



# THE TECHNICAL ADVISORY BODY FOR FISHERIES MANAGEMENT (TAB)

## Gender and fisheries in the Lower Mekong Basin

Mekong Fisheries Management Recommendation N° 4

June 2006



Working towards Effective, Sustainable and Regional Fisheries Management in the Lower Mekong Basin

## BACKGROUND

Balanced, equitable and sustainable development of the fisheries sector must take all social groups into account. However, the role of women in the sector has, for a long time, gone unrecognised and their voice is heard rarely among managers, policy makers and legislators.<sup>1</sup> The lack of recognition and representation is not only unfair, but it also leads to an incomplete understanding of how the sector as a whole operates and functions. Recent studies show that women are an integral and important part of the fisheries' workforce, and the contribution they make is significant — indeed their involvement in some activities is greater than that of men.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, plans to develop fisheries in the Lower Mekong Basin must take the role of women into account fully and should not undervalue the parts of the sector in which their work predominates.

Formulating the measures necessary to redress this imbalance requires knowledge about why issues relating to gender are neglected, why gender issues are important and the role and position of women not only in local fishing communities, but also in fisheries management and in national fisheries line agencies.

In 2005, the Technical Advisory Body for Fisheries Management (TAB), recognising the need for this type of information, commissioned a study of gender and fisheries in the Lower Mekong Basin. Representatives from the Network for the Promotion of Gender in Fisheries Development in the Lower Mekong Basin (NGF)<sup>3</sup> undertook the study. It involved a review of literature, collection of field data and workshops and meetings. This TAB Management Recommendation is a précis of their findings.<sup>4</sup>

### WHY HAVE GENDER ISSUES BEEN NEGLECTED IN THE PAST?

There are many reasons why gender issues have been neglected; some are because the concept of fisheries was limited to direct fishing activity, some concern gender stereotypes and others the disproportionately few numbers of women in academia and in government.

1. In the past, much of the research activity in the fisheries sector focused on developing technologies for enhancing the productivity of capture fisheries and aquaculture — rural livelihoods and social structure, received little attention from researchers.
2. The few social scientists working in the field regarded the household as a single unit, and their research centred around fishing households rather than on the role of individuals within these families.
3. There is a stereotype perception that women are physically weak and therefore unsuited to the physical demands of fishing.
4. Another stereotype perception is that women are not technically minded and therefore incapable of grasping new technologies. (This perception flies in the face of facts, which show increasing numbers of women students in fishery related university faculties — in the Faculty of Fisheries, Kasertart University, Thailand, women form the majority of students majoring in Fish Biology and Fish Technology.)<sup>5</sup>
5. The low proportion of women in Departments of Fisheries at all levels, including decision-making levels.<sup>6</sup>

## WHY ARE GENDER ISSUES IN FISHERIES IMPORTANT?

In addition to the obvious concerns about fairness, equal opportunity and discrimination, there are good reasons why effective and efficient development of the Mekong's fisheries must take the role of women in the sector into account.

1. Women make significant contributions to fishery-related activities other than fishing. They play the major role in processing fish and fishery products, as well as in marketing. Although these roles are often very different to those of men, they are integral parts of the industry and ignoring these activities means ignoring a large portion of the sector.
2. The different work done by women generates different kinds of knowledge. So, for example, while men may know which stretches of river have the best fishing, women know the price these fish will fetch in the market. These kinds of knowledge are often complementary — in this example knowing where to catch the highest value fish. Only with knowledge of both women's and men's opinions and expertise can we understand the fishery sector in its entirety, and manage its development appropriately.
3. The under-representation of women in decision making takes away a large portion of the available pool of expertise — from both the government<sup>6</sup> and the community.<sup>7</sup>
4. The increasing trend of men migrating from fisheries to other work means that women will have to fill their roles.

## RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

Recognising and valuing the role women play in the fisheries sector and empowering them at all decision-making levels — from the household to government — will require both dedicated training and the implementation of explicit gender-related policies.

### *At Ministry/Department level*

1. National policies on fisheries development should take the role of women in the Mekong's fisheries into account. These policies will require considerable discussion before they can be put into operation.
2. Senior fishery legislators and policy makers need training on gender issues. This training will raise their awareness about gender issues and help them formulate guidelines for their departments and ministries to follow.
3. Senior officials should initiate open and regular dialogue with outside agencies working on women's rights.
4. These activities will require specific budget allocation.
5. Give middle- and junior-level officers training to raise their awareness of gender issues and to improve their skills in gender analysis and at developing gender-sensitive projects.
6. The criteria for promotion should include officers' contributions to improving gender equality.
7. Increase the number of women officers in ministries and departments, especially those in decision-making posts.



*At the community level*

1. Encourage the participation of women and women's groups in decision-making processes.
2. Improve women's access to information on the fisheries sector so that they can participate from a position of knowledge.

*Research*

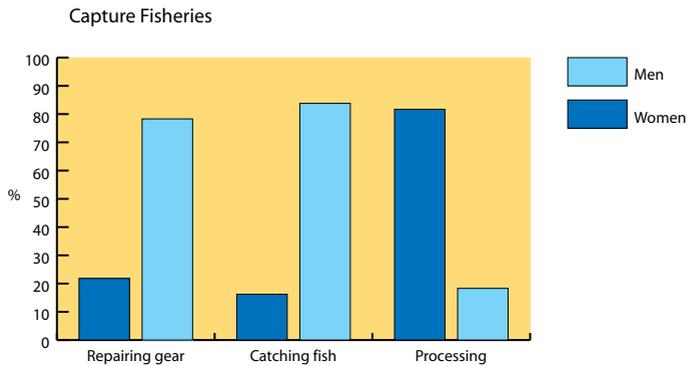
1. Put in place systems to monitor gender-related fishery issues. These will require developing appropriate indicators, a reporting system, and clearly defined roles and responsibilities for those involved.
2. Promote research that focuses on women's role in fisheries.
3. Develop indicators that are specific to women's role in fisheries and include these as a matter of course in regular and routine data collection exercises.

*Strengthen network*

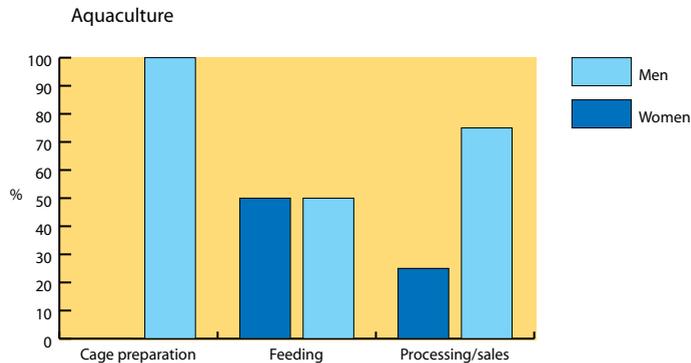
1. The NGF needs to be expanded and strengthened so that it can work more effectively on gender main-streaming in the fisheries sector, by organising training and other activities.

## END NOTES

1. Siason, I.M., Tech, E., Matics, K.I., and P.S. Choo (2002) Women in fisheries in Asia. In: Chiao-Liao, N.H., Matics, K.I. and N.C. Nandeesh, N.C. (2002) *Global Symposium on Women in Fisheries, proceeding of the symposium "Women in fisheries: Towards a global overview"* 6th Asian Fisheries Forum, 29 November 2001, Kalhsung, Taiwan.
2. Examples of the gender roles and division of labour in selected LMB fisheries.
  - (i) Gender division in capture and aquaculture fisheries, Lower Songkhram River Basin, Thailand

