

Advancing Gender Mainstreaming for Sustainable Fisheries: Insights from Southeast Asia

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Gender integration is essential for achieving sustainable fisheries in Southeast Asia, where women play crucial yet underrecognized roles across the fisheries value chain. This article explores the region's progress and persistent challenges in mainstreaming gender, in alignment with global frameworks such as the SSF Guidelines and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It underscores the pivotal contribution of regional institutions, notably SEAFDEC, in driving gender-responsive actions through training, research, and tool development. National examples, including women's entrepreneurship in Thailand and leadership initiatives in Vietnam, demonstrate tangible benefits of inclusive approaches. However, critical gaps remain, such as weak policy implementation, entrenched cultural norms, and limited sex-disaggregated data. The article concludes that advancing gender equity in fisheries requires continuous institutional strengthening, improved data systems, and enhanced regional cooperation to empower women as central actors in fostering social justice and ecological resilience within Southeast Asia's fisheries sector.

United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 14 (Life Below Water), underscore the link between gender empowerment and sustainable use of aquatic resources (United Nations, 2015).

At the regional level, Southeast Asia has taken steps to institutionalize these commitments. The ASEAN Gender Mainstreaming Strategic Framework (2021–2025) provides a foundation for integrating gender considerations across all sectors, including fisheries and aquaculture. The Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center (SEAFDEC) has likewise embedded gender equality and women's empowerment within its operations, projects, and regional programs through the Code of Ethics and Code of Conduct (2022). Guided by the SEAFDEC Gender Strategy (2019) and the Resolution and Plan of Action on Sustainable Fisheries for Food Security for the ASEAN Region Towards 2030 (RES&POA-2030), SEAFDEC promotes gender mainstreaming as a cross-cutting element in fisheries management and development.

At the national level, many Southeast Asian countries have well promoted and implemented gender policies. For example, Thailand promotes gender equality through the Gender Equality Act of 2015, which serves as a key legal framework to eliminate gender-based discrimination and promote equal opportunities. The implementation of gender-related initiatives, including those in the fisheries sector, is supported by the Department of Fisheries in coordination with the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security. In Indonesia, gender mainstreaming in the marine and fisheries sector is guided by the Ministerial Regulation on Gender Mainstreaming in Marine and Fisheries (2016), implemented by the Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries (MMAF) to ensure gender-responsive policies and practices across the sector. The Philippines advances gender equality through the Magna Carta of Women (2009) and the Gender and Development (GAD) Budget Policy, which mandate gender integration and resource allocation across government agencies, including the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR), to empower women and promote inclusivity. In Viet Nam, the National Strategy on Gender Equality (2021–2030) outlines long-term objectives to enhance women's participation and leadership in all sectors, including agriculture and fisheries, under the oversight of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD).

Introduction

Gender plays a vital role in sustaining and strengthening the resilience of fisheries and aquaculture systems across Southeast Asia, where people of all genders engage in harvesting, aquaculture, post-harvest processing, marketing, and community governance. Women are central to household food security, value addition, and the stability of local economies, yet their contributions often remain undervalued due to entrenched norms, unequal access to resources, and limited decision-making power (Harper *et al.*, 2013; Kleiber *et al.*, 2015). Integrating gender perspectives into fisheries and aquaculture is therefore crucial for achieving sustainable livelihoods, food security, and climate resilience. Integrating gender-responsive approaches enhances productivity, innovation, and inclusive governance while empowering women and marginalized groups, strengthens community resilience, and promotes ecological and economic sustainability (FAO, 2023; Weeratunge *et al.*, 2010).

Global and regional frameworks reinforce these principles. The FAO Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries (SSF Guidelines) highlight gender equity as a guiding principle, advocating the full participation of women and marginalized groups in all aspects of fisheries development and governance (FAO, 2015). Similarly, the

Gender Mainstreaming in Fisheries

Gender mainstreaming in fisheries is a strategy to integrate the perspectives of women and men into the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of policies and programs, ensuring equality and preventing disparities.

