

## Women in fisheries development

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Women in the South Pacific have always played a major role in fishing communities, yet it is only during the past decade that consideration has been given to bring women into the fisheries development process. This paper will briefly (1) analyse what “women in development” means and more specifically what “women in fisheries development” means; (2) review some of the mistakes that have been made with respect to “women in development” and (3) explore some concepts critical to the implementation of an integrated development programme that promotes the enhanced quality of a fisherwoman’s life.

Before looking at the concept of development, I would like to mention that while I am relatively new to the area of fisheries, I have been involved in “women in development” (WID) issues both in Canada and in Papua New Guinea. Having spent a large portion of my first three months at SPC familiarising myself with literature pertaining to women in fisheries, I have concluded that many of the issues that need to be addressed relating to women in fisheries development are the same as those which have been and continue to be addressed within the general area of women in development. I must also say that I am not so presumptuous as to suggest this session will even begin to address all the issues as this subject is extremely complex, one which needs much attention and thought. What I do hope this workshop will accomplish is that it will act as a catalyst for future dialogue and stimulate people to consider new ways to approach women in fisheries development.

### Development

The one obvious fact that I have personally encountered and observed and which is reinforced by the literature on women in development is that in the past, women’s economic roles have been undervalued and ineffectively supported, their potential as partners in development largely ignored, and their needs and interests as human beings neglected. When you consider that nearly 50 per cent of the population in the developing countries are women, we must also

then acknowledge that 50 per cent of the population in these countries are not achieving their full potential as individuals in their own right nor as economically productive members of the community.

To address this imbalance that has existed throughout the world, the concept of women in development has evolved. Although every country and every organisation may have its own specific definition relating to WID, I believe it would be accurate to say that the general aim of WID is to allow women to participate on an equal basis with men in the social, economic, and political processes. More precisely but consistent with the general aim of women in development, FAO states that the basic goal for women in fisheries development is to make them equal partners, and productive and self-reliant participants, in the process of improving their own and their family’s nutritional and living standards, and to enable them to realise their full potential as human beings in their own right and as members of their family and community (Raque and Tietae 1988).

Today then when I speak of improving the role of women in fisheries development, I am referring to the process approach that will eventuate into women being equal partners, productive and self-reliant participants within their fishing community.

I think it is worthwhile to mention that equality does not necessarily mean the same. I have frequently heard the comment that equality amongst the sexes is impossible because men and women are different. Yes, men and women are different, and will most likely have different roles within the fishing community but that doesn’t mean they are unequal. Equality or equity recognises differences between human beings, acknowledges that men are different from women, that Australians are different from Canadians, but does not attribute greater value to one over the other. So when I speak of equality for women in fisheries development, I am not suggesting that women be necessarily treated in the same way as men but that they, and the role they

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play, must be accorded equal value to men and their roles. Equal partners imply that neither partner is superior or more important even though they have different roles within the family and community.

### Past mistakes

There have been numerous studies done in the last number of years to determine the progress that has been made in terms of advancement of women, particularly those in the rural areas since International Women's Year. The picture is far from brilliant. In fact a general consensus is that the developing world is littered with projects that have failed (Mathie and Cox 1987).

From discussions I have had with various people since being with SPC, there appears to be a genuine interest within the Commission and its member countries to pursue initiatives within women in fisheries development. While it is encouraging to see this increasing interest, it is vital we don't continue to repeat the mistakes that have been made in the past with women in development projects. If we can learn from the past mistakes, then even those projects that have been labelled as failures will contribute to the future successes.

### What then were some of the mistakes?

- A. The concept of women's work and lack of recognition of the woman's role in the community.

The unpaid, unrecognised nature of much of the women's work leads to lack of status recognition and confusion over who are the productive members of the family. Every society has its own ways of assigning worth to individuals but too often an individual's worth and value is based on how much they earn. As women have not been traditionally paid for their work, their roles have often been perceived as unimportant and non-productive.

We must, therefore, begin to accept the fact that women do real work. In fact, they usually work longer hours, a "double day" — producing and preparing food and supplying the other basic needs of their families, and communities such as water, fuel, shelter, health care, child care and other household chores. International statistics claim most women do two thirds of all the world's work, yet only receive one tenth of all the world's income (Mathie and Cox 1987). But because most of their work centres on the family and as they do not receive wages, society fails to call this important contribution of women "work", and consequently it is not given value.

If development is to be beneficial to society at large, recognition and awareness regarding the

work of rural women and the enormous importance of their contribution must be heightened.

- B. Another mistake that has been frequently made is that of mounting/developing women's programs in isolation. There are two aspects of isolation that need to be addressed.

