
Gender in fisheries management in the Lower Songkhram River Basin, in the northeast of Thailand

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ABSTRACT

‘Women are important and without them our livelihood would be difficult as well as in the fisheries sector’. This perspective was frequently mentioned by men during the conduction of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) in the Lower Songkhram River Basin (LSRB) in the Northeast of Thailand, to investigate the basic information of communities in particular relation to the fisheries sector. However, why we debate and/or emphasize on gender in the fisheries development in the LSRB, and what women can do for fisheries management, the various reasons are documented in this report. The paper describes gender status toward fisheries management in the LSRB, including fisheries activity profile and how women can participate in fisheries management. Moreover, the situation of gender to gain access to fishery resources is assessed and suggestions are made on how to challenge gender issues in fisheries management is presented in order to ensure equal gender participation in fisheries management, which is considered to lead to more sustainable fisheries management.

Several income-generating activities, such as rice farming, cage culture, livestock etc., and responsibilities towards them have been shared between women and men. In the fisheries sector of the LSRB, women are involved particularly in fish processing and marketing practices, whilst men are involved in direct fishing activities rather than women. However, it seems that woman’s activities in the family and other aspects of fisheries are usually unpaid, often unrecognized and sometimes completely ignored. But it is obvious that women are adding value to their importance, particularly in areas such as fish processing. Moreover, women participate particularly at the fisheries management level, and in the government agencies. But the role of women in fisheries in the LSRB is not well defined at the community or local level where a fishery is still considered as a male domain. However, under the leadership of women, their socio-economic conditions have changed and the social capital has increased.

It is essential that the vital role of women in fisheries and integrated community development should be recognized and supported. Women’s participation at all levels in decision-making should be promoted in the community and other organizations. Knowledge, and the capacity of women to access information and technologies should be taken into consideration in fisheries management measures in order to encourage women’s participation in fisheries sector.

KEYWORDS: Gender, participation, Fisheries, Lower Songkhram River Basin

INTRODUCTION

Culture, social, economic and agro-ecological divisions as well as political structure affect to the allocation of labour and responsibilities between men and women in the household. In fisheries activities, women play a significant role in terms of labor, but there has been no clear about policy on the promotion of women in the fisheries. However, women have been accepted by the community that women are key persons in the development as well as fisheries sectors at the community levels. Obviously, it was frequently mentioned by men during the PRA surveys in the

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Lower Songkhram River Basin (LSRB) that ‘Women are important, without them our livelihood would be difficult as well as in the fisheries sector’. Nowadays, Thailand is the biggest exporter of seafood in the world and women play a huge role in the Thai fisheries sector, including holding 33 per cent of professional positions in the central Directorate of Fisheries. According to the Director-General of Fisheries, fishing has long been considered a male occupation, and women were thought to be only involved in post-harvest activities. In recent years, there is a growing recognition of women’s contribution in capture fisheries in all activity spheres. In China, rural labour force statistics for 1991 showed that women accounted for 26.3 per cent of rural labour force in fisheries (UNDP/FAO,n.d.quoted in FAO/website 1).

Therefore, the success behind the fisheries and aquaculture development in Asia is a partly due to the direct and indirect contributions of women to fisheries and fisheries-related areas. In many fishing communities, women make and repair nets, and have the primary responsibility for fish marketing. The fisheries sector, women have a high potential in fish processing and in the marketing of fish products. It can be expected that hundreds of thousands of women work in these enterprises. Moreover, at a professional level, women show their talents as fishery researchers, fishery lecturers, and fishery extension officials.

However, woman’s activities in the family and in the industry support many aspects of fisheries, and are usually unpaid and often unrecognized. These activities become especially crucial in times of crisis when women are the key people to keeping communities and families together. This is why we must take into account the role of women in studies and management decisions concerning the fishing industry.

This paper describes an overview of current gender status toward fisheries management in the LSRB, including fishery activities, and also shows that women are highly productive and can actively participate in fisheries management. Moreover, the situation of gender to access fisheries resource is assessed and suggestions are made on how to challenge gender issues in fisheries management is presented in order to ensure equal gender participation in fisheries management, which is believed that it could lead to more sustainable fisheries management.

