

FISHERIES DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS AND WOMEN

HANNAH KING

In response to the United Nations Decade for Women, many have focused their attention on the role of women in fisheries and in other sectors. Activities are often geared towards policy development and gender-awareness, both necessary in defining approaches for women's participation in all levels of the development process. Many studies and workshops are carried out on, or on behalf of, women. Given a global perspective, many of these activities in developing countries focus on women whose role in food production is crucial. The idea is to translate results and recommendations into viable programs to alleviate the tremendous burden that is part of women's daily ritual.

These programs, of course, would have rebounding effects. For example, they would considerably reduce health risks by minimizing labor input, and raise living standards through income-generating activities. Alas, an added dimension that would come to bear on these processes is structural adjustment - an essential tool in seeking solutions to the economic and financial chaos that plague many economies. Its effect on the majority of voiceless women requires special attention from policymakers.

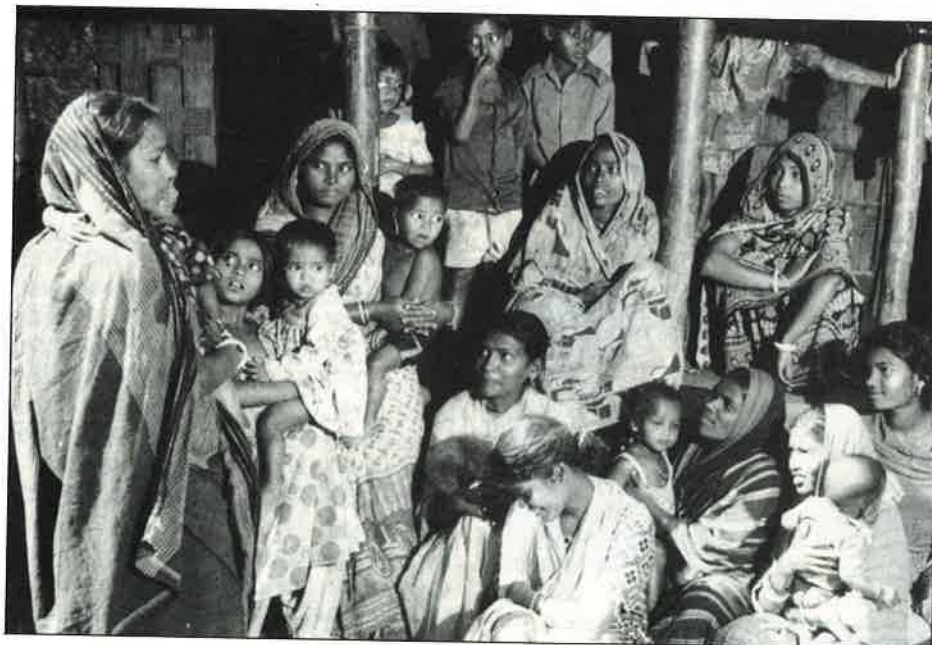
Policymakers may argue that women cannot be singled out as deserving special focus, since those women needing help are among the 'disadvantaged' sections of communities already catered for by development programs. But the point is that, although critical to the survival of many communities, the activities of these 'disadvantaged' women remain largely marginalized. In these circumstances, women must be recognized as an integral force in development. Their contributions must be fully engaged to take maximum advantage of all potentially active human resources.

In many parts of the world, fisheries development for women has taken positive strides - from production and postharvest activities to management and policy decision-making. In others, further change is needed. As recently as 15 years ago, when I first entered the field of fisheries, women were few and far between in the male-dominated world of fisheries. At my first FAO Committee on Fisheries meeting, I was horrified to find that, apart from one or two local representatives, I was the only female country delegate in attendance. This picture has not changed much over the years, although more recently a handful of delegations manage to include women and a few intergovernmental agencies have women in high profile. To alter this pic-

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ture significantly will take time, simply because policymaking fora are usually attended by senior officials who, in fisheries, are invariably male. It is still a 'closed' network.

