

Still beyond the mainstream

Though women play an important role in Cambodia's fisheries, their problems are usually ignored

As a result of several decades of internal war, women make up between 60 to 65 percent of Cambodia's adult population. They play a vital role in the economy. In addition to regular family activities, they contribute significantly to all sectors of food production, such as processing, preservation and marketing.

To study the traditional role of women in Cambodian fisheries, PADEK (Partnership for Development in Cambodia), together with the authorities of the province of Prey Veng, recently organized a national workshop on Women in Cambodian Fisheries.

The workshop explored the changes that are taking place in the development of technology and in social life, and how these changes are affecting the lives of women. It evaluated existing fisheries programmes to see whether they are gender-sensitive, and analyzed the factors that affect the participation of women in fisheries.

Women are equally involved in catching and processing fish for family consumption in the subsistence fishery, which constitutes almost half the national fishery production of 100,000 tonnes.

In the large-scale fishery, which uses different and distinct types of fishing gear, women provide considerable assistance in subsidiary occupations, such as mending nets, preparing various fishing gear and bait.

The processing and marketing sectors are largely dominated by women. Due to the special nature of the fishery, a large quantity of fish is harvested during a short period of time, lasting just two to three months. This huge fish harvest is

processed and preserved almost entirely by women.

As a consequence of women's involvement in the processing and preservation sectors, post-harvest loss of fish is almost negligible. In the fish marketing sector, much of the retail trade is carried out through the involvement of women.

However, little developmental effort has attempted to solve the problems faced by women in this sector. Women continue to be exposed to various health risks during fish processing.

In the marketing sector, poor transport facilities and strongly fluctuating currency rates have been causing women enormous inconvenience. Few women are employed in fisheries education and research, or in the development sector.

The workshop concluded with various recommendations to support and strengthen the role of women in Cambodia's fisheries.

This piece is based on a report by PADEK, Phnom Penh, Cambodia