

Towards Gender-Equitable Governance and Development in Small-Scale Fisheries

Introduction

The small-scale fisheries sector is undergoing a period of rapid change as traditional fishing is under considerable stress as a result of overfishing, climate change, and an ever-increasing expansion of the global economy. As a result, there is growing pressure on fishery resources as people increasingly rely on other sources as income, as well as intensified fishing, in order to make ends meet. Such rapid changes have pushed men and women into new roles, particularly women who are often best placed to undertake supplementary livelihood activities. Despite the hugely important role women play within coastal communities, their contributions all too often go unrecognized and, as a result, inequalities between genders are exacerbated by conservation and management efforts. Gender mainstreaming has arisen as a method to address these inequalities and work towards more gender-equitable governance and development within small-scale fisheries.

Gender Constructions

Gender refers to socially constructed qualities, characteristics, attributes, and opportunities associated with being male or female (West and Zimmerman, 1987). This begins from birth as individuals learn to respond to corresponding societal definitions of masculinity and femininity in terms of what is appropriate behaviour through a complex arrangement of norms, taboos, rights, and duties reflective of one's sex. Biological sex is thus transformed into social identity, thereby creating "gender" (West and Zimmerman, 1987; FAO, 2017).

Gender is a source of power that can interact with and be amplified by other sources of power such as class, race, religion, or sexuality in different social contexts. Perceptions of gender are deeply rooted, vary spatially across the globe, and change over time. While this leads to a wide variation of privileges, responsibilities, and freedoms across societies and cultures, certain patterns of the expression of gender nevertheless arise and repeat. Generally speaking, women have "fewer privileges, fewer rights, more domestic responsibilities, and less of a voice in socio-economic and political decision-making than their male counterparts" (FAO, 2017). These gender-influenced power relations are particularly evident within small-scale fisheries.

Gendered Division of Labour

Women make up roughly 47 percent of workers in the fishing market worldwide, accounting for around 56 million jobs along the fisheries supply chain in 2014, primarily in post-harvest activities like processing and trading (World Bank, 2012; Clabots, 2013; FAO, 2017). Despite the involvement of women in the sector, fisheries are largely perceived as a male domain, a perception that consequently leads to the undervaluation of women's diverse roles and responsibilities (Ramachandran, 2012; Lentisco and Alonso, 2012; Lentisco and Lee, 2015; FAO, 2017).

This is for several reasons. First, there is a limited understanding of what constitutes "fishing". Fishing is commonly thought of as catching aquatic organisms with the use of nets, lines, and spears, all of which are tools dominated by males (SEI, 2018b). The gleaning of shellfish and other organisms from shores and reefs— acts more frequently performed by females— are more likely to be considered "gathering", even though this too is the harvesting of aquatic organisms from marine environments (Schwerdtner Máñez and Pauwelussen 2016; Harper et al. 2013; SEI, 2018b).

This gendered division of labour is based on the predominant perception of women as caregivers with tasks in the domestic or private sphere, and men as wage earners who act in the external or public sphere. This reveals a second factor behind female undervaluation: the fisheries sector focus on public fishing activities. Fishing tasks can be broadly placed within three categories (FAO, 2017):

Pre-harvest work: tasks such as collecting and preparing bait, mending nets, preparing food for fishing trips, repairing dugouts, canoes and other boats, and maintaining books and accounts;

Harvest work: tasks such as fishing and harvesting, collecting, and transporting fish;

Post-harvest work: tasks such as cleaning, selling and trading fish, processing fish (salting, drying, pickling, fermenting and smoking), or sorting fish at landing sites.

The sector primarily focuses on public fishing activities within harvest work, which men dominate, and therefore overvalue men's roles. Despite comprising almost half of the fisheries sector's labour force and their crucial contributions, women's tasks, which largely fall within

pre- and post-harvest categories, are usually considered unremarkable extensions of housework and domestic work (SEI, 2018a; SEI, 2018b; Torre et al., 2019). They are therefore ignored in official data collection and viewed as unproductive from an economic point of view.

It is worth noting that domestic work, which includes tasks such as cooking, cleaning, child care, and caregiving of the sick and elderly, are not traditionally classified as productive roles within the fishery sector and not included in the task breakdown at all, despite playing a significant role. For example, women are chiefly responsible for reef gleaning and subsistence catch for daily meals, which are often not reflected in official catch statistics (Clabots, 2013). Domestic work of this sort can involve up to four extra hours of daily work for women (Montfort, 2015). Though this catch serves as the basis of the local diet, and therefore contributes substantially to nutrition, data on the subsistence portion of the catch is not collected by organizations like the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO).

Gendered labour division and inequality are sustained through various other structures and institutional practices at all levels, ranging from local community customs to national policies that marginalize women and reinforce restrictive gender norms. Patriarchal social norms that confine women to the domestic sphere and care work often result in exclusion of women from meetings on local natural resource management and limits their participation in decision-making processes (Torre et al., 2019). Even if opportunity for participation arise, many women are reluctant to take on additional management responsibilities due to the high demand of their current roles.

