

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 fisheries 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 In turn, fisheries development also significantly impacts women. While fisheries development may increase women's employment, incomes, and self-confidence, it may also eliminate women's positions, increase work burdens, or create negative workplace conditions for women. Women and men of different socioeconomic, minority, or age groups may also be differently affected by fisheries development. Secure Fisheries, therefore, strives to understand the ways in which men and women participate in and benefit from fisheries to support women's empowerment, minimize harmful unintended consequences, and reach our programmatic goals.

Stakeholder engagement

Women constitute an important fisheries stakeholder group. They occupy positions throughout the value chain, comprising nearly half of the small-scale fisheries sector,³ including over 90 percent of the post-harvest labor force.⁴ Secure Fisheries seeks to incorporate their perspectives in project implementation and design, community trainings and events, and other stakeholder engagements.

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. Secure Fisheries commits to collecting sex-disaggregated data in our research and monitoring and evaluation efforts and works to promote women's involvement in fisheries management.

Food and economic insecurity

Women and men often have different spending patterns. Women tend to spend more on the family, especially on meeting 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



Women occupy positions throughout the fisheries value chain. Photos: Jean-Pierre Larroque, One Earth Future.



Photo: Jean-Pierre Larroque, *One Earth Future*.

projects aiming to improve food security through fishing.⁶ However, placing the burden of household food security solely in the hands of women is also problematic.⁷ The World Food Programme finds that poverty is related to higher food expenditures, with food spending among the poorest households reaching 60 to 80 percent.⁸ Around Lake Victoria, research shows that while women are more likely to spend over 75 percent of their incomes on food, the majority of both men and women spend over 50 percent of their incomes on feeding their families.⁹ Women and men provide essential support to their families, and it is important for both to be invested in development efforts.

Maritime security and conflict

Conflict uniquely impacts men and women, and the participation of women and other marginalized groups is critical to conflict resolution.¹⁰ Women's fishing activities also 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[s] 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.”¹¹

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 Bangladesh;¹² marketing and trading, especially in Africa (women make up 80–90 percent of Congolese fish traders);¹³ and cleaning, drying, and salting fish for sale, as is found around [Lake Victoria](#)¹⁴ and in Sierra Leone.¹⁵ 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](#),¹⁶ 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.¹⁷ While overall employment in aquaculture around Lake Victoria is low, the percentage of women compared to men in the sector is higher than in capture fisheries.¹⁸ 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:



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.¹⁹ In the Somali region, barriers to credit access are one of the most significant hurdles for women in the fisheries sector. When women are remunerated for their work, their pay is often much lower than that of their male counterparts. In shrimp processing facilities in Bangladesh, women reported incomes that were half those of their male counterparts.²⁰ In another study in Bangladesh, employers preferred female employment because they were able to pay women lower wages.²¹

Women’s work is consistently overlooked in the fisheries sector. Activities like gleaning are frequently undercounted or omitted from fisheries data collection.²² This omission results in incomplete fisheries data, which undermines stock assessment and contributes to women’s absence in fisheries management and decision-making.



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

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 socioeconomic 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.²³ 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.²⁴ Commercialization and increased profits have incentivized men to outcompete women in traditionally female-dominated fisheries such as the octopus fishery in Tanzania.²⁵ 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.²⁶

Increasing women’s employment does not necessarily equate to women’s empowerment. Women are often primary caretakers

for their families and households and simultaneously occupy unpaid or informal labor roles. One of the most prevalent complaints women voiced following aquaculture development projects is that they resulted in women’s being overworked.²⁷ Employment may also result in community ostracization or workplace harassment.²⁸ It is essential to assess and mitigate these contextual risks.

OUR APPROACH

Secure Fisheries seeks to understand and include women’s roles in fisheries in our areas of work by collecting sex-disaggregated data, incorporating gender perspectives into our research, and including Somali women, youth, and minority groups in engagement with fishing communities in the Somali region. In Lake Victoria, Secure Fisheries is exploring the potential for fish farming to contribute to gender equality. [Project Badweyn](#) highlights and maps development efforts targeting women in the Somali fisheries sector.²⁹ Secure Fisheries’ monitoring and evaluation includes sex-disaggregated indicators to assess how our work impacts men and women. Secure Fisheries will continue to engage with our partners and networks to improve our local understanding of gender dynamics.

ENDNOTES

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