

## Strengthening livelihoods: A Vietnamese fisheries programme helps improve women's roles and participation in fisheries decision-making<sup>1</sup>

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The Regional Fisheries Livelihoods Programme (RFLP), in collaboration with other fisheries institutions, has been trying to improve women's representation in decision-making 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 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 men and women used boats to fish. While most women of offshore fishing households were less likely 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-generating 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 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. Participation increased from 12 women out of a total 1,196 members in 2011 to 471 women out of 2,081 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 among both women and men. Activities included land-based agricultural efforts such as raising pigs, chickens and rabbits, and 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 because women still must 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", such as 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.

<sup>1</sup> This article was first published in: *Yemaya*, the newsletter of the International Collective for the Support of Fishworkers No. 43, July 2013 [<http://www.icsf.net/en/yemaya/article/EN/43.html?limitstart=0>]. It is reproduced here with the kind permission of ICFSF.

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