Box 1 provides the terminology of gender, core principles, and concepts of gender mainstreaming. It promotes inclusive fisheries by addressing barriers faced by women and marginalized groups, enhancing their visibility and participation along the value chain from harvesting and processing to governance and trade (SEAFDEC, 2018). Recognizing gender as both a social construct and a power dynamic that shapes access to resources, opportunities, and decision-making (ILO, 2000; FAO, 2013), gender mainstreaming seeks to achieve equality by systematically analyzing the roles, needs, and constraints of all actors throughout the fisheries value chain.

Box 1. Core principles and concepts of gender mainstreaming (SEAFDEC, 2018)

The principles of gender mainstreaming, as derived from SEAFDEC Fish for the People (Special Publication): Gender Mainstreaming in Fisheries and Aquaculture in Southeast Asia, include:

1. **Integration, Not Separation:** It is not about creating separate programs for women but about integrating a gender perspective into all existing policies, programs, and projects at every stage of the development cycle (Satapornvanit, 2018, p. 11).
2. **A Strategy for Equality:** The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality, ensuring that women and men benefit equally from development initiatives and that existing inequalities are not reinforced (Sornkliang *et al.*, 2018).
3. **Foundational First Step: Gender Analysis:** Mainstreaming requires a gender analysis, which is “a process of gathering and analyzing sex-disaggregated information to understand gender differences and to identify major issues that contribute to gender inequalities” (Satapornvanit, 2018, p. 11). This analysis examines the differences in the roles, norms, power levels, needs, and constraints of women and men (Sornkliang *et al.*, 2018).
4. **Equity as a Means to Equality:** The document distinguishes between gender equality and gender equity. Equality is the end goal, while equity is the “fair allocation of resources, programs, opportunities, and decision-making to both women and men,” which may require compensatory measures to address historical and social disadvantages (Satapornvanit, 2018, p. 11).
5. **Holistic Scope:** The approach should be applied across the entire fisheries value chain “from input supply to production (capture fisheries and aquaculture farming), processing, wholesale, and finally retail” and not just in isolated segments (Sornkliang *et al.*, 2018, p. 17).

Current Status and Regional Insights

Women play indispensable roles across Southeast Asia’s fisheries and aquaculture value chains, from harvesting and aquaculture production to post-harvest processing, marketing, and community resource management. They



Figure 1. Participants in the *Regional Workshop on Gender Mainstreaming in Fisheries in Southeast Asia*, held on 8-10 October 2024 at SEAFDEC/TD

constitute nearly half of the small-scale fisheries workforce (World Bank, 2012); however, their contributions remain undervalued and underrepresented in data and policy. Recognizing gender as a key factor in resource management, food security, and value addition underscores the need to integrate gender perspectives into fisheries governance for greater sustainability and inclusiveness (WorldFish Center, 2010; Kusakabe, 2017).

Overview of Women’s Roles in the Fishery Sector for Sustainable Fisheries

The status and regional insights were extracted from the “Regional Workshop on Gender Mainstreaming in Fisheries in Southeast Asia” held on 8–10 October 2024. Organized by SEAFDEC with support from the Japanese Trust Fund (JTF), the workshop underscored the importance of gender equality and was attended by 31 participants (26 women and 5 men) from SEAFDEC Member Countries, regional organizations, and academic institutions. The workshop featured presentations, group discussions, and case studies to share best practices and propose recommendations. Drawing on country reports, partner inputs, and plenary sessions, participants identified gaps, challenges, and success stories in gender mainstreaming, emphasizing the crucial roles of women in small-scale fisheries, particularly in post-harvest activities, marketing, decision-making, and community resilience (SEAFDEC, 2024).

