

OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE PHANG-NGA BAY COMMUNITY-BASED FISHERIES MANAGEMENT PROJECT

Ruangrai Tokrisna

Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics, Faculty of Economics
Kasetsart University, Bangkok, Thailand

1. INTRODUCTION

Women's participation in community-based fisheries management as outlined by the organizing committee are in fish processing, marketing, fishery management and environmental protection. Participation in the aspects listed is recognized by various agencies involving women development in rural areas. The focus of this paper is thus on the understanding of women's status in the coastal areas of Phang-nga Bay, and especially their capacity and their existing roles and functions in those communities.

From the Preliminary Report on the 1995 Fishery Census of Thailand, data by gender has not been made available. The Census reveals that from about 6,000 marine and coastal fishing and aquaculture households, a little more than 3,000 engage only in marine capture, nearly 1,000 are coastal aquaculture households, while about a thousand are employed as labor in the fishing sector. Most of these households practise both marine capture and coastal aquaculture. The number of fish processing households is 352 while there are only two commercial fish processors. Preparation of shrimp paste is the main form of fish processing in these areas. In terms of fish marketing; 170 households are fish dealers, mainly middlemen and retailers.

The only data by gender made available from the previous Fishery Census is the number of "female" fishery households. About 20 percent of the fishery households are listed as "female households" while the number is a little higher for fishery employees' households. Information by gender is limited and seems to be inadequate to plan for effective women's participation in community-based fisheries management.

2. CONSTRAINTS ON WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION

In this section, we look at the existing constraints to effective women's participation in fisheries management.

I. Lack of information on fisherwomen Lack of information and data on fisherwomen is an important problem. Rarely has data on women has been disaggregated by agencies in

the compilation of field data. Women's responsibility on family and child care is by no means less important than the income earnings of men. While men's responsibility has focused on income generation, women's is on maintaining and improving the family's well-being.

Successful community development cannot be pursued by increasing income alone, but by also improving the quality of life. Often, women have been both earning the income and contributing to the family's well-being. Women's work should not be under-estimated but properly quantified in order to determine their participation in community-based fisheries management.

2. Lack of policy on women's participation Policy on women's participation in fisheries management has never been clearly identified. Traditionally, men have been considered as heads of households and as decision-makers, while women have played subordinate roles. There is a lack of official recognition of fisherwomen. Women have not been welcome in decision-making at the community level and at higher levels of management planning. Extension services on fishery and aquaculture development have been designed for men, not women, while women are capable of effectively dealing with these issues of rural life. Technology training programmes should be geared towards women in order to increase women's participation in fisheries management.

3. Limited education. Because of their traditional role, women usually have fewer opportunities than men to gain knowledge and experience. While they are aware of community problems, they participate less than men in community development. This can be explained by the lack of knowledge and information as well as lack of self-confidence in participation. Limited education limits their job opportunities and participatory roles at all levels of fisheries management.

4. Social norms. Not being well-informed, women often do lack confidence in expressing their ideas. Traditionally, women look after the families households and serve family members rather than take part in community activities. Men usually do not listen to women in public. In many cases, women do not express themselves in community meetings.

3. GOVERNMENT PROGRAMMES IN WOMEN'S DEVELOPMENT

In 1977, the Royal Thai Government initiated a number of women's development programmes. They emphasized improving the quality of rural women's life and promoting women's participation in community development. The programmes have been mainly conducted by four government agencies: Department of Agricultural Extension, Department

of Community Development, Department of Non-formal Education, and Department of Public Health.

The Department of Agricultural Extension encourages women's group organization, and introduces home economics programmes to improve family income and well-being. The Department of Community Development works on strengthening women's participation in community development via training and education on group organization skills. The Department of Non-formal Education organizes job training programmes. The Department of Public Health aims at better health care for pregnant women and children as well as family planning.

The activities mentioned above have been designed specifically to promote women's participation, there is no agenda for co-operation among women and men, because of the consensus that the work described above is confined to "women's tasks".

The Royal Thai Government has prepared a Long-term Programme (1992-2011) for Women with an objective to increase women's participation in development at all levels. Nevertheless, the plans on Social Participation Development and Improving Mechanisms for Women's Development are not prioritized. The allocated budget has been considered as limited for such an extensive programme, indicating a low priority at the national level (Thailand Development Research Institute Foundation, 1995).

There are also a number of NGOs working on women's development in rural areas. A review of these existing programmes can be useful for effective planning on women's participation in community-based fisheries management.

4. OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION

In traditional fisheries, women work with men in various activities concerning harvesting, processing and marketing. Women can engage in fishing within limits imposed by their domestic responsibilities. They can make and repair fishing equipment, undertake post-harvest activities, including fish processing and marketing. Where aquaculture has been practiced, women can work on pond management. Such active involvement allows them to take part in decision-making at the household level. They can take part in financial control or even control household income.

Industrialization or commercialization of the fishery reduces women's participation in fisheries. Commercial fisheries depends more on modern equipment and ways of life which are not conducive to women's involvement. Market development and better transportation involve work beyond the limits imposed by women's domestic work. Only

women enjoy some economic status can participate in fisheries development. Women, and other family laborers, have been replaced by hired labor, most of whom are men.

