

# Women's empowerment through climate action

## In Myanmar, FAO's FishAdapt project is strengthening the adaptive capacity and resilience of fisheries-and aquaculture-dependent livelihoods

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**W**omen's empowerment and gender equality have been recognized as necessary conditions for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development. The SDG Goal 5 – 'Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls' – has 14 related indicators, and there are an additional 39 gender-related indicators across the other SDGs, including those that track the elimination of poverty and hunger, the reduction of inequality, the promotion of health, education and decent employment, as well as those related to sustainable cities climate change action, and peace.

Under SDG Goal 14 – 'Life Below Water – Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development' – which also looks at the management of the fisheries and aquaculture sectors, there is no direct gender target. However, one of the key targets is 'Target 14.b Support Small-scale fisheries – Provide access for small-scale artisanal fishers to marine resources

and markets'. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) tracks this indicator while analysing the efforts made by countries to implement the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines). The SSF Guidelines were developed to address the needs of small-scale fisheries as part of the implementation of the 1995 FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries. These Guidelines strongly emphasize the need for gender mainstreaming as an integral part of small-scale fisheries development strategies, calling on states to meet their obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, urging countries to address any existing discrimination against women in the fisheries sector, and encouraging women's participation in fisheries organizations.

Women's contributions to the fisheries sector are significant, with women representing

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A woman working at a shrimp paste processing factory, Myanmar. Due to high insecurity in jobs in fisheries, women (mainly young women) are migrating to Yangon, Mandalay and abroad, searching for potential jobs, including as factory workers

about half of the workforce, as estimated by the 2012 World Bank report titled 'Hidden Harvest – Global Contributions of Capture Fisheries'. Women's roles in fisheries are often concentrated in processing and trading of fishery products, though many women also mend nets, sort catch, glean and fish, and are usually the main care givers of the fishing households. Not taking gender issues into account leads to discrimination against women fishworkers; further, it also leads to productivity and income losses, and food and nutrition insecurity, especially in poor households.

To address these imbalances, interventions in the fisheries sector must recognize gender issues and include measures that empower women and enhance their participation in decision making. Calls for achieving gender equality in the fisheries and aquaculture sectors must be articulated into context specific gender guidance for fisheries and aquaculture projects working on the ground, including those trying to improve the sustainability and resilience of these sectors against climate change. One such example is the FishAdapt project in Myanmar.

The FAO project 'FishAdapt: Strengthening the adaptive capacity and resilience of fisheries and aquaculture-dependent livelihoods in Myanmar' is being implemented in Myanmar to address climate change issues and to promote resilience and climate change adaptation in fisheries and aquaculture. The main objective of the project is "to assist government to enable inland and coastal fishery and aquaculture stakeholders to adapt to climate change by understanding and reducing vulnerabilities, piloting new practices and technologies, and sharing information". The project is working towards strengthening national, regional and local regulatory frameworks and enhancing adaptation practices through fisheries co-management, integrated mangrove fisheries and aquaculture, inland fisheries and small-scale aquaculture, and addressing critical issues related to land and resource tenure.

The project builds on existing government and partner programmes and emerging good practices, following the Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management (EAFM) and the Ecosystem Approach to Aquaculture (EAA). These approaches provide practical guidance to implement sustainable development in the fisheries sector by identifying and encouraging balance between ecological and human well-being through good governance. The goal is to enhance the resilience of aquatic ecosystems to climate change impacts, reducing the vulnerability of fishing and fish farming communities. The project has a strong gender component to ensure that both women and men benefit from the project outcomes, and that project interventions directly contribute to

women's empowerment in the fisheries sector to reduce vulnerability and improve resilience.

The project has developed a Gender Strategy to enhance the capacity of project stakeholders for a better understanding of the gender issues encountered as part of the project, and to develop gender responsive interventions that meet women's and men's needs in Myanmar's fisheries and aquaculture sectors, and ultimately, contribute to the achievement of gender equality and women's empowerment. The Strategy was developed by the FishAdapt gender team, based on the findings of a gender analysis, to address gender issues as part of project interventions. The goal is to "Ensure that FishAdapt project interventions are gender responsive and contribute to the process of empowering women in fisheries and aquaculture communities in Myanmar".