Insights from the workshop highlighted persistent gender-based divisions of labor across Member Countries. Women are predominantly engaged in processing, marketing, aquaculture, and support activities, while men dominate offshore fishing and primary production. In Brunei Darussalam and Malaysia, women focus largely on processing and local market roles. In Cambodia, Myanmar, and the Philippines, women face persistent barriers to resources but are increasingly supported through capacity-building and post-harvest programs. Indonesia and Thailand show strong female participation in aquaculture and small-scale fisheries, though decision-making remains male-dominated. In the Lao PDR, women contribute significantly

through reservoir-based groups and local leadership, while Viet Nam has promoted women's economic and leadership roles through national programs.

Despite these efforts, women's work, especially in informal and post-harvest sectors, continues to be undervalued. Addressing this imbalance through inclusive policies, gender-responsive data collection, and recognition of women's roles is crucial to achieving equitable and sustainable fisheries development in the region. **Box 2** summarizes the country presentations on the Gender in Fisheries Project/Program.

Box 2. Diverse approaches to gender mainstreaming highlighted in country presentations

- **Brunei Darussalam:** Focused on capacity-building programs and promoting gender equality through educational initiatives. Challenges included a lack of sex-disaggregated data.
- **Cambodia:** Implemented policies such as the Gender Mainstreaming Action Plan, but faced obstacles like insufficient training opportunities and social discrimination.
- **Indonesia:** Promoted women's empowerment through initiatives like fish farmer groups and seaweed cultivation models while addressing issues like limited access to resources.
- **Lao PDR:** Increased women's participation in development strategies and decision-making positions but encountered cultural barriers.
- **Malaysia:** Encouraged women's roles in fish processing and marketing through community fisheries and entrepreneurship programs, contributing to local economic growth.
- **Myanmar:** Addressed gender dimensions in fisheries value chains but faced challenges related to limited access to resources and financial services for women.
- **Philippines:** Leveraged legal frameworks like the Magna Carta of Women to empower female fisherfolk but struggled with unequal resource access and representation.
- **Thailand:** Implemented the Gender Equality Act and promoted women's economic empowerment but noted low representation in decision-making roles.
- **Viet Nam:** Advanced women's participation in fisheries through laws and national programs but faced persistent traditional gender roles and economic barriers.

SEAFDEC Initiatives on Gender Mainstreaming

SEAFDEC has strengthened gender mainstreaming in fisheries through multiple complementary approaches. Capacity-building activities have enhanced knowledge and understanding among fisheries officers and stakeholders, while practical tools and guidelines support planning, implementation, and project monitoring. Research initiatives have incorporated gender analysis to highlight the roles, constraints, and opportunities of women and men in fisheries and aquaculture. These efforts are reinforced by regional collaboration and knowledge sharing with partners such as FAO, USAID, and Gender in Aquaculture and Fisheries (GAF), promoting best practices, harmonized approaches, and inclusive fisheries governance across Southeast Asia.

Enhanced Knowledge and Understanding of Gender Mainstreaming in Fisheries

Capacity building, executed through targeted training sessions and workshops, was a key strategy used to strengthen gender mainstreaming knowledge among ASEAN Member States (AMSs). The primary objective was to raise awareness and enhance the ability of fisheries officers and stakeholders to integrate gender perspectives into their work. This was achieved through a series of activities, including a regional training in Thailand (2022) and subsequent national workshops in Indonesia, Malaysia, Cambodia, and Viet Nam (2022–2023). These initiatives introduced practical concepts such as gender analysis frameworks, gender-responsive project design, and tools for assessing women's roles in value chains. As a result, participants from the ten AMSs have deepened their appreciation for gender-balanced participation and enhanced their capacity to identify gender gaps, integrate gender perspectives into national programs, and generate evidence-based recommendations. This strengthened capacity has directly contributed to more gender-responsive national planning, project activities, and a greater awareness of the value of women and youth in the sector.

Development of Tools and Guidelines for Gender Integration

To support the practical application of gender perspectives, the initiative focused on the development of dedicated tools and guidelines for gender integration. This involved creating gender-responsive manuals, training modules, and analytical tools to aid the planning, implementation, and monitoring of fisheries projects. Key outputs from this effort include the gender integration in fisheries guidelines and the “Training Module on Gender Mainstreaming in the Fisheries Sector” (SEAFDEC, 2022), which provides stakeholders with essential resources for operationalizing gender mainstreaming.