OBJECTIVES

This study describes how women’s participation in the fisheries sector, including the division of labor and decision making, can influence gender relation in households and in the fisheries sector in the Lower Songklram River Basin. The specific objectives of this study are:

1. To describe the gender role in the overall functioning of fisheries
2. To describe the gender role in fisheries sector
3. To identify problems or constraints facing and related to gender in fisheries development

4. To provide recommendations and outline the formulation strategies to encourage gender perspectives in fisheries development

METHODOLOGY

All data were obtained mainly from PRA, which was conducted in 14 villages of two provinces; Sakhon Nakorn and Nakorn Phanom in the Lower Songkhram River Basin. Focus group discussions were carried out with men and women. All groups were asked what are their perception, roles and responsibility about the fisheries activities and constraints for women's participation in the fisheries sector. The information of women's participation in the fisheries sector at the management level was obtained during a fisheries management stakeholder workshop held in Lower Songkhram River Basin held in Sakhon Nakorn Province. Moreover, women activities in the fisheries sector and their participation in fish processing, aquaculture activities, and in social and culture activities of women's income generation group were discussed. The role of women in the training program was also observed and analysed.

GENDER INVOLVEMENT STATUS IN FISHERIES IN THE LSRB

The productive role involved both men and women for payment in cash. It includes not only market production with a monetary value, but also subsistence or home production with an actual use value, but also covers those with a potential to earn income (Moser, 1993). In the case of the fisheries sector in the LSRB, women play an important role in generating income in the same capacity of males. The average percentages of participation of men and women in fisheries activities are shown in Figure 1.

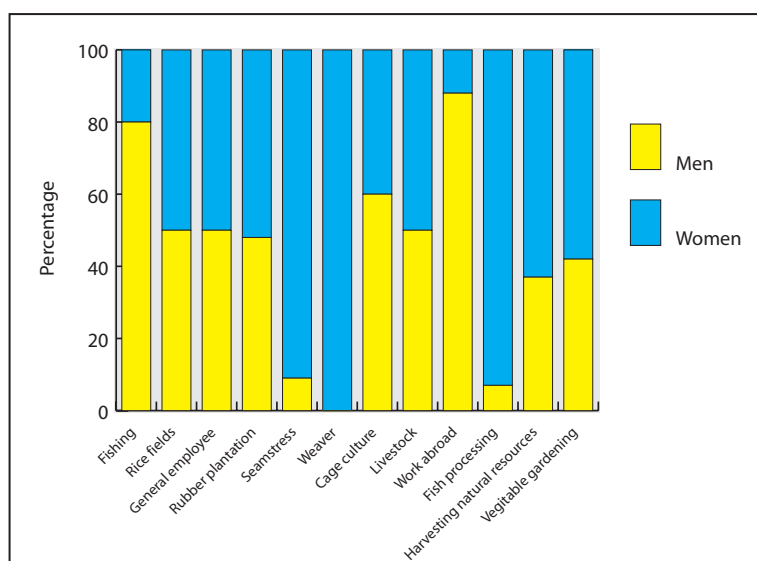


Figure 1. Gender involvement in the income generating activities in the LSRB

The figure shows that women engage more than men in such activities as weaving, food processing and garment production due to the fact that it involves elaborate work, and does not required heavy labor. It also shows that men are involved mainly in fishing activities and work abroad. However, both men and women share responsibly for some other important activities such as rice field farming, rubber crop, livestock and horticulture. Family members share responsibility for this type of work. Labour and security for these activities are important for the whole family. For example, in rice farming, plowing and land preparation require heavy labor usually done by men. However, the whole rice-growing cycle and eventual harvest requires both women and men for a successful outcome.