The business about positive discrimination in favor of women does not hold water. Though not enough, there are



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Fisherwomen from Tuldia village near Chittagong, Bangladesh, listen to their coordinator. With sensitivity, women's needs can be built into viable projects wherein those affected become partners in implementation.



Anklelets jingle as two fisherwomen in Andhra Pradesh, India, carry a catch of crabs ashore from a boat through a stretch of shallow water.

many qualified women and one cannot advocate the lowering of standards. Gladly, many ministries and fisheries administrations are recruiting capable young women who, in time, and given the opportunities, will move up to decision-making positions.

Success Stories

There are many success stories of women in fisheries. In most societies, women are involved in fish handling, processing and marketing; be it on a small-scale such as in Papua New Guinea, where women of Daugo Island exclusively market fish caught by their men; or in Ghana where so-called 'fish mummies' are a force to be reckoned with - owning businesses which often involve leasing out fishing boats to men who, in turn, supply them with fish. These examples may be extremes of the norm, and similar cases may exist elsewhere. In most cases, however, fisherfolk are marginalized; sustaining growth takes sensitive planning and an appreciation of the contributions fisherfolk can make in community development.

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A good example of this is the FAO Bay of Bengal Programme (covering 7 countries in the region) which, in association with local government, has benefitted fisherfolk tremendously. The crucial factor is integrating whole communities in project development. Thus, activities have included instruction on small business management, net-making, aquaculture, fish processing and marketing. Some of these activities focus specifically on women and benefits have included the establishment of day-care centers and schools which offer equal opportunity to girls and women.

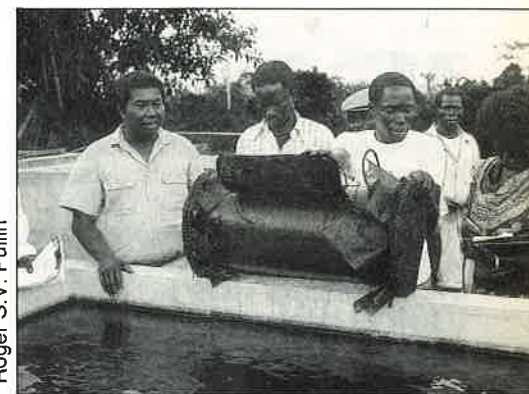
Unusual cases exist, as in The Gambia, where men process fish called *bonga* (*Ethmalosa fimbriata*) on a large scale for export, while the women transport the catch in pans loaded on their heads from canoes to smoke huts, some 50 to 60 m away. On the other hand, migrant women in the same locality and from neighboring countries, have organized themselves, with help from extension agents, to take advantage of demand for sun-dried snails and fish (mainly *Pseudolithus* sp. and *Epinephelus* sp.) traditionally used as condiments.

Partners in Development

Great potentials exist for integrating women into fisheries development programs. But these potentials remain untapped mainly because women's views are not considered in planning. Given the opportunity, women will articulate their needs and aspirations. With sensitivity, their needs can be built into viable projects wherein the women affected become partners in implementation. The spirit of partnership is vital in sustaining community interest. This is particularly true, where the object is (and should be) to phase-out project funds and personnel

and hand over operations to the community. Many a pilot project has lasted in-continuum, creating dependence on project resources, and often ending in total collapse, thousands of dollars later. Limited as resources are, no one should afford unwarranted expenditure, least of all the target communities.

Finally, a word of concern. Recent observations in artisanal fisheries reveal that women who are the object of research (mostly carried out by other women) are beginning to feel that they are being 'studied to death,' and to no avail. This is a serious accusation, meant to reflect on those development agencies



Roger S. V. Pullin

More women are needed in fisheries and aquaculture research and management.

Here a woman trains for research in catfish breeding at an experimental station in the Centre de Recherches Océanographiques, Côte d'Ivoire.

that initiate studies on women with no follow-up action. It could be that these studies are intended for in-house consumption and internal policy reviews. But the fact is lost on these women, whose primary concerns are providing for family survival. The question of sensitivity is a recurring theme and would have its function here. After all, the ultimate beneficiaries are supposed to be women.



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