

Need for gender equality in fisheries

Women play a large role in fisheries, but often their roles and contributions are invisible or not recognized. Women do fish (both on boats and without boats), sort fish, sell fish, process fish and cook fish for home consumptions. However, often women are not seen as “real” fishers and are excluded from fisheries organizations, do not have/ have less access than men to resources such as technology, loans, insurance and information. Women have responsibilities for household work and childcare that limits what they can do in fisheries. They often have less decision making power in the household and society. Some people might feel that women are not discriminated against, but the problem is that they are not even “discriminated”, since they are not even recognized as fishers and only seen as carrying out their duties to support the family.

Such invisibility of women stems largely from the masculine image of fishing, and fishing being the largest concern in fisheries. However, faced with declining fish resources, by now, we recognize that for small-scale fishers to survive and continue fishing/ fisheries as part of their sustainable livelihood, it is important not to focus only on fishing but the whole fisheries value chain. For this purpose, gender perspective is useful.

We need fisheries management and decision making to be inclusive and have both women and men fishers’ voices be heard. We need to identify how small scale fishers can secure their access to fish resources sustainably and regularly, and how the spoilage is minimized, how they can make sure that their food security is ensured, how they can get better price, how they can put value added to fish so that they can sell in niche market or at a higher price. How can they manage their household income so that they can balance the fluctuating income from fisheries.

In order to answer these questions, it is not possible to talk to only women or to only men. We need to empower women so that they will be able to speak out alongside men to ensure active participation.

With active participation of women and men, we can ask questions such as:

- How can we better understand what women and men are doing in fisheries? Often, what women do is seen as an extension of household work (like gleaning or setting small traps to catch small aquatic animals for dinner), so we need to go out of the usual understanding of “fishing” activities to capture all the activities that women, men, children, and elderly are doing.
- What kind of support can we provide to facilitate each of these activities?
- Where are some opportunities that women and men can expand? What support is needed for that? What can be done individually and what need to be done as a group?
- What can beneficiaries of sustainable fisheries (such as government, consumer groups, tourism companies, etc.) do to support women and men’s role in fisheries?