GENDER ROLES IN THE FISHERIES SECTOR OF THE LSRB

Gender division of labor in fisheries activity in LSRB

There are different levels of involvement in inland fisheries, especially around large lakes and reservoirs involving capture fisheries as a primary source of income. In many areas, inland capture fisheries are a secondary income or supplementary sources of protein for food consumption as in the case of the Lower Songhram River Basin. The gender division of labor also has important implications for fisheries development, division of labor applies to who does what activity in the fisheries activity. In the LSRB women and men are engaged in complementary activities in fisheries.

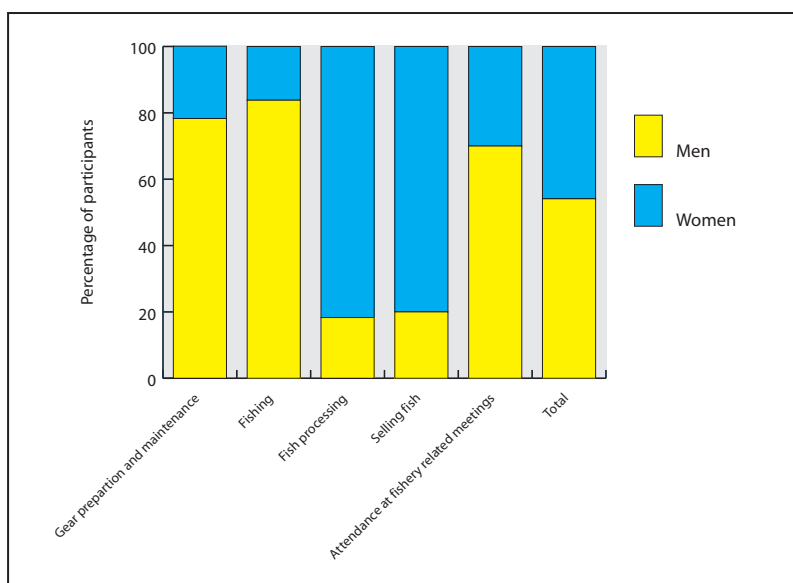


Figure 2. Gender division of labour in fisheries activity in LSRB

Figure 2 shows the gender division of labour in fisheries activity, the fishermen being preparing and maintenance the fishing gears by mainly men (78.3 per cent) while 21.8 per cent of women also involved. Fishing practices is a relatively more risky activity and required physical labor engaged mainly by men (83.8 per cent). However, there are some women that can fish if they have no men

in the family but although there is a strong perception that women are not suited for fishing and cannot go far and fish on their own. Importantly, women are actively involved in the processing of fish catch (81.7 per cent). This involves sun drying, salting, smoking and Pha la production. Women are also normally the ones who subsequently sell the fish products (80 per cent). Concerning the ratio of access to the meeting relating to fisheries between men and women, it seems that men more attended than women. However, an overview of the gender division of labor in fisheries shows that responsibilities of fishery activities between men and women is 54.1 per cent and 45.9 per cent respectively.

In many countries of the world, many women are engaged in inland fishing. In Africa, they fish from the rivers and ponds. In Asia, where fish is an integral part of the diet of many cultures, women are active in both artisanal and commercial fisheries. In parts of India, women net prawns from backwaters. In Laos, they fish in canals. In the Philippines, they fish by using canoes in coastal lagoons. In artisanal fishing communities, in addition, women are mainly responsible for performing the skilled and time-consuming jobs that take place on-shore, such as net making and mending, processing the catch and marketing it. Moreover, in some developing regions women have become important fish entrepreneurs. Women earn, administer and control significant sums of money, financing a variety of fish-based enterprises and generating substantial returns for their household as well as the community.

Gender division of labour in cage culture in the LSRB

Cage culture in Thailand was promoted 10 years ago in central part of Thailand. In the Lower Songkkram River, cage culture is one alternative activity that provides income for many families. There are two types of cage culture in the LSRB; cage culture of Tilapia and cage culture and collection of ornamental fish (mostly indigenous fish species) from the river. Women sell fish to the middlemen. Concerning gender division of labor in cage culture, women have assumed a leading role in the cage culture as well as men. They often perform work of feeding and rearing fish that can be carried out by both men and women (50 per cent and 50 per cent). Men are more engaged in the cage preparation (72 per cent) while women participate in selling fish more than men (75 per cent). However, both men and women (49 per cent and 51 per cent) share responsibilities and decision making on cage culture activity (Figure. 3)

In term of the gender division of labor in collection of ornamental fish, women are more involved in selling fish, while men are engaged mainly in cage preparation and fish collection (Figure 4).

