

# On Gender Mainstreaming Strategies and Tools in Fisheries Development Projects: RFLP Gender Strategy and Lessons from the Asia-Pacific Region

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## Abstract

Traditionally, most fisheries development projects have focused on technical aspects, lacking consideration of gender issues during the identification, implementation and monitoring stages. This paper highlights the importance of undertaking gender mainstreaming as part of fisheries interventions and summarizes, as an example, the gender strategy of the Spanish-funded FAO Regional Fisheries Livelihoods Programme for South and Southeast Asia (RFLP). As part of this strategy, RFLP developed a handbook for gender mainstreaming in fisheries project cycle management and organized a workshop to discuss and validate the tools contained in the handbook as well as to come up with best practices for gender mainstreaming in fisheries project management and policy making. Participants agreed on factors that should be in place for effective gender mainstreaming in the fisheries sector, like improvement of social networks, promotion of women's leadership and business skills, improved access and control over resources and social capital, among others. The need for in-depth research during project design and flexibility during implementation were also highlighted as important for successful interventions. At the macro-level, of note is that amongst the participating RFLP countries, only Cambodia has a specific gender policy for the fisheries sector.

## Introduction

The small-scale fisheries sector in developing countries employs 25-27 million people on a full-time and part-time basis, with 70 million people employed in post-harvest activities, and with women representing about half of the workforce (FAO, WorldFish Center, World Bank, 2008). Despite the importance and extent of women's roles in the fisheries sector (e.g., Williams et al. 2002), fisheries management and policy making have traditionally not been sensitive to gender. This gender-blindness extends into global normative documents such as the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries "which does not mention the word 'gender' or 'women' and those programs that implement the Code have focused on ecosystem effects of fishing, illegal fishing, or improving statistics" (Williams, 2010), rather than on the specific needs of women and men involved in the sector. However, when looking at the fisheries sector through a gender lens (Williams, 2008), women do perform a wide range of activities, including post-harvest and processing, gleaning molluscs, inshore fishing, aquaculture, marketing and trading (Weeratunge and Snyder, 2009). Some have challenged the traditional belief that fisheries is a male sector, arguing that it could be instead a female domain (Weeratunge and Snyder, 2009).

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The extent and ways that women are involved in the fisheries sector can be diverse and can differ to those of men (Harrison, 2001). These roles also vary across regions, countries and localities, being dependent on culturally rooted working practices, local ecological conditions, seasons, ritual cycles, economic models and social structures, traditions, symbols and worldviews, or a combination of all these factors. Besides roles in pre-production, production and post-harvest, women's contributions are also important when it comes to their roles as primary caregivers to all family members (especially children, the elderly and sick), family nutrition, as well as household and financial management.

Despite their important roles and contributions to the sector, women are usually excluded from decision-making mechanisms for the management of fisheries (MRC, 2006; Blomley et al. 2010 Williams, 2010). Documentation of their contributions remains isolated as case studies, rarely appearing in the official statistics, due to most countries not collecting sex-disaggregated data on fisheries related matters (Weeratunge and Snyder, 2009).

The need to incorporate gender into the management of natural resources (Bennett, 2005) or livelihoods development (Allison and Horemans, 2006; Williams, 2010) is being recognized as increasingly important for fisheries interventions (SFLP, 2007). However, the sector still struggles to acknowledge the full relevance of gender relations and how these are impacted by, and influence, fisheries and aquaculture interventions (Harrison, 2001).

### **Gender related issues and risks in the design and implementation of fisheries development projects**

If the complex relationships between women and men in fishing communities in the context of the current changing and complex social structures are ignored by externally-planned development interventions, the development of livelihoods in fishing communities or of the society at large may be impacted negatively. For this reason, an effective intervention in fishing communities should take into account gender roles in pre-production activities (such as preparing fishing bait) through to the final marketing and consumption. Planning also need to consider the myriad of actors (female and male, young and old) involved at all levels as well as the systems of values used to classify them.

Changes are now occurring in fisheries development projects, as in many other interventions linked to natural resource management. Many projects developed today include the word "gender" in their project document, however, this is too often translated simply into activities targeting women as marginalized beneficiaries (Harrison, 2001), in stereotypical roles. A common way of addressing gender is to include specific activities targeted at women in post-harvest processing, diversification of livelihoods, or/and microfinance. Beyond the crucial importance of these income generating activities, projects may fail to acknowledge existing roles and responsibilities (i.e. the context specific gender division of labour) and their importance, or may ignore the potential risk of the double burden (Bennett, 2005; Williams et al. 2002).