First, men must not be excluded from the development process for women, and women must not work in isolation. Without support from men, it is often difficult for women to move ahead. This is why it is very important for husbands, fathers and brothers to understand the value of what women are trying to do. Encouraging men's support rather than men's alienation will surely help the women to reach their goals and be more productive.

I think it is fair to say that men hold the balance of power in the South Pacific. Therefore if men are not part of the solutions to the problems facing women, the chances of the solutions working are very limited. Men must be made aware of the concerns of women, the needs of women and understand what the women are striving for. (In recognition of the customs in various countries where women are not encouraged to speak out, it will be the responsibility of the male leaders and the planners to ensure that the women are invited to articulate their concerns and needs.) Men must be given the opportunity to participate in the development process for women — I am not suggesting men dictate policies and programmes but if they are ignored and excluded the women can't expect to receive support from men for on-going activities.

Back in Canada, I would suggest that one of the major mistakes the feminist movement made in its initial stages was excluding men from the movement. What eventuated was that there were groups of women throughout Canada who had their awareness heightened and who now realised that they had not been given equal opportunity rather had been relegated to traditional roles, which were no longer acceptable to them. But the men who held the power in Canada, be it in government, banking or business, had largely been ignored throughout this awareness period and when women reached the stage of wanting some choice in their destiny, society in general (which was largely controlled by men) was not receptive to these concerns and interests of the women. It is my belief that this lack of receptiveness was primarily the result of lack of understanding and awareness. Another aspect that was lacking was the infrastructure to absorb these enlightened

women — women who now wanted to be part of the paid working world.

It has only been in the last 10 years that we have seen real progress in the area of equality for women in Canada and much of this is the result of finally bringing men into the development process and creating an awareness throughout all of society on the potential of women as full economic, political and social partners.

The other mistake that has been made in respect to isolation is to believe that by providing women with some training and economic opportunities, the women's lives will be enhanced. Past experiences have demonstrated that one does not necessarily follow the other.

As I have already mentioned, many of the village women are presently doing a double day's work. By introducing training sessions, income-generating opportunities, we may be adding to the burdens of women rather than helping them live more productive lives. Unfortunately for women, development has often meant an increased workload, not a diminished workload. Development must, therefore, consider ways of lessening their burdens so that they can have more time for the welfare of their family and for cash generating activities. Planners must begin to design training and support services that will help reduce the workload so that they have the time to develop skills and resources that will give them some economic rewards.

For example, in order to make fish processing economically viable, it is usually not sufficient to simply train women in improved fishing preservation and processing techniques. It may also be necessary to provide support and/or training in childcare, sanitation, water and fuel supply, banking, business practises and improved methods of food preparation.

- C. A third mistake that has been made in respect to development scale projects is not considering the impact male-dominated development programmes will have on women and on community life. Past experiences have demonstrated that large-scale development projects, mechanisation and improved technologies that have largely been aimed at men can have a negative rippling effect on women's lives. Great care must be taken to minimise this negative side of development programmes and activities.

In *New directions for women in non-formal education*, Mathie and Cox (1987) present a number

of examples, which illustrate how the women's positions as individuals has worsened as the result of improved technology.

In the Vanimo district of West Sepik, Papua New Guinea, it was found that the introduction of speedboats, outboard motors and nylon nets did positively impact on the income of men. The negative side to this development was that men were frequently away from home, away from their responsibilities to the family, thus leaving the women with much more work to do as a result. It was also found that very little of the increased income was directed back to the family.

In the Southern Highlands province of Papua New Guinea, village people live on a diet of sago and fish. New technologies have changed travel from canoes with paddles to dinghies with outboard motors. Fishing is now done on a large scale with nets. Although these things seem to make life easier, it is becoming clear that there are fewer fish and the grasses where many prawn and crayfish used to hide are disappearing because of increased pollution. These changes may help men to make more money but are reducing the women's capacities to support themselves and their families (Mathie and Cox 1987).

While it is important to support and encourage improvements and enhanced economic opportunities for men as well as women, these activities must take into account the impact they will have on women. Just as it is critical that men are part of development for women, the converse is just as important — women must be included in the development process that is mainly aimed at men. Often, it is only by talking to the women that the outsider can determine the real needs and constraints within the village.

There are a number of other mistakes that have been made but due to time limitations I have only touched on those that I see as the major ones.

### ***So what can we do?***

To address the imbalances and the injustices that women have experienced in the past, and to ensure success in the area of women in fisheries development it is crucial that the framework for all fisheries development be based on three important concepts: sensitivity, integration and support. To help you to remember these three points, I have called it the SIS design.

- A. ***Sensitivity.*** Planners and field staff must be sensitive to local patterns and methods of work, traditional attitudes and habits and existing economic and social structures,

including women's roles. They must understand and be empathetic toward the real and perceived needs of the people the project is designed to assist. They must allow women to be involved in the decision making processes as sensitivity cannot occur if planners ignore what the women have to say.