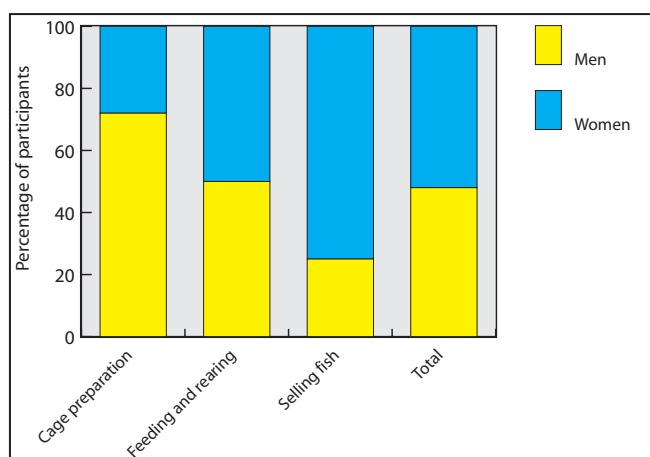


Figure 3. Gender division of labour in cage culture in LSRB

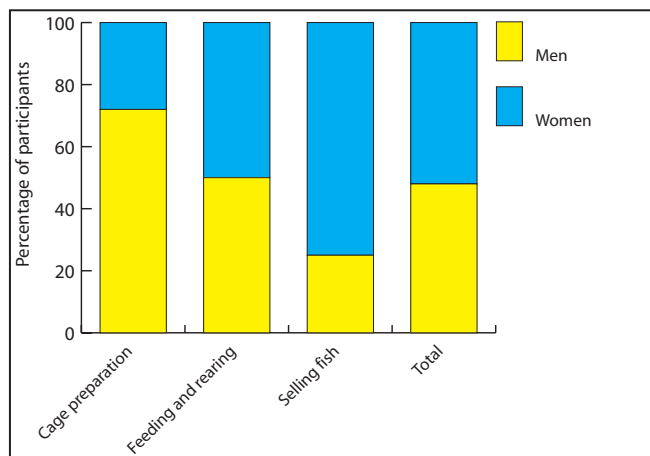


Figure 4. Gender division of labour in collection of aquarium fish

Women normally have to integrate their aquaculture activity with household chores. Thus, they will attend to fish raising later than their husbands. Even though the intensity of their input is the same, women and men might consider women as secondary workers because men do more physically demanding jobs. Men might be seen as the main workers (Kusakabe, 2003). However, the technologies in agriculture, including aquaculture, are commonly transferred directly to men who are supposed to relay the knowledge to their women, specially in the case if the technologies are considered to be difficult to understand (Korsieporn, 2003). This may be a major point to be overcome in gender issues in aquaculture as well as cage culture.

Gender's participation in fisheries management

According to the number of the participants attending the PRA in LSRB, women are the important people providing the information. Figure 5 shows the women's participation in PRA in LSRB that have participated in the group discussion. Men participated more than women (69.1 per cent), while 30 per cent of the participants were women. Most of women who participated provided information

about the activities of women groups in the communities. Women participated in the fisheries management level, as indicated by the number of women attending the stakeholder workshop in LSRB. There were no women in the local community leader and Tambon Administrative Organisation officers group. While women were participating in the group of facilitators, fishers and government and NGOs the numbers of women were less than men. This indicates that women's involvement in fisheries is mainly towards the contribution of labour, but not at the management level, as well as for decision making at both community and higher levels (Figure 6).