The gender analysis was carried out between July and August 2019 to identify gender issues in fisheries and aquaculture households in nine pilot villages in Yangon (Chaung Wa, MeePya, and Zwe Bar Kone Tan), Ayeyarwaddy (Ah Mar, BawaThit and Tha Mein Pa Lae) and Rakhine (Kha Yaing, KularYaung and Nat Kan). The gender analysis provided useful information about gender roles and decision making in these communities, that can be addressed through the Gender Strategy of the FishAdapt project.

The gender analysis revealed the following key findings:

The first was that women have limited opportunity to work as wage labour in the fishing sector, especially in commercial fishing business. This could largely be due to the gender stereotypes considering women as physically weak and unsuited to the physical demands of fishing, though more studies may be required to explain the absence of women in commercial fishing boats (not only in Myanmar, but regionally and globally). Due to high insecurity in jobs in fisheries, women (mainly young women) are migrating to Yangon, Mandalay and abroad, searching for potential jobs, including as factory workers.

The second finding was that men, women and youth from fisheries and aquaculture households have poor awareness about action plans, policies and laws related to gender, fisheries and aquaculture, climate change and disasters.

Women and youth were found to have limited opportunities to be involved as participants, representatives or in leadership positions and decision making roles in fisheries and aquaculture bodies, including government administrative structures. This was true in urban and rural areas, both at local/village administrative levels, and at national levels.

Another key finding was that women of all ages from fishery and aquaculture households



Women working on shrimp paste processing in Ayeyarwaddy Region, Myanmar. There is a need to develop appropriate and conducive marketing facilities in areas where women fishers have easy and unhindered access. Credit policy also needs to ensure women's access to microfinance

are involved in pre-harvest and post-harvest activities: fish processing, small-scale fishing, fish selling and fish products distribution in local and other markets. However, they lack opportunities to access technical skills to enhance their livelihoods.

It was found that improving women's access to markets and storage of fish through provision of ice would help improve women's roles in fish processing and marketing. There is a need to develop appropriate and conducive marketing facilities in areas where women fishers have easy and unhindered access. Credit policy also needs to ensure women's access to microfinance without having to provide collateral or recommendation by other household members, such as the husband.

Reduction of post-harvest losses and improving fish processing beyond traditional drying and salting should be addressed. Training and support for women should also be provided to improve storage, packaging and distribution of fish as well as the management of enterprises.

To address the issues identified by the gender analysis, the Gender Strategy includes actions to improve the capacity of project staff and project stakeholders to become more aware of gender issues, and to be able to acknowledge them. The project also supports the implementation of specific gender activities that can identify the gender issues (for example, through the gender analysis mentioned above), and measures to address them, and support awareness raising.

The following are examples of the gender related activities being implemented as part of the Gender Strategy:

- FishAdapt project staff are trained and provided technical advice on gender issues whenever required by team members. Gender-specific data and gender sensitive indicators are collected, analysed and used throughout the project. A network of gender focal points has been set up. Capacity development events on women's empowerment in fisheries and aquaculture communities are conducted at a national, provincial and local level.
- An attempt is made to ensure the participation of at least 40 per cent of women and 25 per cent of youth in all project interventions, with some activities, such as post-harvest training, requiring 70 per cent of women's participation.

There is regular collaboration and coordination with stakeholders to share technical knowledge and policy advice. Women's leadership roles are being strengthened through FishAdapt village committees. Women's empowerment and gender equality awareness raising public campaigns, such as the 16 Days of Activism in Myanmar in 2019, are given support.

There is an attempt to promote gender-sensitive language in all documents, publications, website and peer to peer mobile application system produced by FishAdapt. ❏

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