

Illuminating hidden harvests

The conversation around a global and collaborative small-scale fisheries study highlights the under-recognition and under-reporting of women's work

By **Kate Bevitt** (k.bevitt@worldfishcenter.org), WorldFish, spoke with the IHH gender co-lead, **Danika Kleiber** (danika.kleiber@gmail.com), social scientist, NOAA Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center, and IHH advisor **Meryl Williams** (meryljwilliams@gmail.com), Chair, GAF.

Illuminating Hidden Harvests: The contribution of small-scale fisheries to sustainable development' (IHH) is a collaborative study led by FAO, Duke University and WorldFish. The study, due out in 2021, consists of 58 country case studies drawing on existing secondary data, a survey of national fisheries administrations, thematic studies and global extrapolations. Gender is a cross-cutting theme in the study, which will provide one of the most comprehensive understandings of small-scale fisheries globally.

Kate Bevitt (KB), WorldFish, spoke with the IHH gender co-lead **Danika Kleiber** (DK), formerly a research fellow with WorldFish and ARC Centre of Excellence for Coral Reef Studies, and now a social scientist with the NOAA Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center, and IHH advisor **Meryl Williams** (MW), chair of the Gender in Aquaculture and Fisheries Section of the Asian Fisheries Society, to learn more about the IHH gender work.

KB: Danika, given the lack of sex-disaggregated data in small-scale fisheries, what issues did you anticipate this would create for the IHH data collection?

DK: For the 58 country case studies, the research leads were tasked with gathering and synthesizing secondary fisheries data. But we (the IHH gender team leads—me and Sarah Harper) were concerned that if the country case study teams hadn't been exposed to gender and fisheries, they wouldn't know where to look for gender data or even realize they were missing data. For instance, teams may not have known to look for gleaning or other women-lead fishing activities.

Another concern was ensuring the country case study teams were asking big questions—for instance, how do you capture the unpaid and mostly uncounted labour that women often do? This type of labour is all essential for small-scale fishing, so what does it mean if we leave it out?

KB: A group of 28 gender experts were engaged to support the IHH country case study teams. Can you tell us more about this?

DK: This was the best part of the whole project. Sarah and I both did our PhDs on different aspects of gender and fisheries, and if you are doing a PhD correctly, you learn how much you don't know! Because IHH is about

gaining detailed information from specific countries, we decided it would be best to invite gender and fisheries advisors with expertise in as many IHH countries as we could find.

These experts we called them gender advisors had on-the-ground knowledge and might even have known where to find sex-disaggregated data mostly because they had collected it themselves. We connected the gender advisors with the IHH country case study leads to try and make sure the data coming in that would be analyzed by the IHH core team would, as much as possible, include gender from the get-go.

KB: How else did you engage with the gender advisors' expertise?

DK: We knew that a lack of sex-disaggregated data was always going to be a limiting factor for the quantification of women's contributions to small-scale fisheries. But we didn't want that to limit our ability to say something meaningful about gender in fisheries. Sarah and I got together and came up with a list of questions for the gender advisors and asked them to fill in as many answers as possible. And we didn't just want quantitative data. We asked for any information they had, including their own observations—this way we would be able to contextualize the IHH data.

KB: What impact did the involvement of yourself and the other gender experts have on the IHH data analysis?

DK: Sarah and I have been making the case, from the very beginning, that some form of gender analysis is key to each of the four main IHH themes. For example, in the environmental theme this has meant a focus on foot fisheries, and in the economics theme, this has focused on finding data that can adequately capture women's participation. Sarah and I have been excited to work with the other IHH theme leaders, and they've been receptive when we've suggested that they report gender analysis relevant to their own theme, rather than just having it all reported in the gender chapter. We don't want to hoard the gender results! We really want them to be woven throughout the whole report.

KB: Finally, what do you believe are some of the most exciting aspects of the IHH gender research?