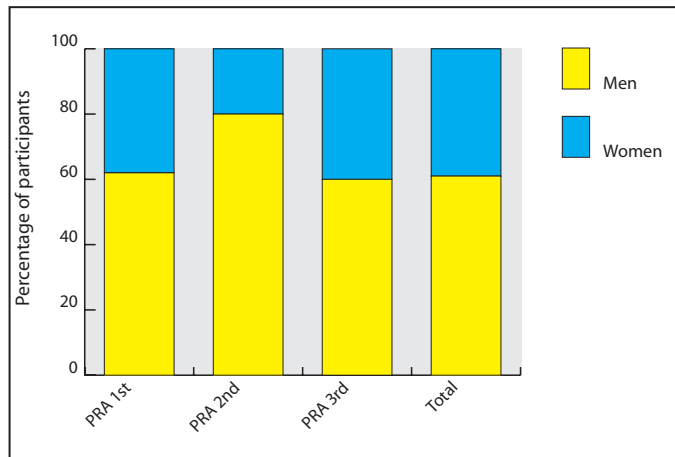


Figure 5. Women's participation in the PRA in LSRB

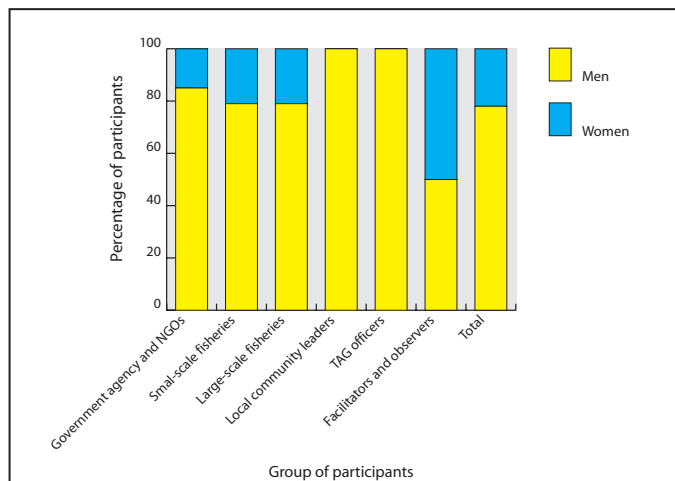


Figure 6. Women's participation in fisheries stakeholder workshop in LSRB

ACCESS STATUS TO TECHNOLOGY AND CONTROL RESOURCES

Due to women have less time available to adjust to take advantage of the growing opportunities, women's time is less flexible because of their reproductive responsibilities (Elson, 1992). This means that most women involved in fishing lack access to tools and credit, a voice in decision making, and opportunities to receive training. Compared to the case of the Lower Songkhram River

Basin women's access to resources and decision making is less. It is a well established fact that women are not represented in community fishing management committees as well as other issues within the community.

Women's time constraints and their decision making power in the household indicates that a household decision-making is not equally shared. For example, improved technology can increase the catch and benefit the household income. However, it is not clear whether the increased catch would result only in increasing the workloads of women, or would increase women's independent income (Kusakae, 2003).

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The role of women in fisheries today, there is little knowledge of women's role in fisheries and of the ways it could be enhanced. In Lower Songkhram River Basin, women are involved in fisheries not only in fish processing and marketing but also they can also catch fish as well as men, when no men in the family or men needs them for assistant. Consistently, in the Nam Ngum Reservoir in Lao PDR both women and men go fishing by motorized boats and use gill nets. Women control the boats, pull nets and get fish from the nets while the men dive. If there is no women control the boats and pull nets, men will hire someone to do the job (Viravongsa, 2000).

Gender may also affect the roles that men and women play in the community. For example, men and women may not have the same participation in patrolling, fishing, or marketing activities, access to decision making as they are differently represented in management organization. It is a fact that there are no women in the group of local community leader and Tambon Administrative Organization officers, which considers the decision making at management level. Consequently, the benefits from different gender roles may differ between men and women.

