capture fisheries-related activities. While men fish farther from shore, women are engaged in local small-scale fishery activities inshore to earn additional income for their households. These include harvesting shellfish and seaweeds for sale and family consumption, repairing nets, processing fish products, and marketing, in addition to managing their households and taking care of their families. Nonetheless, the 'invisibility' of women in small-scale fisheries has been recognized lately and is being addressed through programs and projects that aim to mainstream gender into fisheries development (Needham, 2011).

One of the gender equality issues in fisheries is the lack of awareness of the need to engage women in decision-making processes, especially in fisheries management plans. To understand and analyze the level of women's and men's participation in decision-making processes for their own development and that of their communities, access and control over the fishery resources have been used as tools in the gender analysis framework (SEAFDEC, 2022). In a gender analysis study of SEAFDEC, results reveal that women and men have equal access to household properties, fishing and aquaculture properties, public services, and finances. However, in building their capacities, women seldom participate in training or seminars because they are not confident about their knowledge in fisheries and aquaculture. In the control of household, fishing, and aquaculture properties, men take on more responsibilities because of the traditional gender stereotype that men are good at leadership; therefore, women always depend on men. To promote gender equality in fisheries management, women should be empowered so that their voices are heard, especially in the development of fisheries management plans for sustainable fishery livelihoods and resources.

During the Workshop of the role players in gender and development conducted in Siem Reap on 2–5 November 2010, best practices for mainstreaming gender into small-scale fisheries policies were developed and used as a guide during the formulation of policies to ensure that gender issues are mainstreamed into the plans and programs for sustainable small-scale fisheries (Needham, 2011). Specifically, the small-scale fishery sector not only contributes 70 percent to the global fish catch but also provides livelihood to 90 percent of the world's fishers, with 200–300 million people, many of whom are women, working in fishery value chains (Kolding *et al.*, 2014), and 50 percent of women globally in fish processing and trade (FAO, 2011). About 500 million people rely on small-scale fisheries for their livelihoods, including 53 million involved in subsistence fishing, 45 percent of whom are women (FAO, 2024). The fisheries and aquaculture sector employs an estimated 62 million people in primary production alone, where about 24 percent of the total workforce are women (FAO, 2024).

Gender Perspectives in Small-scale Fisheries and Aquaculture

Gender is how we look at issues concerning both men and women, in a new way, in every action at every level, and in all aspects of our society and community. This is not a standalone issue, but rather a perspective in which we can look at how policies impact both men and women. Gender also refers to the sociocultural attributes of men and women, which are not fixed but can change over time, and vary from one society to another. Gender is also related to the relations between men and women and the socially constructed acceptable roles for each sex. It represents gender equality, empowering people to gain the same opportunities. To achieve this, the process of gender mainstreaming has been used, with several tools to analyze gender equality promotion. One such tool is gender analysis, which examines the impacts of development projects on women and men, individually, considering their economic and social relationships. In gender analysis, the focus is on the Division of Labor, Access and Control Profile, and Assessment of Influencing Factors.

In SEAFDEC, gender has been placed as a cross-cutting issue in the ASEAN-SEAFDEC Plan of Action on Sustainable Fisheries for Food Security for the ASEAN Region Towards 2030: “Strengthen the capacity of relevant stakeholders and harmonize initiatives that support fishing communities and governments, with a special focus on women and youth” (SEAFDEC, 2020). Also, under the Strategies of SEAFDEC Towards 2030, Strategy 5 focuses on “Addressing cross-cutting issues, such as labor, gender, and climate change, especially with respect to international fisheries.” These oversights and regulations can impact a country’s capacity to achieve targets under SDG 5 (Gender Equality), particularly 5. A, which aims to “undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance, and natural resources, in accordance with national laws.”

Gender perspectives refer to how gender identities and roles influence economic and sustainable development in our society. They are necessary to carry out gender analysis, the results of which are subsequently mainstreamed into proposed programs and policies. This article discusses gender analysis to identify gender perspectives in small-scale fisheries and aquaculture, based on the Access and Control Profiles derived from the results of the “Gender Dimension in the Value Chain of Small-scale Fisheries and Aquaculture in Southeast Asia,” a project supported by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and conducted by the SEAFDEC Training Department in selected SEAFDEC Member Countries, *i.e.* Lao PDR, Myanmar, the Philippines, and Thailand.