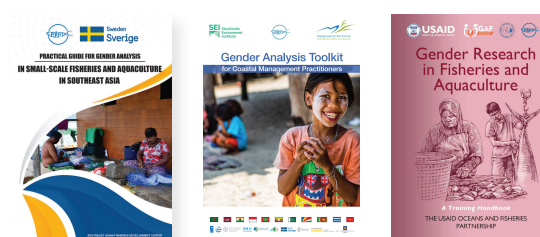


Figure 2. Publications developed by SEAFDEC in collaboration with its partners to guide the process of gender integration in fisheries

SEAFDEC has supported the development and dissemination of tools and guidelines that help integrate gender perspectives into fisheries policies, operations, and community-level initiatives. Existing tools from SEAFDEC and partners include the “Practical Guide for Gender Analysis in Small-scale Fisheries and Aquaculture in Southeast Asia” (SEAFDEC, 2020), “Gender Analysis Toolkit” for coastal management practitioners (MFF, SEI, and SEAFDEC, 2018) and “Gender

Research in Fisheries and Aquaculture” (SEAFDEC and USAID Ocean, 2018) for mainstreaming gender in project planning and monitoring, and reference materials that clarify gender concepts within the context of the small-scale fisheries sector. These publications provide step-by-step approaches that national agencies, researchers, and community practitioners can apply to conduct gender-responsive assessments, design interventions, and track gender outcomes.

Gender Integration in SEAFDEC Research Projects

A cornerstone of SEAFDEC’s approach has been the integration of gender analysis and participatory methods into its regional research and pilot initiatives. This strategic focus aims to develop a deeper, evidence-based understanding of gender roles, constraints, and opportunities within the fisheries sector. This commitment has been demonstrated through a series of key projects, including the long-running SEAFDEC–Sweden Project (2008–2019), the focused Gender Dimension in the Value Chain Project (2020–2022), and the Small-scale Fisheries Management for Better Livelihood and Fisheries Resources Project (2020–2024) under the Japanese Trust Fund (JTF). These initiatives have been instrumental in generating critical insights and advancing gender-responsive practices as documented in SEAFDEC’s publications. **Box 3** shows the SEAFDEC with a partner in conducting the gender analysis for the initiation of gender responsiveness.

Box 3. SEAFDEC and partner efforts on research and gender integration

SEAFDEC Sweden project: Conducted gender analyses in small-scale fisheries communities across Cambodia, Myanmar, and Thailand, documenting gender roles, labor division, and access to resources in capture and post-harvest activities, revealing women’s significant involvement in processing and marketing but limited representation in leadership, and resulting in gender-sensitive community fisheries guidelines and national gender training for fisheries officers.

USAID Oceans and Fisheries Partnership: The research on tuna value chains in the Philippines and Indonesia revealed that women dominate low-paid processing jobs with limited influence in management or market access, face barriers to participating in digital traceability systems, and prompted the development of Gender Action Plans alongside livelihood and digital-skills training for women.

FAO-SEAFDEC Collaboration: The study on the gender dimension in the value chain of small-scale fisheries and aquaculture in Southeast Asia (Lao PDR, Myanmar, Philippines, and Thailand under SEAFDEC-FAO revealed that women play critical roles across post-harvest, processing, and marketing activities but face limited access to resources, decision-making, and market opportunities, highlighting the need for targeted interventions to promote gender equity and women’s economic empowerment.

SEAFDEC JTF: The Small-scale Fisheries Management for Better Livelihood and Fisheries Resources supports the study on gender integration in fisheries in Thailand, which focuses on small-scale marine and inland fisheries management, with a specific focus on women as group leaders, found that women leaders credit their success to high levels of community participation and the respect they have earned through their education and family backgrounds.

