



GENDER MAINSTREAMING

RELEVANCE TO SECURE FISHERIES' GOALS

Gender mainstreaming is important for sustainable fisheries management; the success of which relies on understanding human interactions with the fishery and guiding human behavior.¹ Gender equality in the fisheries sector is connected to resource sustainability, economic growth, and food security. In many regions, women's wages contribute more directly to household food security than men's.² Secure Fisheries therefore strives to understand the different ways in which men and women participate in and benefit from fisheries.

Stakeholder engagement

Women constitute an important fisheries stakeholder group. They occupy positions throughout the value chain, comprising nearly half of the fisheries sector,³ and they make up over 90 percent of the post-harvest labor force.⁴ It is therefore vital to Secure Fisheries' work to assess and include their perspectives in meetings and other stakeholder engagements.

Women
comprise

47%

of the
fisheries sector

Governance and management

Women's work is often overlooked and undervalued, and their perspectives are not taken into account. This has serious ramifications for fisheries governance and management. Women are not only disregarded as a valuable stakeholder group, but the resources they target may not be enumerated in data collection and management measures.⁵ This results in incomplete data and misinformed management, and precipitates women's absence from decision-making positions.

Food and economic insecurity

Women and men often have different spending patterns. Women tend to spend more on the family, especially on satisfying nutritional needs. If development projects do not benefit women as well as men, funds may not translate to family needs, such as household food security. This has been cited as an impediment to development projects aiming to improve food security through fishing.⁶

Maritime security and conflict

Women's fishing activities play a crucial role in maritime security by promoting stability and food security for coastal communities:

“Failure to consider women's strategic role in marine artisanal fisheries and to fully allow women to be involved in the opportunities available in the sector, risk perpetuating inequalities and deepening grievances linked to marine resource rights, access and control which can be a powerful catalyst for non-traditional threats to maritime security.”⁷

EXAMPLES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

Women's activities in the fisheries sector

Women and men both occupy vital and often complementary roles in the fisheries sector. Women make up the majority of the post-harvest sector. This labor includes: factory work in processing facilities, such as shrimp processing factories in Bangladesh⁸; marketing and trading, especially in Africa (women make up 80-90% of Congolese fish traders)⁹; and cleaning, drying, and salting fish for sale, as is found around [Lake Victoria](#) and in Sierra Leone.¹⁰ Women are also involved in essential preparatory activities such as net mending and boat building. In some areas, including the Comoros Islands and Mozambique in Africa and throughout Central and South America, women are involved in [gleaning](#), or the collection of nearshore invertebrates. Women are also involved in aquaculture, especially in Asia where the sector has been rapidly expanding. In China, women comprise 33 percent of aquaculture workers.¹¹ The extent of women's involvement in aquaculture depends on a variety of factors, including the type of aquaculture (cage or pond), distance from home, and the regional or cultural context.

WOMEN'S LABOR INCLUDES:



Processing



Trading & Marketing



Cleaning, Drying & Salting



Boat Building



Net Mending



Aquaculture



A woman gleaning invertebrates on the shore of Lake Victoria. Photo: Sarah Glaser.

Challenges for women in the fisheries sector

Women face a variety of obstacles to success in the fisheries sector, many of which stem from a lack of access to resources. Women are formally or informally excluded from accessing credit, networks, and markets.^{12,13} When women are remunerated for their work, their pay is often much lower than their male counterparts.¹⁴ In shrimp processing facilities in Bangladesh, women reported incomes that were half those of their male counterparts. In another study in Bangladesh, employers preferred female employment because they were able to pay women lower wages.¹⁵

Women's work is consistently overlooked in the fisheries sector. Activities like gleaning are frequently undercounted or omitted from fisheries data collection.¹⁶ This omission results in incomplete fisheries data that undermines stock assessment and contributes to women's absence in fisheries management and decision-making.

*In fisheries sectors across the globe, women's work is **consistently overlooked**; they are **formally and informally excluded** from accessing credit, networks, and markets; and their **pay is much lower** than male counterparts.*

Gender-blind fisheries development

Overlooking gender in fisheries development can produce negative effects for women in the sector. If women's roles are not considered and understood, latent socio-economic structures—which are often dominated by men—dictate who benefits and who loses. Projects may reinforce or exacerbate existing inequalities. In southern India, for example, new pond-based fish farming took jobs from women as agricultural land was repurposed for projects dominated by male employment.¹⁷ International trade and demand for fresh fish can also exclude women's work in the processing sector by eliminating their position in the value chain.¹⁸ Commercialization and increased profits have incentivized men to outcompete women in traditionally female-dominated fisheries such as the octopus fishery in Tanzania.¹⁹ In India, women initially benefited from ocean-based fish farming that was supported by the government, specifically the agency for the Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas, which supported their inclusion. However, women were pushed out when profits increased and banks started providing loans to all-male groups.²⁰

OUR APPROACH

Secure Fisheries seeks to understand and include women's roles in fisheries in our areas of work by highlighting and promoting their unique challenges and opportunities. In Lake Victoria, Secure Fisheries is exploring the potential for fish farming to contribute to gender equality. In Somalia and Somaliland, Secure Fisheries' [Project Badweyn](#) highlights and maps development efforts targeting women in the fisheries sector. Secure Fisheries will continue to engage with our partners and networks to improve our local understanding of gender dynamics. This knowledge will inform future projects and ensures that our work does not negatively affect traditionally marginalized groups, such as women.



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