This article is intended to serve as a platform for disseminating information compiled from the aforesaid project and demonstrating cooperation among SEAFDEC, partner organizations, and SEAFDEC Member Countries in promoting gender aspects in fisheries. The Access and Control Profile (**Box 1**) was compiled from the analysis of the framework for access to and control over the resources and benefits made in 2020–2021. Semi-structured interviews with fishers and farmers in each country’s target community were conducted at the study sites comprising four areas, namely: Small-scale Inland Aquaculture in Lao PDR; Small-scale Inland Capture Fisheries in Myanmar; Small-scale Marine Capture Fisheries in the Philippines; and Small-scale Marine Aquaculture in Thailand (**Figure 1**). Results from the interviews are summarized in **Table 1**.

Box 1: Access and Control Profile
Access and Control Profile examines the “Access to and Control over the Resources and Benefits” of men and women, their participation level, and their decision-making processes for their own lives and the development of their community.
The Resources include family land, houses, income, and capital in cash and kind, family livestock, family equipment and materials, and labor (of self and family members).
The Benefits include education and training, health care services, credit, community development activities, community forest and water resources, government extension services, information and media, communication and transportation services, electricity, local market, membership, religion, and external aids. The benefit also involved participation, which should not only mean joining in doing something but also taking into account their decision-making capacity. Benefits involve meaningful participation, while also considering their decision-making capacity.
Basic questions for this analysis: “Who has what?” and “Who makes decisions?”

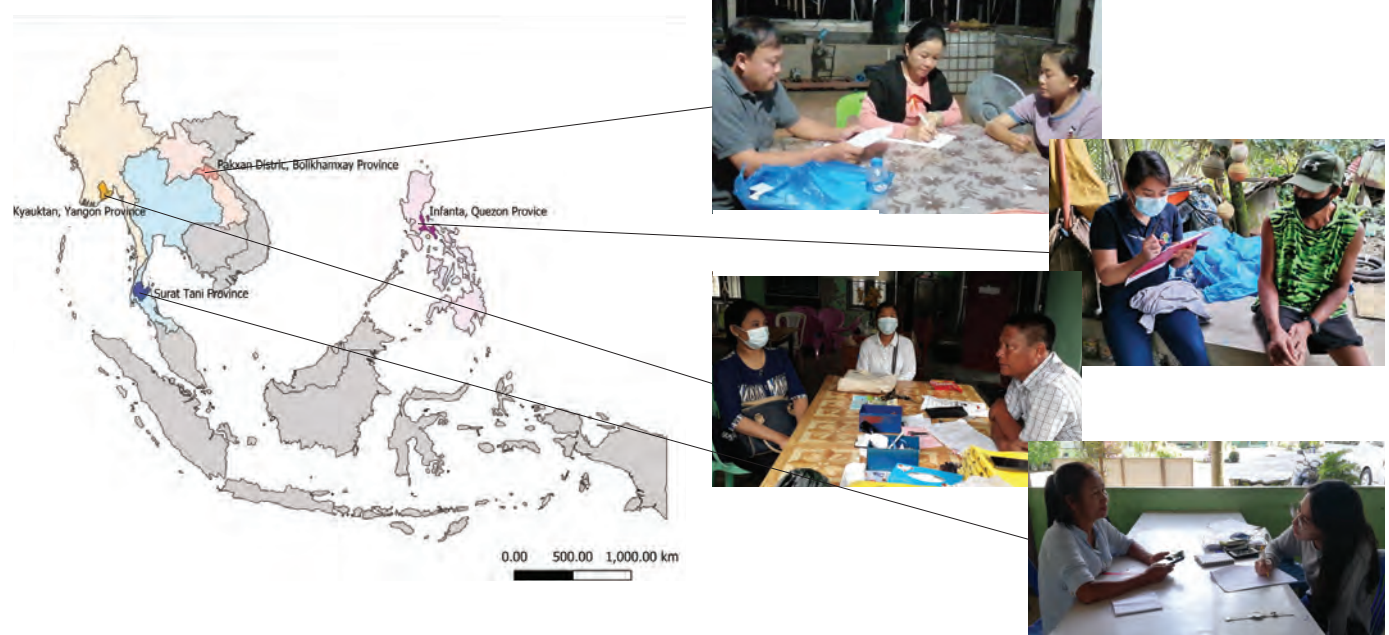


Figure 1. Study sites for the gender analysis study on Access and Control Profile

Table 1. Study sites, data collection period and sampling for the gender analysis study