Gender Mainstreaming in Southeast Asia: Good Practices

Good practices of gender mainstreaming in Southeast Asia have emerged through initiatives by SEAFDEC Member Countries, development partners, academic institutions, and NGOs, demonstrating that gender-responsive approaches strengthen fisheries management and improve community well-being. FAO, guided by its Gender Equality Policy (2020–2030), has empowered women in small-scale fisheries in the Philippines, enhancing participation in decision-making and livelihood activities, which increased incomes and household resilience. Sustainable Fish Asia Technical Support (USAID/SUFiA TS), funded by the Regional Development Mission Asia of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID’s RDMA) from 2020 to 2024, introduced innovative models such as Gender Equality Hubs and fisher empowerment programs to address cultural norms, promote women’s leadership, and expand skills development, resulting in stronger community engagement and access to economic opportunities. Academic institutions, including Mahidol University and the University of Tokyo, have contributed to integrating gender in fisheries management and highlighting women’s roles in cooperatives. NGOs have advocated for gender-sensitive policies, delivered capacity-building programs, and promoted ecosystem-based management, enhancing women’s resilience and contributions to sustainable fisheries.

Across SEAFDEC Member Countries, progress has been uneven, characterized by notable accomplishments and persistent challenges:

- **Brunei Darussalam:** focused on education but lacks sex-disaggregated data
- **Cambodia:** implemented gender action plans but faces training gaps
- **Indonesia:** promoted empowerment via farmer groups and seaweed cultivation, yet resource access remains limited
- **Lao PDR:** increased women’s participation in reservoir fisheries, but remains constrained by cultural norms
- **Malaysia:** strengthened women’s roles in processing and marketing through the MyAP and MyKP programs
- **Myanmar:** integrated gender in value chains but resource and financial access remain challenges
- **Philippines:** advanced legal and institutional support, though leadership gaps persist
- **Thailand:** promoted participation under the Gender Equality Act, yet decision-making representation is low
- **Viet Nam:** expanded women’s entrepreneurship via Project 939, with persistent traditional norms and inequality

Table 1. Good practices of gender mainstreaming in Southeast Asian countries and partners (SEAFDEC, 2024)

Country / Organization	Case Study / Initiative	Key Actions and Results	Lessons Learned / Success Factors
FAO (Philippines)	<i>Empowering Women in Small-Scale Fisheries</i>	Integrated gender in project planning; promoted women-friendly technologies; strengthened women's leadership.	Inclusive and gender-responsive approaches increase productivity and equity.
USAID SuFiA TS (Regional)	<i>Gender Equality Hubs & Fisher Empowerment Programs</i>	Built capacity, promoted women's leadership, and supported marginalized groups.	Institutional commitment and mentoring enhance gender inclusion in fisheries governance.
Cambodia	<i>CAPFISH Post-Harvest Programme</i>	Ensured equal participation of women and men in post-harvest value chains; offered business training.	Targeted support and enabling policies promote equitable benefits and participation.
Indonesia	<i>Smart Fisheries Villages & Seaweed Cultivation Models</i>	Promoted women's roles in aquaculture and income diversification.	Gender-inclusive community models strengthen livelihoods and empowerment.
Lao PDR	<i>Women's Groups in Nam Ngum & Nam Xouang Reservoirs</i>	Organized women's groups to engage in fisheries and income activities.	Collective action improves women's income and social standing.
Malaysia	<i>MyAP and MyKP Fisheries Programs</i>	Provided grants, training, and equipment for both women and men; promoted women's role in processing and marketing.	Economic inclusion of women drives local growth and job creation.
Myanmar	<i>Gender Dimension in Fisheries Value Chain Study</i>	Conducted gender analysis and capacity-building in collaboration with SEAFDEC and FAO.	Gender-disaggregated data supports evidence-based policy and intervention.
Philippines (BFAR)	<i>Implementation of the Magna Carta of Women in Fisheries</i>	Strengthened legal protection, provided training, and expanded market access for fisherwomen.	Strong legal frameworks and institutional backing reduce gender disparities.
Thailand	<i>Gender Equality Promotion Plan (2025-2027)</i>	Increased women's roles in SMEs and local fisheries committees.	Policy implementation must translate into leadership opportunities for women.
Viet Nam	<i>Project 939 - Supporting Women in Business (2021-2030)</i>	Enhanced women's leadership, credit access, and training in fisheries.	Sustained policy and financial support drive long-term gender equity.
Japan	<i>Women's Groups in Fisheries Cooperatives</i>	Established cooperative women's groups; developed leadership and capacity.	Empowered cooperatives enhance community resilience and resource stewardship.