Finally, when cultural norms work to limit women's public visibility, women may withdraw from the economic, consultative, and decision-making arenas. All these circumstances combine to prevent women, and other marginalized groups, from fully contributing to important public debates. Without proper inclusion, women too often bear the brunt of efforts to compensate for dwindling fish harvests by taking on supplementary livelihood alternatives while simultaneously needing to continue to meet domestic demands.

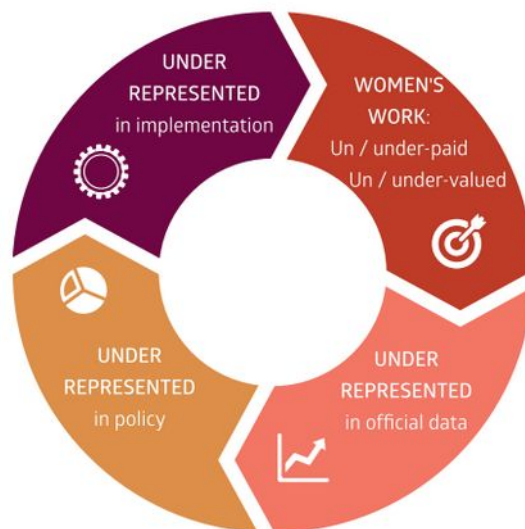
Cycle of Invisibility

As a result of the gendered division of labour, women's activities are usually overlooked or under-represented in official statistics. Sex-disaggregated data on fisheries is especially limited in the Asia-Pacific region and Africa and for small-scale fisheries in general (Harper et al. 2013). The FAO (2016) estimated that one in five people "directly engaged in the fisheries and aquaculture primary sector" is a woman, but that women represent half the labour force when the primary and secondary sectors are included, demonstrating that if activities such as gleaning and aquaculture were taken into account, women could make enough of work force

for the sector to be considered a female sphere (WorldFish Center 2008; Weeratunge et al. 2010; SEI, 2018).

The lack of sex-disaggregated data, however, leads to gender-blind policy-making, which in turn translates into inadequate funding for the sectors that women serve in. This leads to a cycle where, deprived of resources, women's work is further marginalized and undervalued, and therefore likely to be further discounted, as seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Women's work and the cycle of invisibility (Manuela Marazzi/CONFLUX)



The division of labour tasks, however, is widely context-dependent and is contingent upon other sources of power like ethnicity, religion, caste, class, and nationality – identifications that are subject to constant change and contestation in the public eye. The structures and practices that hold them in place are not fixed and have the potential to change as societal influence and cultures change, suggesting that gender-discriminatory laws, policies, customs, and practices may be challenged and subjected to scrutiny and transformation.

Bridging the Gender Gap

With an increasing focus on addressing gender inequalities within marine conservation efforts, particularly under the Sustainable Development Goals, several guidelines and strategies have

been designed to support the recent emphasis on gender inequalities as a primary aspect of sustainable resource management. Conservation organizations are increasingly calling for the full participation of women at all levels of policy-making and implementation in order to achieve effective biological diversity conservation (WEDO, 2012). The rationale behind this approach is based off of the recognition that men and women have different roles and relationships as each may have different knowledge of biodiversity, control over resources, and access to decision-making. Without proper recognition and consideration of this, the realization of key conservation goals may be hindered (Al-Azzawi, 2013).

Gender Mainstreaming

Gender mainstreaming is one tool that has been developed as a means of intervening in this vicious cycle of female underrepresentation. Gender mainstreaming is defined as “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). Gender mainstreaming is thus a strategy and tool for achieving the broader goal of gender equality. Given the changing nature of gender roles across time and space, it has been difficult for the development of any one specific gender mainstreaming technique. As a result, several strategies, two of which are listed below, have been created to provide broad outlines and assist in the drawing of broader conclusions.

1. RFLP Gender Mainstreaming Strategy

The Regional Fisheries Livelihoods Programme for South and Southeast Asia (RFLP) developed an extensive body of material on gender mainstreaming strategy that aims to improve the livelihoods of small-scale coastal fisheries communities while contributing to sustainable management of aquatic resources. According to RFLP's approach and modus operandi, gender mainstreaming should include:

- The use of gender sensitive indicators based on baseline surveys and gender analysis carried out in the inception phase;
- The collection of sex-disaggregated data for all project activities;

- The use of guidance questions for gender impact assessments to monitor and document the gender impact of interventions, and;
- Gender specific sections in regular progress reports

2. The Empowerment Approach

Another strategy for gender mainstreaming is the Empowerment Approach. This method is used for analysing a situation and monitoring progress through four elements, which are defined UNEP and GWA (2019) as follows:

