

### **Challenges and Way Forward**

In the abovementioned cases, the importance of financial services has been recognized as one of the effective tools for supporting small-scale fishers to maintain and enhance their fishing activities in a sustainable manner. In many countries, microfinance programs could support the fishing households in undertaking self-employment and providing small capital to people in the fishing communities for their socioeconomic needs, especially in sustaining their quality of life and food consumption during the off-fishing season. Micro-financing also helps in managing risks and reducing economic and social vulnerability. Therefore, it would be beneficial to small-scale fishers if they could have easy access to financial services for sustaining their livelihoods.

In order to enhance the activities in small-scale fisheries, SEAFDEC continues to engage its Member Countries in the implementation of the SSF Guidelines and provide them technical assistance through the ongoing SEAFDEC/TD project “Small-scale Fisheries Management for Better Livelihood and Fisheries Resources” supported by the Japanese Trust Fund (JTF). As an important part of the activities in small-scale fisheries, financial services should be discussed and concerns addressed in relevant meetings and workshops in order to compile the necessary information that could be shared among the countries for establishing and/or strengthening appropriate financial schemes in their respective countries. At the national level, enhancing communications, cooperation, and partnership among the fisheries sector, particularly small-scale fishers, financial service providers and government agencies concerned would be essential to identify, sort out and overcome any constraints and issues toward increasing “access to financial services” in small-scale fisheries. For better dialogues and understanding, a network on financial services at the national and regional level could be considered like the CAFI-SSF Network at the global level. Furthermore, considering that innovations and new developments are key for the sustainable development of small-scale fisheries that impact the small-scale fishers, appropriate financial service schemes coupled with easy access must be in place and available for small-scale fishers and fishing communities for their sustainable fishing activities and better livelihoods.

### **9.3 Gender Equity in Fisheries**

Socially constructed roles, behaviors, and characteristics are some aspects that a given society considers appropriate for females and males. These roles and characteristics are acquired through socialization processes: people are born female or male but learn to be women or men. Sex is biological, while gender is sociological. Perceptions of gender are contextual and time-specific, therefore, not fixed (even though they may appear as such). In most societies, there are differences and inequalities between women

and men in terms of responsibilities assigned, access to and control over resources, as well as decision-making opportunities.

In an attempt to strengthen the perceptions of gender and its role in sustainable fisheries development, gender has been included in relevant ASEAN-SEAFDEC policy directives. Like for example in the ASEAN-SEAFDEC Plan of Action (POA) on Sustainable Fisheries for Food Security for the ASEAN Region Towards 2030, POA No. 15 specifies that the AMSs should consider to “*Strengthen the capacity of fisheries communities and the capability of fisheries-related organizations (e.g. by empowering such organizations as appropriate) to implement necessary actions towards increased resilience, improved livelihoods, adoption of supplementary livelihoods, and poverty alleviation, in support of achieving sustainable development with gender integration in the process;*” and in the Strategies of SEAFDEC Towards 2030, where Strategy 5 indicates the need towards “*Addressing cross-cutting issues, such as labor, gender, and climate change, were related to international fisheries.*” In this regard, SEAFDEC initiated the development of the SEAFDEC Gender Strategy to facilitate gender mainstreaming at all levels of the organization and to serve as an organizational overarching framework to facilitate the efforts of SEAFDEC in integrating gender in its programs, projects, and activities. The main five aspects of the SEAFDEC Gender Strategy are: 1) Mainstreaming Gender at all levels of the organization, 2) Integrating gender in SEAFDEC programs and projects, 3) Incorporating gender perspectives in all events organized by SEAFDEC, 4) Boosting the visibility of SEAFDEC as a gender-responsive and gender-sensitive organization, and 5) Strengthening further the cooperation and collaboration with Member Countries and other organizations on gender aspects.

Recognizing that “gender equality is not only a fundamental human right but is also a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world,” the UN Sustainable Development Goals include Gender Equality as its Goal 5 which focuses on the need to “achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.” Specifically, for the fisheries sector, the FAO Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines) also provide the guiding principles for gender equity and equality, especially for the small-scale fisheries sub-sector.

#### ***Promotion of Gender Equality and Equity in Fisheries***

At the onset, SEAFDEC in cooperation with the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI) with support from the Embassy of Sweden in Bangkok, Thailand conducted the study on Gender Dimension in Coastal and Fisheries Resources Management in South and Southeast Asia.

From the results of the study, it was found that various national-level mechanisms on gender equity are already in place in the AMSs. Moreover, efforts to support gender equality and address gender issues were also noted across all countries involved in the study. Although sometimes there may be overarching ministries, committees, or commissions responsible for gender that provide the enabling environment for gender mainstreaming, this did not always facilitate translating such gender concerns into policies and projects for fisheries and coastal resources management. The study also recognized that several AMSs have their respective national structures for the promotion of gender equality and women empowerment. These include:

- Brunei Darussalam: International Women’s club Brunei Darussalam
- Cambodia: National Council for Women (Women’s Empowerment Neary Rattanak IV 2014 -- 2018)
- Indonesia: Indonesian Women’s Organization
- Lao PDR: Lao Women’s Union
- Malaysia: Gender Equality Act
- Myanmar: Women’s Organizations Network of Myanmar
- Philippines: Philippine Commission on Women
- Singapore: Singapore Women’s Association
- Thailand: Gender Equality Promotion Committee
- Viet Nam: National Committee for the Advancement of Women (NCFAW); Women’s Union