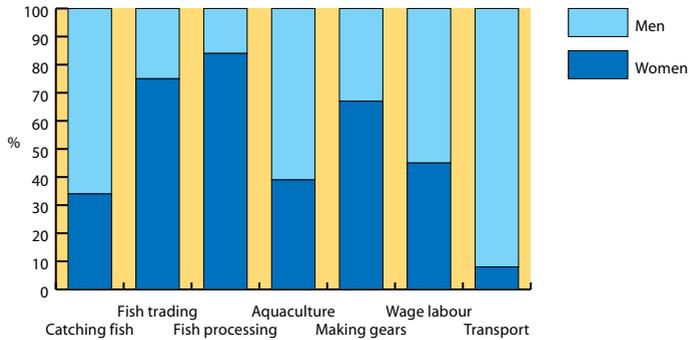


Source: Kusakabe (in press) see end note 4



Source: Kusakabe (in press) see end note 4

(ii) Involvement in land fisheries by gender in Tra Vinh province, Viet Nam



Source: Kusakabe (in press) see end note 4

- The Network for the Promotion of Gender in Fisheries Development in the Mekong Basin (NGF) was established in 1999. The NGF has representatives in each of the four riparian countries. The network aims to raise and promote women's issues in fisheries through training, capacity development and dissemination of information.
- Kusakabe, K. (in press) Gender and Fisheries in the Lower Mekong Basin. MRC will publish this report as part of the Mekong Development Series.
- Number of students in the Faculty of Fisheries, Kasetsart University, Thailand

Major	Total	Male	Female	% Female
Fishery Management	157	91	66	42.0
Fish Biology	140	45	95	67.9
Aquaculture	274	168	106	38.7
Fish Technology	143	70	73	51.0
Marine Sciences	174	119	55	31.6
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>888</b>	<b>493</b>	<b>395</b>	<b>44.5</b>

Source: Suwanrangsri, (undated) Technological changes and their implications to women's fisheries

- Female to male ratio in Ministry/Department of Fisheries in the riparian countries

	Cambodia	Lao PDR	Thailand	Viet Nam	Region
Total staff	1214	889	2725	161	4380
Female	171	225	998	41	1380
% Female	14.1	25	37	28	32

Source: Presentation of riparian countries NGF in 5th Annual Meeting of Regional NGF

Note: Information on Cambodia, Lao PDR and Thailand includes all staff from central to local levels, but data on Viet Nam includes staff only at the central level.

## Female to male ratio in Ministry/Department of Fisheries at policy making levels

Country	Total number of officers	Total number of women	% Female
Cambodia	134	8	6.0 (i)
Lao PDR	72	7	9.7 (ii)
Thailand	257	75	29.2 (iii)
Viet Nam	144	12	8.0 (iv)

Note: Definition of decision-making position differs from country to country. In Thailand, these were officials Rank 8-11. In Viet Nam, they were leaders of the MoFi and of its departments and 26 Provincial Fisheries Departments. In Lao PDR they were the deputy chief of section and above in the DoLF. In Cambodia, they are Chief and Vice-chief of the section and above in the DoF and in the Provincial Fisheries Offices.

(i) Three of the eight, are chiefs of sections. (ii) There is only one woman among the eight leaders (deputy director and upwards) (iii) Only 7.5% of women officers in DoF were at the decision making level, for men, it was 10.5%. (iv) If only MoFi officers are concerned, the ratio is 12% (total 66, female 8).

## 7. Women in management decision making co-management of aquatic resources

	Cambodia	Lao PDR	Viet Nam
Reservoir planning	40%	20%	50%
Leadership	30%	20%	20%

Source: Sriputinibondh *et al.* (2004) Gender-mainstreaming in the MRC Fisheries Programme, presented at the 7th Asian Fisheries Forum, 30th November – 3rd December 2004, Penang, Malaysia.



*Printed by the MRC Secretariat to promote and support the TAB – March 2005*

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