Collectively, these initiatives show strong regional commitment to gender equality while highlighting the need for better data, inclusive policies, and ongoing capacity-building to fully realize women's contributions to fisheries development (SEAFDEC, 2024).

Challenges/Gaps

Despite these advancements, gaps remain in achieving consistent and effective gender mainstreaming across the region. One major challenge is the uneven implementation capacity among AMSs, particularly in data collection and institutional coordination. Many countries still lack sex-disaggregated data and gender analysis frameworks specific to the fisheries sector, which limits evidence-based policy design and evaluation (SEAFDEC, 2024). Cultural and

social norms continue to restrict women's participation in decision-making, especially in small-scale fisheries communities where traditional gender roles prevail. While policy frameworks exist, enforcement mechanisms and local-level integration often remain weak due to limited funding, insufficient technical expertise, and the absence of gender focal points in fisheries departments. Furthermore, policy fragmentation between gender agencies and fisheries ministries hampers the mainstreaming process. In several AMSs, gender policies are managed by ministries outside the fisheries sector, resulting in limited coordination and sector-specific adaptation. Without clear institutional linkages, gender mainstreaming risks being treated as a stand-alone activity rather than a cross-sectoral development principle. **Box 4** shows the conclusion of the common challenge in Southeast Asia.

Box 4. Persistent gender mainstreaming challenges across Southeast Asia (SEAFDEC, 2024)

- Limited gender-disaggregated data and weak monitoring systems
- Insufficient financial and technical resources for gender implementation
- Persistent gender norms that restrict women's mobility and participation in leadership
- Weak institutional capacity and low prioritization of gender at local governance levels
- Inconsistent integration of gender perspectives into national fisheries statistics and management frameworks

Opportunities

To strengthen regional coherence in gender-responsive fisheries governance, SEAFDEC can harmonize its Gender Strategy with the ASEAN Gender Mainstreaming Strategic Framework (2021–2025) to ensure consistent policy alignment across Member States (ASEAN, 2021). Institutionalizing capacity building by integrating gender training for fisheries officers and policymakers through SEAFDEC's Regional Capacity Building Network (RECAB) can be the initial step toward inclusive fisheries management. A unified Regional Gender and Fisheries Data Framework is also essential for systematic collection, analysis, and sharing of sex-disaggregated data, supporting evidence-based decision-making and reporting on SDG 5 and SDG 14 (FAO, 2017; UN Women, 2020). Strengthened institutional coordination is recommended through joint working groups linking gender ministries, fisheries departments, and regional bodies such as ASEAN, SEAFDEC, and FAO. Enhanced knowledge sharing, including documentation of women's cooperatives, co-management models, and gender-responsive budgeting, would amplify successful practices across the region.

Moreover, there is a clear direction toward mainstreaming gender perspectives in current SEAFDEC projects with various partners. Examples include the Gender Action Plan under the Blue Horizon: Ocean Relief through Seaweed Aquaculture initiative; the Japanese Trust Fund 7 project on improving fishers' livelihoods and co-management in small-scale fisheries, which aims to ensure equitable benefits for both women and men in fishing communities; the Bay of Bengal Large Marine Ecosystems Phase II (BOBLME II) program, which commits to integrating gender equity and social inclusion; and the Gender Strategy developed under the GoTFish Project on promoting the blue economy and strengthening fisheries governance in the Gulf of Thailand.