Women's participation in fisheries can be enhanced in community-based management regimes. Community-based fisheries management allows women's participation in fisheries activities, fisheries management, and environmental monitoring. When non-traditional economic activities are introduced, they should allow an opportunity for women's participation in such development.

Opportunities for women's participation in community-based fisheries management can be increased by providing the following:

- Information on gender division of labor, women's active role, and women's status in the community.
- Encouraging women's participation in community-based fisheries management at every possible stage, from the early stages of planning and decision-making through implementation and monitoring.
- Support on women's group organization to increase women's participation.
- Training for women as well as men.

Women can benefit most from activities in the following technical areas (FAO1788):

- economic activities
- social services and community activities
- organizational, technical, and financial support
- household food security

The status of women in the fisheries community should be assessed. Information concerning existing roles of women in domestic work, income generation, involvement in community organization in various aspects, and constraints on women's participation should be sought in order to design an effective plan for women's participation in community-based fisheries management.

While modernization of the commercial fishery has forced women out of the fisheries, community-based fisheries management regimes focus on small-scale fisheries and maintaining traditional practices within the fisheries. This regime will therefore avail of greater women's participation by working within traditional fisheries. Women can participate in various traditional fisheries activities, including harvesting, post-harvest handling,

processing, and marketing, as well as non-fisheries activities. Those can help augment local food supply and generate income.

In fisheries, women can fish (e.g., as crew, owners of the vessel, manual collection, etc.) and engage in aquaculture. In artisanal fisheries, women can help fishing gears. They can participate in processing and marketing. These activities are either for domestic food supply or income generation or both. The greater the participation, the more significant the fisheries are among local women. Thus, the greater is the concern for fisheries management.

Involvement in non-fisheries activities as allowed by availability of input supplies and access to market can be useful as alternatives where fishing effort has to be controlled.

Community-based fisheries management schemes should take into account women's social status, their community activities and perceptions of their social needs. Opportunities should be given to women to participate in community decision-making, providing training for women's decision-making and leadership skills. At an early stage, women's groups can be organized to serve as a forum for exchanging ideas and increasing women's social awareness to develop collective action and involvement in fisheries management.

To enhance women's participation, support on organization, technical know-how, and finance should be considered where necessary. Women can be involved in various stages including fisheries management, monitoring, data collection, adoption of appropriate technology, maintenance of fishing gears and equipment, post-harvest handling, processing, marketing, as well as other non-fisheries activities. Nevertheless, they may need organizational, technical and financial assistance at the beginning.

Household food security is the main responsibility of women. Not only are women responsible for ensuring an adequate daily food intake for family members, through harvesting or other means of producing food, but they can also generate income to buy food for the family. Women can engage in processing, marketing or other non-fisheries activities. Community-based fisheries management should consider women's roles in these ways. Design of the management schemes should accommodate women's responsibility in food security.

5. WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION AT THE COMMUNITY LEVEL

Opportunities for women's participation in community-based fisheries management are still limited at this early stage, but nonetheless, there are many possibilities to increase women's participation. Women as well as men should be invited to participate in the forum. They should be encouraged to make their voice heard in meetings. Women's views can be

different from men's as they have the responsibility to provide food for their family members. Women tend to give priority to quality of life rather than income earning. At the same time, if fish products are the main source of food, and as it is dependent on the health of the fishery resources, women should be aware of its sustainability and be willing to co-operate in sustainable fisheries management schemes.

Lack of access to information, training and education, and existing social norms may constrain women's self-confidence and their active participation. Special programmes tailored for women may be required at the early stages of community-based management projects. Organizational support can help in developing collective women's groups, thus allowing them to take part in project development and implementation. Working groups composed of women members can help enhance their participation. Understanding women's social status, their responsibilities, capabilities, and their perceptions is necessary for effective planning in enhancing opportunities for women's participation in community-based fisheries management. Providing that an improvement in the quality of life in coastal communities is an objective of community-based fisheries management projects, women's participation cannot be neglected.

6. REFERENCES

- Asian Productivity Organization. 1995. Women in farming and improving quality of life in rural areas in Asia and the Pacific. Report of an APO Seminar, 27/9-7/10 1994, Japan.
- Canadian International Development Agency. 1993. Women and fisheries development. Communication Branch, Quebec, Canada.
- FAO. 1988. Women in fishing communities. Rome, Italy
- National Statistics Office and Department of Fisheries. 1996. A Preliminary Report on 1995 Fishery **Census**. Bangkok, Thailand (in Thai).
- Thailand Development Research Institute Foundation. 1995. Women in development: Enhancing the status of rural women in northern Thailand. Natural Resources and Environment Programme., Bangkok, Thailand.
- Phothiyong, Thongdee. 1995. Mae ying pattana. 21 th Komol Keemthong Foundation Lecture, 22 Feb. 1995. Thammasat University, Bangkok, Thailand (in Thai).