Countries	Study Sites	Period of data collection	No. of Respondents
Lao PDR (Inland Aquaculture)	Bolikhamxay Province	25-29 January 2021	28 persons (8 women and 20 men)
Myanmar (Inland Capture Fisheries)	Kyauktan, Yangon Province	24-28 May 2021	40 Persons (12 women and 28 men)
Philippines (Marine Capture Fisheries)	Infanta, Quezon Province	16-19 November 2021	40 Persons (18 women and 22 men)
Thailand (Marine Aquaculture)	Surat Thani Province	28-30 August 2020	93 (29 women and 64 men)

Lao PDR

The gender analysis for Small-scale Inland Aquaculture was conducted in Pakxan District, Bolikhamxay Province in Lao PDR, where two main fish species, tilapia and catfish, were cultured in inland ponds. Results indicated that for access, ownership, and control over family resources (Table 2), the percentage was high for both men and women in household assets, such as houses, farmland, cars, and motorcycles. Moreover, both men and women can access and control financial investments through loans from banks, microfinance, and private entities. While both men

and women could engage in money lending, they also have equal access to public services, such as health, and can have their own car insurance. In addition, both men and women get equal opportunities to obtain employment. In terms of aquaculture equipment and materials, men have greater access than women because they are the primary workers in fish culture. Generally, both men and women make their own decisions and have equal control over such decisions, especially in product harvesting and selecting buyers. This is advantageous for women because their participation in decision-making concerning their family and resources is recognized.

Table 2. Access and control over resources in Pakxan District Bolikhamxay Province, Lao PDR

Item	Access				Control			
	No.	Men	Women	Both	No.	Men	Women	Both
Resources: Household assets								
(1) House	28	25 %	11 %	64 %	28	11 %	7 %	82 %
(2) Farmland	28	18 %	7 %	75 %	28	4 %	4 %	92 %
(3) Car	24	38 %	4 %	58 %	24	21 %	4 %	75 %
(4) Motorcycle	28	25 %	4 %	71 %	28	21 %	4 %	75 %
(5) Expenses in the house	26	8 %	4 %	88 %	18		8 %	92 %
Benefit: Services (Financial/insurance/health)								
(6) Loan from bank for investment	14	21 %	7 %	72 %	15	7 %	7 %	86 %
(7) Loan from microfinance	6	17 %		83 %	14	17 %		83 %
(8) Loan from private entities	2			100 %	6			100 %
(9) Money lending	3			100 %	2			100 %
(10) Life/health insurance	8	25 %	12 %	63 %	3	14 %	14 %	72 %
(11) Car insurance	10	50 %		50 %	7	30 %		70 %
(12) Public health	18	6 %	6 %	88 %	10		6 %	94 %
Resources: Management of inland aquaculture								
(13) Employment	7	29 %	29 %	42 %	24	20 %	20 %	60 %
(14) Equipment for aquaculture	26	50 %	8 %	42 %	5	20 %	8 %	72 %
(15) Fish feed	26	42 %	8 %	50 %	25	9 %	4 %	87 %
(16) Storage for keeping equipment	26	54 %	4 %	42 %	23	24 %	4 %	72 %
(17) Workers' dormitory	13	54 %	8 %	38 %	25		36 %	64 %

Table 2. Access and control over resources in Pakxan District Bolikhamxay Province, Lao PDR (Cont'd)

Item	Access				Control			
	No.	Men	Women	Both	No.	Men	Women	Both
(18) Seeding	26	58 %	8 %	34 %	11	26 %	4 %	70 %
(19) Medicines or chemicals for aquaculture	26	69 %	12 %	19 %	23	30 %	9 %	61 %
(20) Farm registration	11	55 %	9 %	36 %	11	9 %	9 %	82 %
(21) Decision to select customers	28	11 %	18 %	71 %	23	4 %	13 %	83 %
(22) Decision to select buyers and product harvesting	25	12 %	12 %	76 %	20	5 %	5 %	90 %
Benefit: Capacity building								
(23) Training/study tour/others	24	33 %	8 %	59 %	18	22 %	6 %	72 %

Myanmar

The gender analysis for Small-scale Inland Capture Fisheries was conducted in Kyauktan, Yangon Region, Myanmar, where the drift net is mainly used to catch multispecies of fish, e.g. threadfin (*Polynemus* sp.), catfish (*Arius* sp.), croaker (*Johnius* sp.), hilsa (*Tenuialosa ilisha*), and basa fish (*Pangasius* sp.). Results of the analysis (Table 3) showed that both men and women have access to and control over their household assets such as their house, although men have more control over ownership. Both men and women have control over farmland, but men have more control over cars and motorcycles, the

most common form of transportation within the family. While women have greater access to bank loans for investment and microfinance, both men and women have control over microfinance loans. Only one of the women respondents had non-performing loans, and only one man had life insurance. Men had the main access to lending money. The respondents did not mention car insurance and medical (sickness) treatment. As for household expenses, both men and women had equal access to and control over such expenditures. Meanwhile, both women and men participated in training and study trips, and both could decide on their participation.

