

The way ahead

The exclusion of women from organizing bodies is a key challenge facing women in Japan's coastal fisheries

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In Japan, the Fishery Cooperative Associations (FCAs) are key entities in the effort to protect the environment in coastal fisheries. They manage traditional fishing rights with legal support from the government, and are embedded into a multi-layer management system – including Total Allowable Catch controls for some species, effort control by Total Allowable Effort, prefectural government licensing systems, and traditional rights based management.

Women in Japanese coastal communities have been organized and connected to FCAs for many years. However, they have not had full-membership rights because of the Japanese law and the practice of 'one member per household', with membership traditionally reserved for men. The consequence of this practice is that FCAs have few women members, and few young members, since newcomers are seldom recruited.

This membership pattern also restricts renewal of fishing communities' approaches to the management of fisheries, which tend to focus on the harvesting stage and the interests of men, while neglecting post-harvest and community well being.

Therefore, the situation is that people who are key to the survival of a thriving and sustainable fisheries, especially young men and women, are excluded from decision making processes. Instead, elderly men and former fishers who are unable to fish are the regular members managing the resources and maintaining their influence and power within the FCAs.

Women are involved in voluntary activities as members of FCA women's groups which play a prominent role in the economy of many fishing communities by connecting local fishing,

local processing and local distribution. Such examples of women's entrepreneurship offer hope for the renewal and revitalisation of fishing communities.

To enable this vital renewal to occur, the national fishery plans and laws should aim at revitalising communities as well as the entrepreneurship capacities of women and men. The government should encourage or require that local fisheries governance mechanisms, such as the FCAs, have broader and much more representative memberships, including, in particular, membership from women and youth. ■

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