

# Strengthening livelihoods

**A fisheries livelihoods programme is helping improve women's roles and participation in decisionmaking in the Vietnamese fisheries**

By **Angela Lentisco** (Angela.Lentisco@fao.org), RFLP, Thailand and **Hoang Thi Phuong Thao** (hthao2005@gmail.com), RFLP, Vietnam

The Regional Fisheries Livelihoods Programme (RFLP), in collaboration with other fisheries institutions, has been trying to improve women's representation in decisionmaking as part of its goal to improve the livelihoods of fishing communities and the management of fisheries resources in six countries.

Since September 2009, RFLP has been working on five main components: co-management, safety at sea, post-harvest, livelihoods and microfinance. A strategic and cross-cutting component running through the main components is gender mainstreaming, implemented through the inclusion of gender equality considerations in the various stages of programme intervention.

One of the six countries implementing the RFLP is Vietnam, where the project has been rolled out in three central provinces: Quang Nam, Quang Tri and Thua Thien Hue. A baseline survey carried out at the beginning of the programme indicated that there was a division of labour among fisher households of different fishing groups. In marine fishing households, only the men went to sea to fish, while in lagoon fishing households, both the men and the women used boats to fish. While most women of offshore fishing households were less likely

to work outside the home, women from inshore fishing households often engaged in selling fish or in other income-generation activities such as services, vending and fish processing, in addition to household work.

Women from lagoon fishing households worked long hours, fishing daily with their husbands for about 12 hours, bringing fish products to the market, and additionally doing the housework. In the afternoons, they helped their husbands repair fishing gear. They thus appeared to have very little free time for relaxation or entertainment. Further, the children in lagoon fishing households also joined their parents in fishing, in contrast to marine fishing households where women and children did not usually perform any such income-generation activities.

The baseline survey also noted a generational change in the livelihoods of fishing communities: fishing no longer appeared to be the choice of many young people. The lagoon and inshore fishers, in particular, did not want their children to be fishers, and many young people were moving into big cities to earn money. Despite the presence of a network of fisheries associations in the province, the survey also revealed a low level of awareness among both fishers and government staff of the concept of co-management. Women knew even less about co-management than men.

One objective of RFLP is to improve co-management. In Vietnam this translated into providing support to set up Fisheries Associations (FAs). Although at the start of the project, FAs began by recruiting only male fishers. Later, appropriate measures were taken to ensure that the FAs promoted membership among women.

Incentives to promote women's membership in FAs included promoting household membership, with both husband and wife together having to pay only a single membership fee; and financial support only for those livelihoods projects where women were FA members. As a result, the numbers of women in FAs increased considerably. The participation increased from 12 women out of a total 1196 members in 2011 to 471 women out of 2081 members in 2013.

Consultations held in Vietnam with RFLP's 14 communities in the three provinces during April and May 2012 revealed an increasing interest in a wide range of non-fisheries income-generating activities. The participants in the consultations were both women and men. The activities included land-based agricultural

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Women in Phong Hai commune, Thua Thien Hue province, with the ice boxes provided by RFLP, Vietnam

activities such as raising pigs, chicken and rabbits as well as peanut cultivation. Other small business-related options included small-scale production for shoe and garment factories. Improving existing activities such as fish-sauce making and strengthening marketing links was also discussed.

The greater involvement of women in livelihood activities would further increase their workload, as women still had to attend

to household work. However, it was reported that due to declining catches and RFLP supporting livelihoods activities involving women, male fishers were willing to spend more time helping with traditional “women’s activities”, like pig- and chicken-raising. Men were also reported to have started contributing to household chores, so that women could dedicate more time to income-generating activities. **M**

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