Furthermore, the Practical Guide for Gender Analysis in Small-scale Fisheries and Aquaculture in Southeast Asia (also known as the “Practical Guide”) was also developed through the SEAFDEC-Sweden Project, to promote the implementation of the SEAFDEC Gender Strategy in support of the integration of gender perspectives in fisheries and aquaculture in the SEAFDEC Member Countries. Recognizing further that gender analysis is an important tool to understand gender equality in fisheries, SEAFDEC collaborated with relevant partners for the development of tool kits for gender analysis and gender integration in fisheries management projects through the application of rights-based and gender-equitable approaches in the whole value chain of the small-scale fisheries and aquaculture in Southeast Asia. These include: 1) Gender Analysis Tool Kit for Coastal Fisheries Management Practitioner (with support from IUCN and SEI); 2) Gender Research in Fisheries and Aquaculture: A Training Handbook available in various national languages of the AMSs, e.g. Bahasa Melayu (Malay language), English, Thai, and Vietnamese (developed through the SEAFDEC-USAID Oceans Project), and Fisheries Management Guidance for Gender-inclusive, Technology-responsive Research (a collaborative effort with the SEAFDEC-USAID Oceans Project).

### Issues and Challenges

There is still a lack of collaboration among the gender-related organizations or initiatives and those that are directly responsible for fisheries and coastal resources management. Furthermore, a dedicated budget to fund the sharing of knowledge across agencies is still limited. Nonetheless, another element that validates the idea of an enabling environment is the integration of gender in national constitutions. Since most countries conform to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) therefore, CEDAW could be used as an entry point to strengthen gender mainstreaming at the national level. Moreover, various instruments on gender analysis are available that could be referred to in gender mainstreaming, e.g. the Regional Gender Synthesis and Gender Analysis of the IUCN and SEI. There are five main aspects that should be strengthened for better integration of gender elements in coastal and marine fisheries policies and practices. These are shown in **Box 41**.

<b>Box 41. Main aspects that should be strengthened for better integration of gender elements in coastal and marine fisheries policies and practices*</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>1. Capacity development</b></li> <li><b>2. Awareness</b> - There is a need for concrete examples of women’s involvement in the value chains to adapt communication strategies to convey their message</li> <li><b>3. Political will</b> - Supporting and rewarding champions can go a long way to support gender integration from the local to national levels</li> <li><b>4. Budget</b> - It is important to assess the budgetary requirements and the source of funding - either internal or external</li> <li><b>5. Coordination and collaboration</b> - Intersectoral coordination from national to provincial levels is a key for further gender integration, and collaboration among NGOs and community-based organizations is also an important element to consider for the uptake of the best practices</li> </ol>

\* Regional Dialogue on Gender Dimension in Coastal and Fisheries Resources Management in South Asia and Southeast Asia

### Way Forward

SEAFDEC has been promoting gender mainstreaming in fisheries through capacity building on gender concepts to fisheries officers and gender analysis for baseline information to create plans for fisheries management. Moreover, SEAFDEC has also taken steps to integrate gender into the fisheries management projects of the AMSs in order to achieve gender equality in the fisheries and improve the livelihoods of women, men, elderly, youth, and marginalized persons in the community. In so doing, recommendations had been raised for promoting and strengthening gender mainstreaming in the Southeast Asian region (**Box 42**).

**Box 42. Recommendations for promoting and strengthening gender mainstreaming in the Southeast Asian region for gender equality\***

- Community level: facilitate the conduct of awareness-raising sessions for men and women to ensure collective understanding of and learning about the benefits and values of women’s tasks in the different spheres of coastal and fisheries resource management
- Project level: facilitate the conduct of training sessions on gender analysis with a focus on the intersectionality of gender and other axes of power
- Promote participatory identification and strategizing to address societal discriminatory norms
- Engage and collaborate with relevant institutions and organizations
- Provide gender awareness materials in simple and easy to understand local languages

\* Regional Dialogue on Gender Dimension in Coastal and Fisheries Resources Management in South Asia and Southeast Asia

SEAFDEC has been sustaining the integration of gender analysis in baseline data collection applying gender analysis in four pilot AMSs through the Project “Gender Dimension in the Value Chain of Small-scale Fisheries and Aquaculture in Southeast Asia,” which is being supported by FAO. This Project is specifically aimed at improving and strengthening gender dimension in selected small-scale fisheries and aquaculture value chains in Southeast Asia, namely: for marine capture fisheries in the Philippines, mariculture in Thailand, inland aquaculture in Lao PDR, and inland capture fisheries in Myanmar. The Project has initiated the data collection on gender for fisheries management for the gender sensitivity analysis as part of the Project.

In summary, SEAFDEC has already facilitated the conduct of capacity building activities in the AMSs to enhance the awareness and capacity of the human resources at all levels on gender aspects and build the capacity of the SEAFDEC and AMSs’ staff involved in programs and projects to enable them to integrate gender aspects in their respective program/project cycle. SEAFDEC will continue to promote gender responsiveness in the AMSs and strengthen the capacity of SEAFDEC and the AMSs on gender integration in fisheries to ensure gender equity and equality in fishing and fish farming communities.