- B. **Integration.** Women's development should not be separately planned or treated in isolation. They must be part of the regional development strategies and/or local government directives.

Women's development programmes that are mounted in isolation often marginalise women further from the mainstream economy. The activities can be specific to women but part of the mainstream. An example of this is my own programme and position. Even though my programme is specific to women it has been mainstreamed into Fisheries and (I hope) is seen as being as important as projects primarily aimed at men. I believe it is important to have a Women's Fisheries Programme Officer at this time to ensure that women's concerns and needs are fairly addressed but our ultimate goal should be complete integration of development activities thus eliminating the need for a WFPO. This however will only occur when women have been accorded true equality within society.

- C. **Support.** Women must be given appropriate organisational, technical and financial support for their domestic, economic and social activities. This essentially means that it may be imperative to provide the necessities of life so that the women can make better use of their time. It also may mean introducing technologies that would improve the efficiency of their activities and not one that would displace them. In still others it is providing the necessary equipment and training to bring them into the realm of modernising for advancement.

This support can be demonstrated in various ways:

- a. research aimed at developing improved technologies for fish processing or non-fisheries enterprises in which women are engaged;
- b. provision of banking service and credit facilities;
- c. extension services and training;
- d. improved facilities that will ease the burden of domestic chores such as collecting water and fuel;
- e. better sanitation, housing and medical facilities;

f. nursery day schools;

g. introduction of improved methods of food preparation and cooking; and

h. ensuring women have equal legal rights to property and other assets.

If you propose to establish an income-generating project with and for the women within a village, you will need to look at the other factors that impact on the women's success within the project, consideration may need to be given to childcare, sanitation and water supply. Therefore, not only should fisheries advisors be brought into the planning process but also rural development advisors, youth workers and possibly health care workers. In doing this, the project becomes completely integrated and addresses all the factors that could contribute to the success or failure of the project.

### Conclusion

To conclude my comments I would like to refer to an article by Penelope Schoeffel (1985), "Women in the Fisheries of the South Pacific".

In this article, Ms Schoeffel points out that Government Fisheries Departments in the South Pacific are primarily committed to the development of commercial and industrial fisheries, which involve training local men to become full-time professional fishermen or skilled workers on government or private industrial fisheries vessels. She further states that the subsistence and small part-time fisheries characteristic of most fishing communities in the South Pacific receives little attention in the face of more pressing national economic priorities. Since contribution is greatest in subsistence fishing and in selling fish on local markets it tends to be ignored or under-estimated.

Ms Schoeffel's conclusion is that the fundamental structure of fisheries development in the South Pacific is the greatest barrier to increasing women's participation in fisheries. While she recognises an understanding and appreciation of the reasons why regional governments pursue this type of development in fisheries, she purports that a more balanced policy in fisheries development is required which would allocate more staff, funds and other technical resources to increasing the efficiency and productivity of small-scale part-time commercial fisherwomen and women fish vendors.

Therefore, in addition to my previous comments as to what is required to implement development programmes successfully, attention must be given to Government policies and strategies and analyse the impact they have on the quality of women's lives. Sensitivity, integration and support is not only required at the community level but also at the government level.

As Ms Schoeffel has expressed in her article it is understandable why regional governments are committed to large commercial ventures — economic growth is essential for the development and stability of any country. It is therefore not logical to suggest that governments halt all large commercial and industrial fisheries development — these still have to be fostered. But the government must carefully plan the ventures to ensure that one segment of the community or country is not benefiting at the expense of another. Should the development of commercial initiatives have a negative impact on a group of individuals, it is then the government's responsibility to incorporate some corrective action to redress these potential imbalances.

All of you present today modifying government policies that may unintentionally have a negative impact on certain segments of the population in the South Pacific. Even though governments have not intentionally set out to discriminate against women, we can no longer ignore the negative rippling effect of economic initiatives upon women. Consideration must be given to incorporating at the national level policies and programmes that will help to offset some of the detrimental consequences of social and economic change. Just as men must support women and women support men, so must governments support community initiatives and concerns. Without this support, local initiatives will not be sustainable.

As I stated in my introduction, the issue of women in fisheries development is extremely complex and cannot be resolved easily or quickly. I have only briefly touched upon some of the problems and some possible actions that can be taken to assist the women in fishing communities. What is important now is that we recognise that there are actions that we can pursue that will empower women to be self-reliant and partners in development. A famous quote from John F. Kennedy was "Ask not what your country can do for you but what you can do for your country." To conclude I leave with you a similar remark, "Ask not what the women can do for you but what you can do for the women."

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