Table 3. Access and control over resources in Kyauktan, Yangon Region, Myanmar

Item	Access				Control			
	No.	Men	Women	Both	No.	Men	Women	Both
Resources: Household assets								
(1) House	40	3 %	3 %	94 %	37	5 %	3 %	92 %
(2) Farmland	14	21 %	50 %	29 %	12	25 %	17 %	58 %
(3) Car	4	75 %	25 %		5	20 %	40 %	40 %
(4) Motorcycle	24	92 %		8 %	23	83 %	4 %	13 %
(5) Expenses in the house	29	3 %	14 %	83 %	23	4 %	13 %	83 %
Benefit: Services (Financial/insurance/health)								
(6) Loan from bank for investment	4	25 %	50 %	25 %				
(7) Loans for microfinance	27	44 %	52 %	4 %	3		33 %	67 %
(8) Non-performing loans	1		100 %					
(9) Lending	6	50 %	17 %	33 %				
Benefit: Capacity building								
(10) Training/study tour/others	19	16 %	5 %	79 %	15	13 %	13 %	74 %

The Philippines

The gender analysis for Small-scale Marine Capture Fisheries was conducted in Infanta, Quezon Province, in the Philippines. The main fishing gear used by fishers are hook and line, although other gear, such as set net, gill net, and miscellaneous gear are also used. The species caught include, among others, skipjack tuna, yellowfin tuna, sardines, dolphin fish, herring, red snapper, threadfin bream, clownfish, goatfish, grouper, round scad, big-eye snapper,

hardtail mackerel, Indian mackerel, milkfish fry and adult, and moonfish.

Results of the analysis (**Table 4**) indicated that women and men can access ownership and control of resources and services with high percentages. Work related to fisheries, such as employment and boat and gear registration, is more accessible and controlled by men. Women can decide to select the buyers or customers and harvest the products. However, women have little access to capacity-building activities, such as training and study tours.

Table 4. Access and control over resources in Infanta, Quezon Province, Philippines

Item	Access				Control			
	No.	Men	Women	Both	No.	Men	Women	Both
Resources: Household assets								
(1) House	37	8 %	5 %	87 %	30	3 %	3 %	94 %
(2) Farmland	12		33 %	67 %	9	22 %		78 %
(3) Car	4		75 %	25 %	5	40 %		60 %
(4) Motorcycle	19	53 %	10 %	37 %	10	40 %		60 %
(5) Other properties	7		43 %	57 %	8	13 %		87 %
(6) Expenses in the house	23	9 %	35 %	56 %	25	4 %	16 %	80 %
Benefit: Services (Financial/insurance/health)								
(7) Loans from the bank for investment	7	29 %	42 %	29 %				
(8) Loans for microfinance	16	13 %	25 %	62 %	11		9 %	91 %
(9) Non-performing loans	1		100 %		1			100 %
(10) Lending	4	25 %	75 %		2		100 %	
(11) Life/health insurance	3	67 %	33 %		8	12 %	12 %	76 %
(12) Car insurance	8		25 %	75 %	2			100 %
(13) Sickness (medical) treatment	3		33 %	67 %	1			100 %
Resources: Management of marine fishing								
(14) Employment	5	60 %	20 %	20 %	1			100 %
(15) Boat and gear	28	46 %	4 %	50 %	21	43 %	5 %	52 %
(16) Boat and gear registration	23	52 %	4 %	44 %	18	38 %	6 %	56 %
(17) Decision to select the customers	30	30 %	43 %	27 %	19	26 %	32 %	42 %
(18) Decision to select wholesale buyer and product harvest	30	30 %	47 %	23 %	19	16 %	31 %	53 %
Benefit: Capacity building								
(19) Training/study tour/others	12	42 %	25 %	33 %	6	17 %	17 %	66 %

Thailand

The gender analysis of Small-scale Marine Aquaculture was conducted in Surat Thani Province in southern Thailand. Three groups of respondents were engaged for the three species cultured, one group each for crab, fish, and shrimp. Results of the analysis (**Table 5**) indicated that women and men have equal access to household assets such as houses, farmland, cars, and motorcycles. However, men are dominant in the ownership and control of those assets. Both women and men have access to loans from banks, microfinance, and private entities. However, in terms of ownership and control, loans from banks are made by men, loans from microfinance

are made by women, but both women and men share the loans from private entities equally. Men's greater access to loans could be linked to their ownership and control of their houses, held by men. Money lending is mostly accessed, owned, and controlled by women, while women and men can access life/health insurance, car insurance, and public health. Ownership and control of cars are held by men, as the main owners of family cars. Women and men spend equally on household expenditures, but in terms of employment, equipment, materials, and planning related to aquaculture operations, men have greater access, ownership, and control than women, because men provide the main workforce in aquaculture.

