

## **MMSS Commentary 6: Gender and the role of women**

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The Manifesto for the Social Sciences includes two references to gender and the position of women in fisheries: MMSS 1.2.4 refers to the continuing neglect of women's contributions to the fish supply chain and MMSS 3.6 highlights the need for systematic attention to gendered patterns and inequalities in all the topics of the Manifesto. We elaborate on these points in the following pages, focusing attention on the need to integrate gender in fisheries science.

Scientists, politicians and planners have for a long time overlooked the contribution women make to various phases of the fish supply chain. However, women often represent an important part of the labour force in harvesting, processing as well as marketing. Women prepare fishing gear, sell and process fish, and nowadays play important roles in fisheries organisations, administration, consultancy and research.

The research on women's formal or informal involvement in fisheries commenced in the 1980s; it was spearheaded by feminist and women scientists in the North (Norway, Canada, USA, Iceland, France) as well as in the South (Tanzania, Malaysia, Cambodia, India). The creation of international networks promoting women's participation in fisheries contributed also to studies on women and gender relations in fisheries.

Despite four decades of research, scholarly knowledge about gender and gender relations at local, regional, national and international levels remains deficient. More effort is required to realize state-of-the-art research on gender in fisheries. There are important gaps in knowledge regarding women's paid and unpaid work, daily and seasonal work patterns, access to resources and capital, labour conditions, as well as gender relations in fisheries households. The way women organise their daily life in various coastal contexts, often combining care-taking, food production and small-scale business activities, deserves more study. In other words: we require more knowhow on what women are

actually doing in fisheries and how this varies according to place and time. Such knowledge can help to better understand the impacts of resource decline and depletion, or new policies and management rules, on men as well as women. Gender-sensitive impact assessment studies might investigate, for example, how quota policies and access measures impact different categories of women in coastal and fishery areas around the world. Moreover, they could evaluate women's capabilities and empowerment, especially in situations where women become economic agents (for example, playing roles in marketing). \_

Women's participation in the public space is the second area requiring more research. This includes the investigation of women's organisations and networks and their influence at different political and administrative levels.

A third theme is physical wellbeing: what are the health issues facing women and men depending on sea-related activities in different parts of the world? How, in this age of pandemics and stressed health systems, does access to health facilities and medicine, along with insecure living and working conditions, affect fisher households (men and women)? Better knowledge about health matters is crucial to developing strategies for improved and accessible health systems.

A fourth theme to study is how the gender-related sections of international agreements such as the Sustainable Development Goals (particularly SDG 5 on gender equality) and FAO's guidelines for responsible fishing are being applied on national and local levels. To what extent are gender considerations becoming mainstreamed in policies and action?

The application of quantitative and qualitative methodologies is the last field we would like to highlight. Today, there is a great lack of relevant gendered statistics as well as systematic narratives. Better statistical material (historical as well as contemporary) would help practitioners to improve women's living and working conditions. Dissemination of gender research results plays a vital role in the crafting of new gender-sensitive fisheries policies. Action research and advocacy contribute to this effort.