

# Saying no to forced labour

## In communities and families, women bear the brunt of the negative impacts of men's forced labour on fishing vessels

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A recent project revealed that the exploitation of men's labour on fishing vessels is central to certain fishing practices in Asia, including forced labour and trafficking in persons. The project, Safeguarding Against and Addressing Fishers' Exploitation at Sea (SAFE Seas) was carried out by PLAN International at sites in Indonesia and the Philippines to improve understanding of what constitutes forced labour and trafficking, and how to remedy labour abuses. Women and men in fishing families were engaged in the project to help increase their ability to recognise and report labour exploitation.

Typically, work related to overcoming labour exploitation at sea does not include women but, given the serious impact of such exploitation on families and communities, this project not only recognised but also drew upon the potential of women to speak up and act against forced labour. In General Santos City and Sarangani Province (Philippines), 20 per cent of women surveyed had husbands or sons who experienced work abuse; 15 per cent revealed that they had experienced such abuse but failed to report it for fear of job loss while 5 per cent of those surveyed were not aware of what constituted abuse. The 20 per cent who had experienced labour abuse mentioned financial penalties forced on them such as the withholding of their salary, being forced to work overtime to pay off debts, and having to

personally bear the cost of medical treatment for work-related accidents and injuries.

When husbands and sons experienced labour abuse at sea, women themselves experienced a range of negative impacts, such as increased stress, having to take on extra work to make ends meet and shouldering debt burdens. Women typically manage the household finances and so they tended to take the lead in borrowing money for the family, often at exorbitant rates. Further negative impacts included children having to drop out of school and girls marrying young.

Gender norms determine the roles women perform in the family, society and industry, including unpaid or underpaid productive work. Despite these strictures, women may have considerable influence at the community and local government levels, advocating for local government to act on labour violations. When women are educated on labour rights, they are better prepared to fight for these rights. It is also often the case that men returning from sea are not interested in going to meetings to address these issues.

By examining women's roles in relation to local forced fishing labour, this study revealed that the families, through the women, also need better financial services, including affordable loans, social protection programmes and the development of livelihood opportunities and skills. **✎**

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