DK: It's super-exciting that the IHH study is focusing on fisheries that have been ignored

before. For instance, some of the IHH research disaggregates between fishers in boats versus on foot. Foot fishing is a gender issue—that's where women are doing most of their fishing. It's great that the IHH team has been able to incorporate that.

When I've spoken with some of the leaders in the field of gender and fisheries (like Meryl Williams!), they notice how gender work (or more specifically, funding for gender work) tends to go in cycles. It builds momentum, people start to pay attention, a few things get done, then there's a general feeling of 'we fixed the gender problem, no need to worry about that any more. Gender in fisheries is absolutely building momentum again, so the question is, how do we institutionalize change so that we can keep moving forward?

DK: Thanks, Danika... Meryl, why was it important for the IHH study to put a strong focus on collecting data on women in small-scale fisheries?

MW: Much fisheries data are markedly sexist, due to the conceptualisation of fisheries as a male domain. As Nalini Nayak and Cornelia Quist of ICSF reminded us recently, feminists see a "struggle within a struggle" in which poor marginalized women need to mobilize within the larger struggle of the marginalized fishing communities, led by men.

In many countries, women working in harvesting cannot even be registered as fishers; the areas of the fish value chain in which women dominate, such as processing and marketing, are not covered well by the fisheries agencies; and most fisheries policies ignore women. No wonder, therefore, that data on women are sadly lacking and a major effort is now needed to redress this data sexism. IHH is an ideal opportunity to do so, and activism and expert knowledge such as resides in the IHH gender network members is needed to do so.

DK: What is significant about the IHH gender research?

MW: Women and gender studies, and also action, has been going on for some decades in fisheries, but it has not gained much traction in the rapid development of fisheries (and aquaculture) research. Indeed, in some countries and fisheries, such as the Canadian Atlantic fisheries that experienced the collapse of the cod stocks in the early 1990s, strong research on women's roles and contributions was sidelined in the policy and management decisions and key researchers turned their efforts to other fields of gender research. This shows the difficulty of making a difference with the knowledge gained and in maintaining continuity in efforts.

The IHH study is key because it is being implemented in the era post the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-

scale Fisheries Guidelines in the context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines) and this is the first global fisheries agreement that has gender equality provisions. Thus, IHH has a wonderful opportunity to show the importance of women in small-scale fisheries by fully counting and recognizing them.

KB: How does the IHH gender work support progress on greater inclusion of gender within fisheries research?

MW: In the fisheries sector, small-scale fisheries are one of the two major areas where women make huge but unrecognized contributions and can suffer if their roles and opportunities are not counted and valued. The other major area is post-harvest in industrial fisheries. If IHH does not do justice to the gender dimension, then this will be a huge lost opportunity for those of us promoting gender equality in fisheries.

If they are to succeed, major data discovery exercises such as IHH need to bring in strong contextual knowledge. By including gender experts from many of the case study countries into the project, a huge amount of knowledge from actual localities is being brought into the case studies and therefore the IHH project. The whole of the IHH project, and its predecessor 'Hidden Harvests', is predicated on making the data on small-scale fisheries more complete and therefore accurate. These data are not readily available in mainstream fisheries data systems, otherwise the project would not be needed. But we know from the evidence of a myriad of small projects on women and gender in small-scale fisheries that women are major but often invisible participants. It needs gender experts to bring this information out in an ethical way.

KB: Why is the involvement of gender advisors in the IHH study so significant? How can and should this work be continued and supported in the future?

MW: Their involvement is significant because the small-scale fisheries data system being constructed by IHH has an ethical imperative to be gender equal, and yet this will not happen without inclusion of gender experts. Its predecessor, the 'Hidden Harvests' study, did make a first rough global estimate of the number of women workers in world fisheries but it was not transparent about how the estimate was derived. IHH is moving beyond this to a more transparent approach and is making more effort with collecting sex-disaggregated data. To be realistic, however, even this project will not be able to do a complete job. If the IHH gender network is continued, then in subsequent IHH projects, I am confident that really exciting data discovery work will be done.

KB: Thanks, Meryl.

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