Finally, AMSs are encouraged to integrate gender-responsive budgeting within fisheries programs and allocate dedicated financial resources to support gender inclusion and women's economic empowerment (UN ESCAP, 2019).

Recommendations and Way Forward

The article focuses on advancing gender mainstreaming, which requires a multi-level strategy across organizational, agency, and project tiers.

Key strategies for advancing gender mainstreaming in the fisheries sector include strengthening institutional structures by embedding gender considerations into organizational mandates, policies, budgets, and accountability mechanisms. Continuous capacity development is also essential, with regular training provided to fisheries officers, policymakers, and community leaders on GESI analysis and gender-responsive planning. To support evidence-based decision-making, regional gender databases and monitoring systems should be established to track progress through relevant indicators. Policy integration further enhances effectiveness by aligning international frameworks such as the SSF Guidelines and the Sustainable Development Goals with national gender equality legislation and fisheries policies. In addition, documenting and sharing good practices, success stories, and lessons learned through regional platforms promotes wider adoption of successful approaches. Finally, enhancing partnerships with development organizations such as the FAO, GAF, universities, and various NGOs helps leverage technical expertise and financial resources to support sustainable, long-term gender-responsive fisheries development.

Future Role of SEAFDEC

Building on its mandate to promote sustainable fisheries development, SEAFDEC will continue to play a central role in supporting AMSs to strengthen gender equality and social inclusion within the fisheries sector. Moving forward, SEAFDEC will facilitate regional dialogues that foster shared understanding and coordinated action on gender-responsive fisheries governance, while also providing technical assistance to help countries integrate gender considerations into fisheries management plans and national programs.

The organization will expand its coordination of capacity-building initiatives and lead the development of regional guidelines that support consistent and practical approaches to gender mainstreaming. In addition, SEAFDEC will promote stronger cross-sectoral collaboration by linking fisheries with environmental and social development sectors to address gender issues more holistically. To ensure accountability and sustained progress, SEAFDEC will continue monitoring and reporting gender-related outcomes to the SEAFDEC Council and relevant ASEAN mechanisms, positioning gender integration as a key component of its future work and regional leadership (Figure 3).



Figure 3. Group discussion during the regional workshop on gender mainstreaming in fisheries in Southeast Asia on 8-10 October 2024

Conclusion

Gender mainstreaming in fisheries and aquaculture across Southeast Asia has emerged as a transformative pathway toward inclusive, resilient, and sustainable development. The collective efforts of AMSs, guided by frameworks such as the FAO SSF Guidelines, the ASEAN Gender Mainstreaming Strategic Framework (2021–2025), and SEAFDEC’s Gender Strategy, have laid a strong foundation for promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment within the sector. These initiatives have enhanced women’s visibility, strengthened their participation in value chains, and advanced equitable access to resources, decision-making, and livelihood opportunities. However, persistent challenges such as limited sex-disaggregated data, weak institutional coordination, and enduring social norms continue to constrain full gender integration at national and community levels.

Moving forward, harmonizing regional and national policies, institutionalizing gender-responsive budgeting, and investing in capacity development are critical for sustaining progress. Building comprehensive data systems and monitoring frameworks will enable evidence-based policy formulation and accountability. Regional cooperation through SEAFDEC and ASEAN can further facilitate

knowledge sharing, innovation, and policy coherence, ensuring that gender equality becomes an integral component of fisheries governance.

Ultimately, empowering women in fisheries is not only a matter of social justice but also a driver of ecological sustainability and economic resilience. By recognizing and amplifying women’s roles in resource management, value addition, and community leadership, Southeast Asia can foster more inclusive and adaptive fisheries systems. Strengthening gender mainstreaming will therefore remain essential to achieving sustainable livelihoods, food security, and the broader development goals envisioned under the SDGs and regional commitments.

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