

The Gender Handbook

A new field handbook developed by the Regional Fisheries Livelihoods Programme for South and Southeast Asia highlights the contribution of women, helping enhance the chances of success for projects targeting small-scale fisheries

By **Steve Needham** (Steve.Needham@fao.org), Information Officer, Regional Fisheries Livelihoods Programme, FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, Thailand

As part of its efforts to promote gender equity to improve fisheries livelihoods, the Regional Fisheries Livelihoods Programme (RFLP) for South and Southeast Asia is developing a field handbook that gives guidance on taking gender into account in all phases of small-scale fisheries development projects. To discuss a draft version of the handbook, a meeting of government and field project staff, researchers as well as representatives of NGOs and international organizations from around the region was organized in the historic Cambodian city of Siem Reap from 2-5 November 2010. Participants looked at best practices for mainstreaming gender in the fisheries sector and also field-tested the tools contained in the handbook.

“Women play a significant role in fisheries, yet lack of attention to gender can result in policies or programmes failing to improve livelihoods or reduce vulnerability of fishing communities,” said Jose Parajua, Regional Manager of the Spanish-funded RFLP. “So much attention is paid to gender; however few people really have much idea about how it can be incorporated into project planning,” said the RFLP’s Angela Lentisco. “When the RFLP started in late 2009, we realized that

there was very little information available. The usual approach seems to be to simply ensure that a certain number of women participate in training. We thought about making something that would help people understand gender and give practical guidance on how it can be integrated into projects.”

The main objectives of the handbook are to introduce key gender concepts while also building the capacity to identify gender issues in fisheries development projects. The publication provides information on the rationale, concepts and approaches related to mainstreaming gender in development co-operation. It presents an overview of the role of women in the Southeast Asian fisheries sector as well as tools to help integrate gender into various stages of the project cycle.

Tools include an activity analysis which helps map the activities of men and women in their daily lives; an analysis of access by men and women to resources and benefits (for example, cash/income, boats, markets, information, community groups, and so on); and an analysis on gender needs (for example, access to training, credit, education, clean water, and so on). The handbook is designed to be user-friendly and meant for project managers, field officers, those in contact with communities, or others involved in designing projects or initiatives.

“The main mistake lies in not understanding people’s real needs. We have to avoid the idea that just by working with women everything is okay. You cannot just separate women as a different stakeholder group and expect them to become involved in various activities. This increases their burden as it does not take into account other commitments, such as household work or supporting the men. You need to have a really good understanding of what women’s needs and expectations are beforehand. This is where the handbook will play a valuable role,” said Angela.

Participants at the workshop had the chance to test the tools in the handbook at a number of fishing communities around Tonle Sap Lake. The field testing was a valuable experience, revealing the considerable contribution of women in these communities.

“Many women said they went fishing with their husbands but that they were only helping and did not define their contribution as work. They did not valorize what they did. Women also fetched water by hand while

RFLP




Women play an important role in fisheries. Lack of attention to gender results in policy or programme failures to improve livelihoods

the men would only do so if they could use a motorcycle. Yet the preconception exists that only men could pull up the nets and so the men's contribution was recognized while the women's was not," Angela said.

At the same time, however, the field visits made clear how complex gender roles can be and how difficult it may be to assess them accurately. Considerable feedback on the draft of the handbook was generated during the workshop, which will be incorporated into the final version.

"The handbook can always be improved but only if people use it and help refine it. The aim is to provide simple advice and tools that help make the work women do visible and to help project planners and managers consider the impact of any activities on women," said Angela.

For more information on the field manual 'Mainstreaming gender into project cycle management in the fishery sector' or to register interest in receiving a copy, please contact angela.lentisco@fao.org 

The handbook aims to provide advice and tools to make women's roles more visible.