Table 5. Access and control over resources in Surat Thani, Thailand

Item	Access				Control			
	No.	Men	Women	Both	No.	Men	Women	Both
Resources: Household assets								
(1) House	93	12 %	9 %	79 %	86	63 %	35 %	2 %
(2) Farmland	89	19 %	11 %	70 %	81	68 %	28 %	4 %
(3) Car	54	24 %	4 %	72 %	54	58 %	25 %	16 %
(4) Motorcycle	83	22 %	8 %	70 %	79	47 %	30 %	23 %
(5) Expense in the house	89	12 %	9 %	79 %	57	23 %	17 %	60 %
Benefit: Services (Financial/insurance/health)								
(6) Loan from bank for investment	51	20 %	18 %	62 %	50	53 %	39 %	8 %
(7) Loan from bank for microfinance	24	17 %	29 %	54 %	24	29 %	50 %	21 %
(8) Loan from private entities	4	25 %		75 %	4	50 %	50 %	
(9) Money lending	4	22 %	67 %	11 %	4	43 %	43 %	14 %
(10) Life/health insurance	9	18 %	24 %	58 %	14	18 %	24 %	58 %
(11) Car insurance	50	36 %	16 %	48 %	28	49 %	24 %	27 %
(12) Public health	59	10 %	9 %	81 %	54	14 %	14 %	72 %
Resources: Management of marine aquaculture								
(13) Employment	31	61 %	10 %	29 %	30	63 %	20 %	17 %
(14) Equipment for aquaculture	51	60 %	7 %	33 %	59	79 %	9 %	12 %
(15) Fish feed	53	58 %	8 %	34 %	59	68 %	17 %	15 %
(17) Storage for keeping equipment	41	59 %	3 %	38 %	44	76 %	8 %	16 %
(18) Workers' dormitory	19	76 %		24 %	20	96 %		4 %
(19) Seeding	53	62 %	8 %	30 %	50	71 %	17 %	12 %
(20) Medical or chemical for aquaculture	51	72 %	3 %	25 %	47	80 %	8 %	12 %
(21) Farm registration	48	62 %	15 %	23 %	49	71 %	24 %	5 %
(22) Decision to select customers	48	56 %	18 %	26 %	39	69 %	18 %	13 %
(23) Decision to select wholesale buyers and product harvesting	38	66 %	17 %	17 %	37	70 %	18 %	12 %
Benefit: Capacity building								
(24) Training/study tour/others	34	52 %	14 %	34 %	33	71 %	17 %	12 %

Conclusion and Recommendations

The gender perspective shows the distinctions in status and power and explores how this form of discrimination influences the immediate requirements and long-term interests of both women and men (ECOSOC, 1997). In the abovementioned study, the results show that by law, women and men have equal access to resources and benefits. The results revealed a gender disparity, with men exercising greater control over decision-making processes compared to women. On the impact of participation in a capacity-building program, women are generally not involved as much because they are not recognized as fishers or farmers.

This perspective is an obstacle to women's empowerment, as it requires confidence so that their voices are heard and they can make their own decisions.

Intermediate goals should focus on engagement and creating a program for women in fisheries management to improve confidence, while long-term success requires gender equality awareness to balance household and resource control. This will enable them to understand each other and reduce the traditional stereotype of femininity and masculinity, which can ultimately help improve household livelihoods.

Way Forward

SEAFDEC has a gender strategy in place. Several projects conducted by SEAFDEC have raised gender equality as a cross-cutting issue by promoting gender equality at all levels and for all stakeholders, including fishers and farmers. This aspect will be continued as framed in the ASEAN-SEAFDEC Plan of Action on Sustainable Fisheries for Food Security for the ASEAN Region Towards 2030: “Strengthen the capacity of relevant stakeholders and harmonize initiatives that support fishing communities and governments, with a special focus on women and youth” (SEAFDEC, 2020).

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