

'Engendering' the fisheries industry development plan

The need to integrate gender as an analytical and planning perspective in the National Fisheries Industry Development Plan in the Philippines is being forcefully articulated by women fishers and advocates

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In the Philippines, the adoption of the term "fisherfolk" to mean both women and men who are fishers is important policy recognition of the gendered nature of the fishing industry. When the Fisheries Code was passed in 1998, following 10 years of lobbying by fisherfolk, gender was slowly being recognized as an integral element of development. At the time, the crux of the struggle was the priority use rights of small-scale fishers over the coastal waters. The specific issues and concerns of women were only to unfold in the new millennium, as NGOs



took up research, consultations, training and the organizing of women fishers.

Roles in fishing communities and households are substantially shaped by gendered notions of work. "Fishing," which constitutes the actual capture of fish and is usually done further offshore, is considered to be work (since it earns income) and is regarded as a male occupation. Women are engaged in various preparatory and post-capture (marketing and processing) activities, as well as capture, both offshore (fishing with their male family members) and

nearshore such as gleaning and harvesting. Despite the importance of these activities in the whole fishing cycle, these activities remain unpaid economically and unvalued socially.

The invisibility of women's roles is further aggravated by their displacement from nearshore fisheries, as mangrove areas are felled to give way to aquaculture farms throughout the country, and as tourism and industrial development encroach on women's traditional fishing grounds. Even as women participate in community-based coastal resources management, the fisheries development agenda still largely ignores the marginalization that women face, particularly women fishers without economic and political resources to participate in policy-making.

The Fisheries Code mandates the formulation of the "Comprehensive National Fisheries Industry Development Plan" (CNFIDP), which serves as the operational framework for "optimal development and long-term sustainability of benefits derived by the nation from its fisheries". However, only after a decade since the passage of the Code did consultations, initiated by the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR), towards formulating the CNFIDP begin. The elements of the Plan include the Philippine fisheries profile, status and issues; fisheries sector development framework; medium-term priority programmes and projects; and institutional implementation schemes. Each section deals with the specific issues of the fisheries sub-sectors, namely, municipal, commercial, aquaculture fisheries, and post-harvest.

However, in neither the process nor the formulation of the Plan, did gender as an analytical and planning perspective receive attention. The Plan was strongly biased towards industry, focusing heavily on enhancing production, while critical social elements, such as fishing communities' access to basic services or social protection were not included in the operational part of the Plan. The Plan was also silent on issues such as women's access to reproductive health services or protection against violence and abuse, common in coastal communities. Even though the Plan document

had almost been finalized, women fishers and advocates began strongly pushing for the integration of gender concerns within it. Finally, they submitted to the BFAR, the text for inclusion in the Plan document for each of the chapters, including medium-term priority programmes and projects.

To begin with, the need for recognition of women fishers' role in the local and national fishing economy was included among the nine key issues of the sector. These are: (1) depleted fishery resources; (2) degraded fishery habitats; (3) intensified resource use competition and conflict; (4) unrealized full potential of aquaculture and commercial fisheries; (5) uncompetitive products; (6) post-harvest losses; (7) limited institutional capabilities; (8) inadequate/inconsistent fisheries policies; (9) weak institutional partnerships; *and (10) lack of recognition of women's roles and contribution in fisheries development.*

In developing their proposed inclusions to the Plan, women fishers and advocates asked several questions. What gender issues are addressed in the CNFIDP? Are the roles and problems of women in the fisheries considered and integrated in the analysis of the context, problems and issues? How does the CNFIDP consider women as stakeholders in the development of the fisheries industry? What are the specific programmes that address issues and concerns of women in fisheries?

Given that the advocates believe that the empowerment of women is fundamental to gender equality, the elements submitted to the BFAR largely addressed women fishers' concerns. These included access to resources; women's effective participation in decisionmaking and planning; institutional reform; a favourable policy environment for the full integration of women in fisheries governance from local to national levels; and overall contribution

to substantive changes in the quality of life of fishing households. Also proposed were awareness-raising for men and women in the different fisheries management structures and capacity building for developing and implementing gender-responsive programmes and projects. While gender equality is a long term goal, the actions to be taken at present should be based on gender equity; this means addressing impediments that women fishers face in participating and influencing institutional and social reforms.

The advocates saw to it that the Plan recognized the differential roles and status of men and women as fishers; the importance of the institutional and policy environment; and that the "gender content" was both logical and comprehensive from analysis to operational mechanisms. Thus, the proposals also included national policies and international treaties signed by the Philippine government that relate to gender equality and gender mainstreaming, which is expected to help shape the policy discourse and practical interventions relating to fisheries governance.

The text for inclusion was well received by BFAR and is considered in the final document. However, the ownership of the new elements and the implementation of the Plan itself remain a challenge.

Going ahead, an analysis of the issues in the commercial, aquaculture and post-harvest sectors still needs to be done, since women in these sectors were not reached by the women-led consultations on the CNFIDP. Essentially, a more comprehensive gender analysis in the sector is required even as women fishers and advocates continue to create and seize opportunities to engage policy makers, fisherfolk leaders, and others, including the private sector, on gender equality as an integral part of sustainable fisheries development. ❖

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