The way fisheries projects address gender issues could bring the risk of failure if they are being addressed with a Western bias about the sexual division of labour, the social organization (see Yanagisako, 1979) and the household distribution of income and resources (Ostergaard, 1992). “Gender” being a social construct, gender relations change over time and across cultures. Gender therefore is an area of continuous study and interventions need to be based on empirical, contemporary evidence. Fisheries projects should be formulated questioning the status of women while activities should be planned trying to challenge power and power relations and aimed towards the empowerment of women (Aguilar and Castaneda, 2001). Furthermore, the impacts that the project will have on women (whether participating or not in project activities) need to be assessed, as well as how the changes brought will affect relationships between women and men.

Gender mainstreaming is about assessing the implications for women and men of the fisheries development actions planned. We use the concept of gender mainstreaming to refer to “the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programs, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programs in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated” (ECOSOC, 1997). It should take place at all practical levels in order to ensure that development interventions are designed in response to specific needs of women and men, while contributing to gender equality. Hence, gender analysis - “the study of differences in the conditions needs, participation rates, access to resources and development, control of assets, decision making powers, etc. between women and men and their assigned gender roles. (European Commission, 1998) - should be an integral stage of project formulation. Gender analysis is also crucial during project implementation as well as during project monitoring, evaluation and measurement of impact.

Project planners and managers face a new challenge: how to do all this given the surprising lack of concrete guidance, specifically in the context of the small-scale fisheries sector.

### **The gender mainstreaming strategy of the RFLP**

The work of the Regional Fisheries Livelihoods Programme for South and Southeast Asia (RFLP) provides an example of gender mainstreaming in practice. The RFLP is a four-year programme funded by the Government of Spain which is being implemented by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in six countries – Cambodia, Indonesia, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Timor-Leste and Viet Nam. Its aim is to improve the livelihoods of small-scale coastal fisheries communities while contributing to sustainable management of aquatic resources. The RFLP has gender mainstreaming as an important cross cutting issue of its implementation. The overall strategy for gender mainstreaming of the RFLP is incorporated in a set of actions in information gathering, knowledge sharing, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and capacity development (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Gender mainstreaming strategies in RFLP.

<b>Information gathering systems:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Gender analysis carried out in the RFLP countries during the initial baseline surveys helped to define activities in national work-plans and the setting of gender targets and indicators.</li> <li>- Data is being sex-disaggregated in all project activities, especially in training and relevant meetings</li> </ul>
<b>Knowledge sharing and advocacy:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Establishment of the RFLP Gender Focal Points at regional and national levels, for the dissemination of information, knowledge sharing and gender advocacy purposes.</li> <li>- Liaison with the Gender Focal Points from the National Fisheries Administration and other relevant government agencies.</li> <li>- Presentation and/or organizing national and regional meetings relevant to gender (e.g. the development of gender awareness campaigns and participation in the Gender Fisheries Symposium organized by the Asian Fisheries Society, among others)</li> <li>- Facilitate discussion on gender-related information with RFLP stakeholders, especially government counterparts, encouraging debate on gender dimensions at RFLP country office, during meetings with stakeholders, other agencies and NGOs, in order to design and implement strategies which will maximize benefits to both women and men.</li> <li>- Creation of the Women in Fisheries Award. The purpose of this Award is to highlight the activities carried out during two years of project implementation and to share the impact and results obtained at country levels with regards to gender equality and women's empowerment.</li> </ul>
<b>Implementation of activities:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Increased flexibility with regards to activity implementation facilitates the participation of women in RFLP interventions. For example, carrying out training and meetings near villages or by providing child-care makes it easier for women to participate in activities.</li> <li>- Screening agreements and other contracts with implementing stakeholders to ensure they indicate the number of women and men participating in project interventions and assessing the likely impact that activities would have on female and male beneficiaries.</li> <li>- Increase efforts to raise and improve women's participation in project interventions (e.g. activities related to post-harvest, diversified or improved livelihood options and improved access to microfinance services) and in decision-making mechanisms, especially in co-management, taking into account the double burden and/or a potential lack of mobility.</li> </ul>
<b>Monitoring and Evaluation:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Gender targets and indicators have been set in the RFLP national log-frames, for measurement of the gender related impact of RFLP implementation during monitoring and evaluation missions.</li> <li>- Reporting, Monitoring and Evaluation (M&amp;E) with a gender perspective, including the disaggregation of all M&amp;E data by sex.</li> </ul>
<b>Capacity Development:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Capacity building is done by identifying the needs of RFLP country staff and government officers and other stakeholders at country level for training aimed at improving their understanding of gender equality and the principles of women's empowerment.</li> </ul>

In addition to these initiatives, RFLP also developed a specific handbook for gender mainstreaming in the fisheries sector (Arenas and Lentisco, 2010). We describe this handbook as well as the best practices workshop for gender mainstreaming in the fisheries sector organized by the RFLP.

