

European Union

Collaborating Spouses

The Executive Summary of a Report on 'The role of women in the fisheries sector', prepared for the European Commission, Directorate General for Fisheries, by Macalister Elliott and Partners Ltd in March 2002

Methodology

A lack of detailed gender specific data led to an approach where reviewing existing literature was backed up by field enquiry by a team of specialists based throughout the Member States. The wide geographic coverage required (EU 15 countries) meant that, given the study's scope, (i) enquiry needed to be mostly limited to specific key Fisheries Dependent Areas (FDAs) or pockets of fisheries activity in "non FDAs" and (ii) fully statistically rigorous surveys could not be undertaken and surveys had to rely upon opinion from a limited number of key knowledgeable individuals in the FDAs. A template was devised to impose a common approach, and this was successful up to a point, though variations in the different team members' perception of the issues led to a diverse response. However value was seen in this in that where there were common results, these were seen as being the more valid because of the diversity of the researcher's outlooks.

Key areas covered

- *Employment data*, including gender differentials, for each main discrete occupation within the fisheries sector i.e.: fishing, aquaculture, marketing & distribution, processing, administration & management and informal (especially unpaid spouses support).
- *Legal and social status*, women's legal position concerning involvement in the sector, and problems inherent in this.
- *Organizational*, concerning how women are organized within the industry (e.g. unions), what formal support systems there are (e.g. childcare) and how education serves women in the sector.
- *Socio-cultural constraints*, resolved into three aspects—external social factors that effect women's decisions, the social status (thus desirability) of fisheries occupations and 'internal'

psychological factors related to women's interests, aspirations and concerns.

- *Economic*, mainly concerned with the respective earnings for various fisheries occupations, and particularly with gender-related earnings discounts and economic alternatives.

Key Findings

It was a surprise to find that, for all the cultural and economic diversity within the EU, the position and perception of women regarding the fisheries sector showed a considerable degree of commonality. Within this common pattern the following findings stood out as interesting and important:

- Women feel unwelcome in the seagoing fishing sub-sector, but have little interest in participating anyway. It is not surprising that very few women are involved (3 per cent of the workforce).
- Women feel discriminated against in aquaculture, but to a much lower extent, and are far more representatively involved. There are a few specifically women-managed aquaculture activities.
- Processing is the one sub-sector where women are over-represented, but mainly because they predominate in low-grade unskilled jobs. Seafood processing is perceived to hold few career prospects for women, mostly with good reason.
- Management/ administration: women have made significant inroads into this segment, which is both better rewarded and more positively viewed by women. It is particularly in the public sector that women have been successful.
- Informal: the role of women as support to seagoing spouses ("collaborating spouses") was found to be both very important and highly undervalued by the fishing community. This was seen as providing the most relevant and potentially productive avenue to explore in order to better women's position in fisheries.
- The study found that there was economic discrimination against women in the sector. Women are paid 12 per cent less than men for what appears to be the same work, though given the limited data, like may not have been compared exactly with like. However, this is much less than the overall earnings discount women face across

the EU economies of around 22 per cent.

Recommendations

Following these findings, a number of practical recommendations for subsequent action by the EU and Member States became clear:

- *Fishing*: Women on the whole don't wish to go to sea and aren't particularly wanted, so whilst ensuring that women can participate if they so wish (i.e. no unfair barriers) there is little point in pushing for greater involvement. However, for some small-scale, discrete inshore fisheries there could be scope for community-based management (CBM), an approach both potentially beneficial in itself, and one offering women a more widely acceptable as well as a more genuine role in the primary production segment.
- *Aquaculture*: Barriers are lower and opportunities significant in this sub-sector. Focused training should enhance access to technical and managerial positions viewed as desirable by women. Women already manage a few specialized culture activities and enhancing their skills in this direction is also recommended, with community-based management (CBM), seen as the most appropriate approach.
- *Fish Processing*: There is clearly discrimination in processing, but it is perhaps best to help women exit the industry rather than concentrate on upgrading what are likely to always be low-grade jobs. So in non-FDAs there is little justification for special support other than the general education/training that will allow women to move out of these undesirable jobs, which are probably insecure anyway. In short, this is part of general national gender-support and overall development programmes. In FDAs, though, there is justification in assisting women to take 'ownership' of some added-value or processing functions so that they can maximize and upgrade their shore-based role as co-managers of family businesses.
- *Administration*: Environmental and resource management issues are potential key themes for women's continually expanding involvement, and so training should focus on these as well as core management subjects. Public sector administration and research are identified as key

areas where women's involvement and equality are relatively high, and probably where there are the best prospects for further enhancement. Thus training directed towards the public sector will probably yield best results.

- *Women's shore-side support role* - "Collaborating spouses": Our principal recommendation concerns acknowledging, upgrading and expanding women's support role in the sector. A package of support should be devised to promote the enhancement of this role for women, possibly containing specific support for (a) enhanced mutual support networks, (b) assistance with improved communication (especially internet-based), (c) public awareness campaigns to enlist wider community support (especially from fishermen), (d) training including a mix of specific local technical and managerial courses plus IT skills to encourage women to become the internet managers for their family enterprises. This would reinforce the networking capabilities of shore-based women as well as generating transferable skills in a marketable area, should fisheries fail the family, or the women require greater independence. Topics that training would need to cover could include: management, marketing, selling, quality control, modern processing, business planning, accountancy & bookkeeping, employment regulations and taxation, safety at sea, environment and long term resource management.