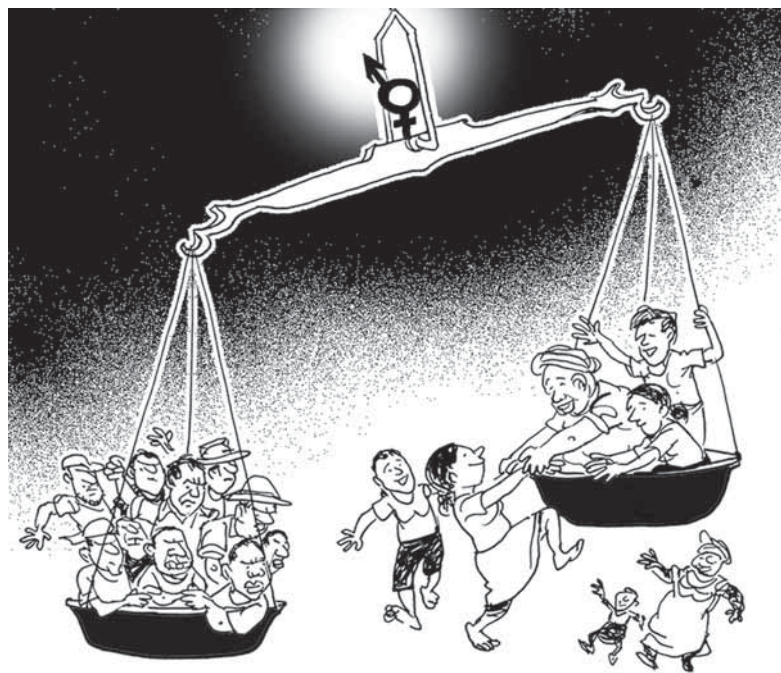


What women want: Community Fisheries in Cambodia

A new study on Community Fisheries across six provinces in Cambodia finds a great deal of consistency on women's roles, needs and aspirations in the sector

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At the Fisheries Administration in Phnom Penh, the 6th of November 2008 saw the official launch of a study report titled "Women's Roles, Needs, and Aspirations in Community Fisheries Management in Cambodia". The event was organised under the presidency of H.E Nao Thuok, Delegate of the Royal Government of Cambodia, and Director General of Fisheries Administration. Other dignitaries included Srey Marona, Executive Director of the CBNRM Learning Institute, and Oung Heng, Vice Chairman of the Gender Unit of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries.



The study describes the roles of women and men in fisheries and Community Fisheries (CF) at the household and community levels as well as the needs and aspirations of women associated with CF. It also recommends practical strategies for increasing women's participation in CF planning and implementation. The research was conducted in six provinces including Kampong Chhnang, Battambang, Kampot, Kep, Stung Treng and Takeo.

The study found that women are engaged in a variety of fisheries-related livelihood activities—small-scale capture fisheries, gathering of aquatic plants and animals, aquaculture—and they also play a supportive role in the fishing activities of men. But the main responsibility of women in fisheries-related livelihood is in the post-harvest sector, including processing and trading fish. Women are viewed as more competent than men in marketing fish and take greater responsibility in the post-harvest stage.

Women run the savings groups because of the traditional norm of household financial management being their responsibility. There is also a general acknowledgment that women are more competent than men at managing financial matters.

In information dissemination, women support the CF in a variety of ways: through formal meetings supported by NGOs, but more commonly through informal conversations at community events or while working in the rice fields. Women participate only rarely in patrolling illegal fishing. A typical role for women is that of an accountant or a disseminator of CF information. However, women leaders feel that they are only token members and do not have a significant role in the CF committee. Some do not stay on for meetings because of the demands of household work.

The study found that the needs expressed by women were consistent across all the case studies. Typically, they expressed the need for capacity-building on existing CF activities, for example, to understand the Fisheries Law, agricultural production techniques and gender concepts. Women also said they needed better understanding, and respect for their opinions, from their husbands. Women wanted better livelihoods through the CF as well as external assistance for capacity building and alternative jobs. Better education, both literacy and knowledge, was another felt need in all regions. Furthermore, women advocated gender balance. Many said they needed encouragement to be leaders like men.

The case studies indicate that there are three main reasons why, despite many constraints, women participate in CF activities. One, these activities bring economic and social benefits through providing support for livelihoods improvement, capacity building, access to savings

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groups and so on. Two, they empower women through improving their skills, knowledge and confidence. And finally, women believe that CF activities can improve fisheries resources and that future generations will benefit from this. The main constraints to women’s participation are the prevailing social norms, a low level of literacy and lack of confidence.

The study recommended that future strategies to increase women’s participation in CF activities should take the following factors into consideration: (i) lack of support from husbands, and other men in the family, which is a major obstacle to women’s participation. There is need therefore, for gender sensitization for all men and women in the CF; (ii) avenues for alternative livelihoods which would directly benefit women.

These could include introducing new technologies for fish culture and processing products; (iii) there should be a clear quota, between 30 to 50 per cent, as part of the national policy, for the representation of women in community fisheries’ committees; (iv) collaboration and networking with the other agencies and donors should be promoted to raise financial and technical support for the CF; and (v) encouraging leadership roles for women in CF to build their confidence.

Speaking at the launch event, H.E Nao Thuok recommended that institutions engaged in gender issues in the fisheries sector should work towards greater collaboration with the Fisheries Administration Gender Working Group and the Ministry of Women’s Affairs to promote leadership roles for women in fisheries. **■**