

Caribbean Fisherfolk Perspectives on Gender Equality in the Small-Scale Fisheries Guidelines

Perspectivas de Pescadores del Caribe en Materia de Género Igualdad en las Directrices de Pesca en Pequeña Escala

Perspectives de Pêcheurs des Caraïbes sur le Genre L'égalité dans les Lignes Directrices à Petite Échelle de la Pêche

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ABSTRACT

Fisherfolk in the Member States of the Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism take great interest in the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines) developed and adopted as a global instrument through the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. The Caribbean Network of Fisherfolk Organisations has actively encouraged Caribbean national fisheries authorities and the inter-governmental Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism to incorporate the SSF Guidelines into policy. The Caribbean Network of Fisherfolk Organisations has also been very active in promoting awareness of the SSF Guidelines among the leaders of national fisherfolk organisations. For some women, gender is an important part of the contents of the SSF Guidelines. However, gender issues are not normally included in national fisheries management plans, and gender is missing from the Caribbean Community Common Fisheries Policy. A small survey was undertaken to explore perspectives on gender equality amongst fisherfolk in the Caribbean using the provisions of the SSF Guidelines as key topics. The findings suggest that gender in fisheries is indeed an issue, but perhaps less so than gender in Caribbean societies as a whole. Equality needs to be pursued in areas ranging from access to finance, to capacity development, and opportunities in fisherfolk organisations. The extent and nature of inequality varies by topic and country. This information is useful for designing a Caribbean Network of Fisherfolk Organisations programme of action to implement the SSF Guidelines and mainstreaming gender in fisheries.

KEYWORDS: Fisherfolk, gender, SSF Guidelines, survey

INTRODUCTION

The Caribbean Network of Fisherfolk Organisations (CNFO) has actively encouraged national fisheries authorities and the inter-governmental Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism (CRFM) to incorporate the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines) into policy. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) takes great interest in the implementation of the SSF Guidelines. The CNFO has been very active in promoting awareness of the SSF Guidelines among the leaders of national fisherfolk organisations in the Member States of the CRFM. Gender is important in the contents of the SSF Guidelines. Yet, gender issues are not normally included in national fisheries management plans. Gender is also missing from the Caribbean Community Common Fisheries Policy. These factors prompted the Gender in Fisheries Team (GIFT) to partner with the CNFO to undertake a small survey to examine perspectives on gender equality amongst fisherfolk in the Caribbean using the provisions of the SSF Guidelines as key topics. The poster of survey results is translated into this short communication.

METHODS

The survey was exploratory. The instrument was a ten-question, one-page form designed for completion in no more than ten minutes either electronically in Word; or printed, filled in and scanned. Later it was also converted into an online survey using Survey Monkey. Responses choices for all versions were Likert scale ratings with an optional open-ended question at the end. The instrument measured the degree of agreement to disagreement with statements drawn from the sub-sections of gender chapter 8 of the SSF Guidelines and focused on gender equality in society generally and the fisheries sector specifically. The target population of respondents consisted of fisheries organization members and leaders. They were selected as convenience samples roughly in the same ratio as may be expected of the boards and membership. Consequently the respondents were predominantly male, quite contrary to the implicit assumption that gender research must primarily or solely engage women. Respondents were contacted by email and invited to participate in the survey using lists of people on the boards of national fisherfolk organizations. Data from completed instruments were entered in Excel spreadsheets for analysis to produce simple descriptive statistics.

RESULTS

Responses were received from 38 people (62% men and 38% women) in 13 CRFM member states. Most of the respondents were men between 46 and 60 years of age. The main lessons from the results are set out below based on the questions asked.

Societal Level

One set of statements addressed perceptions of gender equality at the societal level. These questions were not in sequence, but interspersed with the fisheries level questions to reduce the tendency towards patterned responses. In response to the statement “Men and women are currently treated equally in society” 80% did not agree that men and women are treated equally in society. However, when we said “Women and men currently have equal opportunities in society e.g. in education, professions, pay, politics, etc.” 68% said women and men have equal opportunities.

Another item stated: “The equality of women and men is backed by legislation”. To this, 45% said men and women have equality backed by legislation. In addition, to the statement: “There is a national policy on gender that aims at equality” 57% indicated being aware of a gender equality policy in their country.

Fisheries Level

The other set of statements addressed perceptions of gender equality at the fisheries level. These were mixed with the societal items. Regarding “Fisheries management and development currently take the needs of both men and women equally into account” 65% disagreed that the needs of men and women were equally taken into account. When we suggested that “There is no discrimination against women in fisheries” 58% said no discrimination against women in fisheries exists in their country.

We also stated that: “There is equal participation of men and women in the decision-making processes for fisheries plans, policies”. Around 53% of respondents did not agree that men and women participate equally in fisheries decision making processes. To investigate organizations we said that “Women are encouraged equally with men to participate actively in the existing fisherfolk organizations you know”, and 50% did not agree that women and men are encouraged equally to actively participate in fisherfolk organisations.

Capacity development is particularly important in these small islands, so we posed the point that “Men and women have equal access to fisheries technical services, training and others for capacity development”. Around 76% reported that there is equal access to fisheries technical services, training, and others for capacity development. Financing is always an important dimension of capacity, so we said “Women and men have equal access to formal credit for fisheries such as bank or credit union loans, or grants”, and about 71% said men and women have equal access to credit from financial institutions.

Open-ended

There were few elaborating responses from those who said “yes” to the open-ended question “Do you think that anything needs to be done now to ensure that women and men in the fishing industry in your country have equal rights and opportunities?” However, one of the comments from a female respondent was: “*Everybody should have equal rights in my country, we need more education for women as far as fishing is concern*”. Somewhat in contrast a male respondent offered the observation: “*I really do*

think women are responsible for placing a glass ceiling and limiting themselves—reducing their involvement in the industry”.

DISCUSSION

The findings suggest that gender in fisheries is indeed an issue, but perhaps less so than gender in Caribbean societies as a whole. Equality needs to be pursued in areas ranging from access to finance, to capacity development, and opportunities in fisherfolk organisations. The extent and nature of inequality varies by topic and country, but both men and women are aware of the need to achieve gender equality. This information is useful for designing a CNFO programme of action to implement the SSF Guidelines and mainstreaming gender in fisheries. There is much for the GIFT to do in Caribbean fisheries gender mainstreaming.