### **Frameworks, approaches and tools for gender mainstreaming in fisheries projects**

Since the widely quoted work of Boserup (1970) on the roles of women in economic development, and the gender division of labour, a broad body of literature has been produced on the topic. We note, however, that the critical apparatus of the social sciences has had an uneven influence in much of the literature produced, so that many works still carry some of the weaknesses of Boserup, specifically in regard to the descriptive and non-analytical character of her study, as well as the weak theoretical framework applied (Beneria and Sen, 1981). A number of approaches and tools have also emerged from development and research institutions, especially since the 1992 Earth Summit and the gender inclusions in Agenda 21 (Resurreccion, 2010). When undertaking a gender analysis, the adoption of any one approach will have an impact on the planning process, as certain facts will be highlighted while others remain hidden, according to the information gathering methods used. Following Nadel-Klein and Davis (1988), three types of analytical approaches are considered: a descriptive approach that addresses women's and men's roles separately, as being different but complementary; a second that considers power relations in a context of colonialism, capitalism and class; and a third addressing micro-level studies that allow a view of the complexity and multiplicity of roles (Aslin, Webb, and Fisher, 2000).

Different authors and development agencies have developed a variety of analytical frameworks for use in development projects. The five more common frameworks are the Harvard Analytical or Gender Roles Framework (HAF), the Moser or Gender Planning Framework (MF), the Gender Analysis Matrix (GAM), the Women's Empowerment Framework (WEF), and the Social Relations Approach (SRA). These are summarized in USAID (n.d.) and UNDP (Keays, McEvoy and Murison, 2000) and reviewed by March, Smyth, and Mukhopadhy (1999). Beyond these, the Socio-Economic and Gender Analysis (SEAGA) Programme of FAO (Wilde, 2001), developed a toolkit suggesting complementary means to gather information and perform analysis. The gender analytical matrix for fisheries and aquatic systems designed by WorldFish Centre (2010) is built using a selection of elements from the above-mentioned frameworks in combination with the Capabilities and Vulnerabilities Framework and the Sustainable Livelihoods Frameworks. Some authors have preferred to put into use tools such as the Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) (Sriputinibondh, Khumsri and Hartmann, 2005) with a gender emphasis, while the work of Aguilar and Castaneda (2001) provides an integral Participatory Appraisal from a Gender Perspective tool of use in different stages of marine coastal zone projects. A documented example of gender analysis for gender mainstreaming in the fisheries sector in Africa can be found in the FAO Sustainable Fisheries Livelihood Programme

(Westlund, Holvoet and Kebe, 2009)<sup>2</sup> that draws also upon the Sustainable Livelihood Approach, combined in some stages with Value Chain Analysis, covering macro/meso and micro levels for analysis and interventions. Holvoet (2008) provides a valuable experience-based explanation on these concepts.

Practitioners interested in using the above mentioned frameworks should consider the recommendation of Hunt (2004) that technicians should not use the frameworks in isolation; instead they should combine them in a manner that reflects the needs, sector and stage of the project. In addition, the frameworks are just “the means to a bigger end” for gender mainstreaming (March, Smyth and Mukhopadhy, 1999).

The RFLP handbook was based largely on the Harvard and Moser frameworks but adapted to the fisheries sector. The aim of the handbook is primarily to raise awareness on the importance of gender mainstreaming in fishery-related projects and to facilitate gender analysis as part of project management (Arenas and Lentisco, 2010). This handbook was presented for feedback to fisheries practitioners in a workshop that discussed best practices for gender mainstreaming. The following section describes the main findings and recommendations from this workshop.

### **Outcomes of the 2010 RFLP Workshop on “Best Practices for Gender Mainstreaming in the Fisheries Sector”**

In order to improve the draft RFLP handbook, learn from Asia-Pacific experience, and design better development interventions (Mehra and Gupta, 2006), RFLP organized a Workshop on “Best Practices for Gender Mainstreaming in the Fisheries Sector”, from 2 to 5 November 2010 in Siem Reap, Cambodia. The workshop was attended by 33 government staff, field project staff, researchers and practitioners from intergovernmental, international non-governmental, and non-governmental organizations working in small scale fisheries. They discussed policies, concepts, tools and frameworks for gender analysis, field experiences, case studies and strategies to address and integrate gender dimensions in development projects (RFLP, 2010).