- **Political Empowerment:** *all persons involved, including women, are participating in decision-making by organizing themselves in groups, such as fishers' groups, water management groups, waste management groups, etc*
- **Economic Empowerment:** *both women and men have right to paid employment, equal wages, and the right to decide about the spending of one's income. Women's work needs to be recognized like men's work is. Unpaid work is also important. All people should have equal access to means of production, to training, credits, etc. without giving bribes*
- **Socio-Cultural Empowerment:** *It is an important aspect of empowerment that women see themselves as important and not as inferior to all others. Development work in the marine environment can boost women's leadership and make them see themselves as crucial links in the chain, whilst also the society changes the attitude towards more respect for them. Physical*
- **Physical Empowerment:** *to have a say over one's body, and to be freed from drudgery work. This aspect of empowerment is also to be able to resist violence, inside and outside the home. Further to have access to safe water and food, and to healthcare. If women are involved in waste management, they need to have protective clothing. Within the criminal sectors that flourish in coastal areas, women are usually physically very disempowered*

It is important to note that, regardless of the strategy used, gender mainstreaming is a process to be worked on over time and at all levels of program intervention rather than as a one-time activity. Mainstreaming involves the consideration of gender issues during all stages of a project, from design, to monitoring, to implementation and evaluation. Given that the manifestation of gender inequality is never uniform and can be vastly translated, it is recommended that gender mainstreaming be adapted using different approaches in different cultural contexts. Additionally, it is crucial that any project involve a continuous assessment of the impact of mainstreaming government legislation, policies, and programmes throughout the entire length of the project and that the strategy be adjusted accordingly.

Critiques

While gender mainstreaming is generally hailed as a positive contribution to conservation efforts, it also has the potential to re-entrench a gendered division of resource use if not executed properly. “Community-based” and “collaborative” management strategies, even if implemented with the best of intentions, can result in the creation of unrealistic demands of time and resources from women with an already extensive list of responsibilities (Baker-Médard, 2017). Given that women are often the targets and recipients of many policy changes and developmental programme interventions, women are usually the most affected by changes within the community. Often the impacts of these programmes can be varied, unanticipated, and result in unintended physical and emotional stress to create what been termed the double burden and negate conservation gains. Therefore, it is in organizations’ interest to be vigilant regarding policy measure outcomes.

Another critique in gender mainstreaming is of the common recommendation to ensure female participation through the use of quotas. While this approach sets aside seats, it does not guarantee representation. Instead, the importance of the activity has to be weighed by the quality of participation and engagement. Efforts need to be taken to ensure active rather than token participation. Therefore, quota use should be used as a last resort to encourage female participation (Lentisco and Alonso, 2012; RFLP, 2013).

It has also been argued that conservation organizations target “low-hanging fruit” by focusing efforts on proximate drivers of marine resource use over ultimate drivers such as global commodity chains (Baker-Médard, 2017). This places disproportionate emphasis on spatial enclosures and the restriction of use and certain harvest methods rather than driving change at a much-needed higher level. Additionally, this drives research that follows a focus on roles and livelihoods, generating outputs that tend have one-dimensional views of women rather than ones that incorporate intersectional analyses that view multiple and embedded identities of women in class, ethnicity, racial and generational terms. Instead, gender analysis should consider issues of resource access, rights, use and governance and their impacts on the environment as they change over time (Schwerdtner Máñez and Pauwelussen 2016).

Research, however, has also begun to address the lack of engagement with masculinity concepts in fisheries, that not only addresses the vulnerability of men caused by the

reinforcement of masculine identities, but also encourages analysis of gender and power relations between men and women in fishing communities (Allison, 2013).

Though there has been an expansion to include wider gender issues, these publications are still in the minority (Schwerdtner Máñez and Pauwelussen 2016; de la Torre-Castro et al. 2017; Lentisco and Lee, 2015).

Conclusions

While gender concerns have been mainstreamed to the extent that they are included in project planning, there still remains a lack of disaggregated empirical data and a shortage of academic peer reviewed papers that provide concrete evidence of how, and to what extent, these strategies achieve better conservation outcomes. Overall, gender mainstreaming often remains too piecemeal and fragmented. This may be because gender and social equality issues continue to be set aside to prioritize technical, ecological, or economic aspects of marine resources conservation efforts. This leaves the drivers of inequality and vulnerability largely ignored. As a result, the need for a more meaningful and relevant action to improve socio-ecological approaches to fisheries research and management remains.

Through this review of literature concerning the role of gender within small-scale fisheries, a few recommendations specific to Coral Cay Conservation are revealed:

Coral Cay Conservation should conduct a detailed gender analysis of the beneficiary communities to take place, as well as capacity building and awareness raising among stakeholders on the importance of taking gender aspects into account. It is crucial to understand the local context before taking action and to identify all barriers to full participation by women in order to allow for the development of specific gender targets and tools that allow for the mainstreaming of gendered considerations in an effective way, regardless of which gender mainstreaming strategy is used. CCC should also include some flexibility within plans for capacity building that may not initially be planned for to allow for the design and implementation of interventions that promote and improve gender related activities and fill any knowledge or capacity gaps that become apparent during the project.

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