However, over the years, women involved in fisheries are becoming more visible to policy-makers and the general public alike. In the past most people tended to overlook the fact that women are fully involved in fish processing, marketing and selling aquatic products. Only recently have decision-makers become aware that women actually play a crucial role in the nutrition, health and well being of rural families in the Mekong Basin. Greater recognition by the general public is also emerging. Moreover, women continue to improve the quality of life in rural communities and they want to participate fully in the planning of future development initiatives that will affect them and their families. They especially want to contribute in tandem with men to develop the fisheries of the region. By realizing their potential, society as a whole will benefit

Therefore, in order to increase women's participation in decision making in the community and other organizations should promote the gender mainstreaming in fisheries (Figure 6). For example MRC can provide the opportunity for conducting research activities and exchanging information on women in fisheries among riparian countries by drawing up policies which increase awareness

on women in fisheries and exchange information among relevant agencies within and outside the region. With this wider perception and information, the fisheries line agencies can help each respective government to introduce policies for women in fisheries.

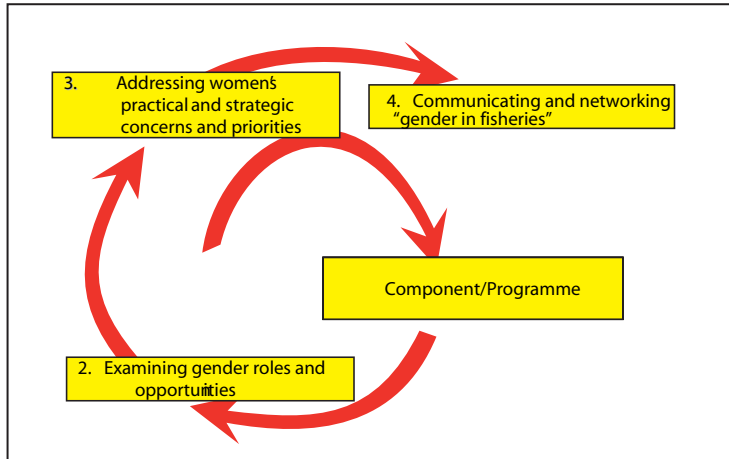


Figure 7. Entry point for gender mainstreaming

These policies can be actualized in programs that meet the needs of women in the fisheries sector, be they in remote rural areas or large-scale commercial enterprises. We need better recognition and enhancement of women's role in the fisheries sector. The examine gender roles and opportunities needs to be analyzed- the recognition of women's labour and knowledge should be monitored. How much of women's work is reported by men? Are women's contribution to fisheries seen as important by other member of the family? How much do men think women know about fisheries and identify the strategic concerns and priorities through the communication and networking gender and women in fisheries?

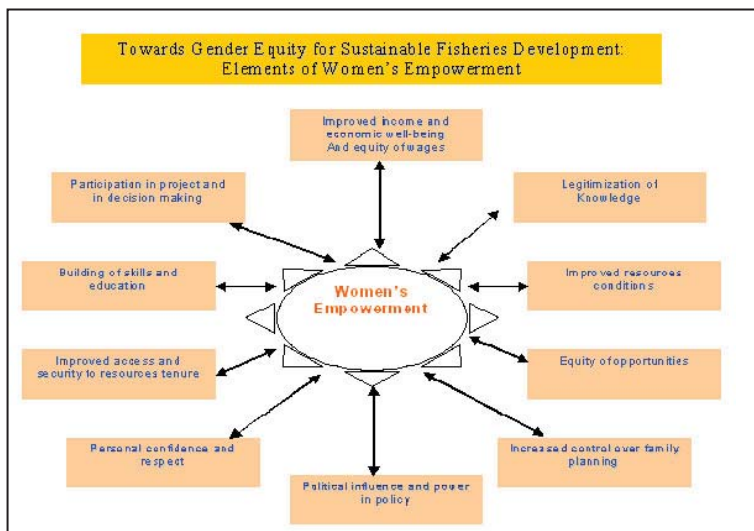


Figure 8. Towards Gender Equity for Sustainable Fisheries Development Elements of Women's Empowerment

However, we must particularly emphasize professional training for women who want to become involved in accounting or management activities. Support should also be directed to women wishing to bring greater added value to fish production and to those wishing to become involved in alternative economic activities whether inside or outside the fisheries sector.

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