Participants experiences were that access to financial, social and symbolic capital, means of production and business skills were crucial to promoting women’s empowerment. The experience in Kampong Tralach Village, Kep province-Cambodia (Seltik, 2010), showed that savings/self help groups were one means of helping women escape from the trap created by the collusive strategies of lenders. The creation of fishery by-product social enterprises in Tiwi (Philippines) helped improve well being in the communities (Coralde, 2010). In other places, such as Timor Leste, entrance into the market economy and the rapid process of modernization involving a shift from community to individual-based rights, could produce negative side effects for certain peripheral sections of society (women, children or the elderly) by producing

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<sup>2</sup> A partnership between the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the Department for International Development (DFID) of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and 25 participating countries in West Africa, ran from November 1999 to October 2006. The Programme aimed at enhancing the livelihoods of artisanal fishery communities in coastal and inland lake areas.

transitional states of social anomy (Pena, 2010). Interventions should be able to assess these risks to reduce potential negative impacts.

Resource management and environmental issues also need attention during project implementation. As shown by the bottom-up resource management experience in Sihanoukville, Cambodia, self regulatory management systems can help women to enhance their leadership capabilities and awareness of conservation issues while improving their access to the management of productive and natural resources (Ruangsivakul, Etoh and Sorn, 2010). With regards to environmental changes related to climate change, the experience of the 2006 tsunami (see Davis et al. 2005) revealed that women were more vulnerable to extreme weather events due to the fact that they are far less mobile and have less access to information. More women than men work in the informal sector, which is often the worst hit and least able to recover from the effects of disasters, due to lack of capital, and limited access to credit and information, among other obstacles (Epps, 2010).

Workshop participants agreed that although no universal formulas for gender mainstreaming in fisheries development projects exists, a number of factors, when put in place, can contribute to success. These were the constitution and improvement of social networks and the promotion of women's leadership and business skills as well as improved access and control over resources, means of production, social capital or other symbolic capital. Efforts must target both women and men and monitor potential side effects such as any increase in domestic violence. Knowledge upon which interventions are formulated needs to be increased, in both global (effects of climate change, globalization); and local domains. Project interventions should take into account the changing roles (productive and reproductive) played by women and the new roles that need to be played by men, for example, providing greater support in the household, as well as local culture, norms, economic practices, access to resources, social structures, power relations, world views and value systems.

Project implementation must leave room for flexibility. Whilst project documents and texts remain static, social reality moves on.

### ***The policy or macro level***

The workshop reviewed existing (or non-existing) gender mainstreaming policies in the fisheries sector of RFLP countries. From among the participating countries, only Cambodia has a specific policy devoted to the promotion of gender equality in the fisheries sector (Fisheries Administration, 2007). Each of the other countries have only general or national gender policies and strategies that may be applied to the fisheries sector, but that would need strong institutional support to apply them in fisheries.

From the experiences of the different countries (Alonso and da Cruz, 2010; Hoang Tam and Bao Duy, 2010; Khim and Ponley, 2010; Munoz, 2010; Pellu and Suwardi, 2010 Vithanage and Dissanayake, 2010) showed that the implementation of gender policies is constrained by traditional social structures and beliefs, conceptual misunderstandings, lack of knowledge

concerning the complex sets of roles played by women, as well as significant intra-national differences in beliefs, religion, and everyday practices. The lack of skilled human capital or funding appeared as common obstacles. Despite the many constraints and gaps identified in policy making and implementation, however, significant advances have been made at the macro level.

At the macro-level, the recommendations were that: government institutions and other relevant fisheries organizations must provide the normative and policy framework to increase the visibility of women's roles (e.g. through specific gender policies aimed at the fisheries sector), the creation and promotion of women's organizations, the empowerment of women and their participation in decision making bodies (e.g. in co-management mechanisms), the wider dissemination of information on gender issues, the increase of access to markets and food security for women and their families and the improvement of women's skills in the realms of production and income generating activities. Additionally, agencies should support research targeting nuanced analysis of gendered impacts of larger processes and structures on fisheries, such as climate change, markets, industrialization and technological changes (Weeratunge, 2010). To assist the research and for planning purposes, state institutions and organizations must be encouraged to produce gender disaggregated statistics.

### ***The methodological and conceptual dimensions***

Traditional conceptual tools arising from the social sciences must be taken into consideration (Arenas, 2010) until new conceptual tools demonstrate their usefulness. Divisions like sex/gender, equity/equality or concepts like gender mainstreaming are known and recognized concepts used to understand social inequalities. However, Pena and Alonso (2010) pointed out that binary sets such as sex/gender, public/private, productive/reproductive or domestic/politic, are divisions by which Western cosmologies understand and explain social and gender hierarchies and frontiers. These authors challenged the traditional concepts of analysis, drawing upon ethnographic evidence of the human-nature relationship from different places around the world. Anthropology is nowadays calling for a revision of these conceptual sets, but such a revision, which currently remains in the academic sphere, has not yet been incorporated into the development sector or even into gender analysis as a sub discipline.

With regards to the methodological dimensions, participants agreed that every tool available for gender analysis (such as the ones contained in the handbook), as well as the research methodologies, must be carefully selected for the given social context.

To attain knowledge on the local dynamics for use in project identification and evaluation, medium or long term ethnography will be needed, based on rigorous qualitative and quantitative research methods, including careful analysis of secondary information, bibliographic analysis and data. Through these techniques, local worldviews and social structures, e.g., lineages, casts, class, systems of values (Pena and Alonso, 2010), networks of interchange and the operation of customary and new economic practices outside of the market (Pena, 2010) would be known. Also through rigorous social research, the needs and aspirations of the local

people can be drawn out, understood and included in project planning, as demonstrated in presentations by Bunthoeun (2010), Kwaenjaroen (2010), Dubois (2010) and Weeratunge (2010). Knowledge will be gained on the differential contribution of women and men to livelihood activities and household economics, gender disparities in intra-household practices (such as nutrition levels, income, education, health services, water and sanitation) as well as decision making/bargaining power (Weeratunge, 2010). Emically driven locally based research, i.e., with local communities driving the research directions, is one way to fill the gaps in the knowledge of the aspirations of the local communities (Bunthoeun, 2010; Dubois, 2010). In applying this approach, the role of the researcher must be that of an active listener, gathering the concrete wishes of the individuals, groups and organizations of the community/region or locality (Kwaenjaroen, 2010). The otherwise gender “neutral” Value Chain Analysis also may be a very useful research method for gender analysis when applied with a gender perspective, by describing the different actors (women and men) across the value chain (Kusakabe, 2010). Such in depth research, however, is often neglected due to limitations in time and resources.

Researchers must complement any information gathered through the tools included in the handbook with notes on nuances and exceptions. Checklists establish boundaries that cannot match reality, therefore, researchers must test and adapt the available templates to the needs and the changing contexts of analysis. Where checklists are filled in with participation of the community members, researches should also take into account information gathered through direct observation and complementary techniques. Researchers must become cultural translators, providing the shift from local categories to analytical ones. To achieve this, experienced researchers are needed.

With regards to how knowledge gained is further transformed into the design of project interventions, participants pointed out the risks of using etically (culturally neutral) based problematization techniques abstracted from their context. The Logical Framework Approach, for instance, has been criticized for being too rigid. Current trends appear to point to an increasing incorporation of the wishes and aspirations of local communities in project design, but most donors and institutions still demand the use of logical frameworks. With this demand, responses to non-planned effects during project implementation are difficult to incorporate, unless flexibility is allowed. Participants stressed the need to include local views in project planning, expressing the need to change from designs based on logics of etic problematization to emically (culturally explicit or meaningful) driven project designs. But they also noted that this need has yet to be recognized by donors.

Finally, any gender mainstreaming strategy depends not only on knowledge, but also on the gender awareness and sensitivity of institutions and development planners as well as the level of relativism they apply when designing interventions. A degree of knowledge-based creativity should be permitted in project design while a degree of flexibility should be applied during project implementation, in order to respond to changing realities.

## Conclusions

To effectively mainstream gender in the fisheries sector, the roles of women and their contributions to the sector need to be continuously highlighted. Instead of taking their roles for granted, they must represent a constant area of study and awareness, as they change over time, and depend on local context. They will also evolve as a result of project interventions and social change. This is why undertaking gender analysis prior, during and after project implementation is so important. However, information on how to do this in the fisheries sector remains scarce, and more examples are necessary. RFLP, as part of its overall gender mainstreaming strategy, has developed a handbook containing gender analysis tools to help manage fisheries development projects. The research methodologies selected to apply these (or other) tools will largely depend on local context and will depend upon the knowledge and skills of the field researchers. Gender research should be conducted during the project identification phase and be an integral part of the monitoring and evaluation strategies. Additionally, project implementation needs to incorporate local views and be flexible enough to respond to changing realities. Finally, it is important to note the need for more policy and institutional support from governments and other relevant organizations for gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment in the fisheries and aquaculture sectors.

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