

Women Integration in the Marine Sector Promotes Climate Resilience

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If we relate, a considerable share of the total population is women. According to the Bangladesh Population Clock (live), the country's current population's sex ratio is almost equal (male 50.6% and female 49.4%). In line with that, among the entire country's population, the marine fisheries sector is a critical component employing around 14 million people, according to the Department of Fisheries. It is also worth mentioning the sector generates over 3% of the country's GDP, contributing significantly to poverty reduction and food security. However, the participation of women in the sector is notably low, with only 1.5% of women engaged in fishing activities, compared to 98.5% of men.

It is well noted that the marine sector plays a critical role in supporting human societies worldwide, and its importance has increased in recent years due to climate change. The marine environment provides essential resources, including food, minerals, and energy, while also serving as a critical regulator of the Earth's climate system. Nevertheless, this sector faces numerous challenges, including overfishing, pollution, and climate change impacts, which negatively affect marine ecosystems and human societies. And, in this critical era of climate change, the inclusion of women in the marine sector can indeed be a tool for climate resilience as women play a crucial role in managing marine resources and adapting to and mitigating the impacts of climate change.

Presently, there has been growing recognition of the vital role that women can play in the marine sector, particularly in the context of climate resilience. Recent research has

demonstrated that women's inclusion in the marine sector can be a powerful tool for building climate resilience and promoting sustainable development.

One of the key areas where women can contribute significantly is sustainable fisheries management and ecosystem conservation. Women's traditional knowledge and expertise in fishing practices can be leveraged to promote sustainability and build resilience to the impacts of climate change in small-scale fisheries. Additionally, women's skills in resource management and traditional ecological knowledge can contribute to marine conservation efforts, including establishing protected areas, which can benefit both critical habitats and local communities. Ultimately, their participation in these areas can help mitigate the impacts of climate change and promote long-term sustainability.

Another area where women can contribute significantly is developing alternative livelihoods that are more resilient to climate change impacts. Women are often involved in small-scale aquaculture and seaweed farming, which can provide alternative sources of income for communities that are vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. By promoting the development of these alternative livelihoods, women can help build resilience to climate impacts while promoting sustainable development. Actually, by promoting women's inclusion in the marine sector, we can help to promote gender equality, social justice, and a more supportable and resilient future for all.

And the most important one is maritime education and research. There is no way to deny that women and society consciously avoid maritime studies and jobs. Conversely, in maximum maritime education, women are sounder than men. Women can participate in the maritime sectors with extraordinary academic knowledge and developmental research.

Generally, women often face significant barriers to participation in the marine sector, including discrimination, lack of access to resources and education, and social and cultural norms that limit their capabilities. Especially, women have traditionally been underrepresented in this sector, and their contributions have often been overlooked or undervalued in our country. But, it is exemplary that to address women's role in the marine sector, several countries have already recognized the importance of women's inclusion in the marine sector.

For example, in the Philippines, the government has implemented a program to train women in sustainable fishing techniques and to encourage their participation in community-based coastal resource management. The Women in Fisheries Network – Fiji (WiFN-Fiji) aims to promote networks and collaborations that provide women with comprehensive information about sustainable fisheries in Fiji. The network's objective is to enhance the active engagement of women in decision-making and management at all levels of sustainable fisheries in Fiji.

Even our familiar neighbors India, Sri Lanka, and China have also recognized the importance of women's inclusion in the marine sector for climate resilience and sustainable development. In India, the National Fisheries Development Board has launched a program called "Matsya Sampada Yojana" to promote sustainable aquaculture and fisheries development. As part of

this program, there is a specific focus on supporting women's participation in the sector, including providing training and financial assistance for women entrepreneurs. The government has also established a Women's Fishermen Cooperative Society to promote women's participation in fisheries management.

In Sri Lanka, the government has implemented a program to train women in sustainable fishing practices, including using fishing gear that is less damaging to marine ecosystems. The program has also provided women access to credit and other resources to support their businesses. Additionally, the government has established a Women's Fisheries Federation to promote women's participation in decision-making processes related to coastal resource management.

In China, the government has recognized the importance of women's inclusion in the marine sector for poverty reduction and long-term development. The government has launched a program to support women's entrepreneurship in the sector through training and financial assistance. Additionally, the government has implemented policies to address gender-based discrimination in the sector and to promote women's participation in decision-making processes related to coastal resource management.

Bangladesh has an excellent opportunity to learn from these examples and promote women's participation in the marine sector for climate resilience and defensible development. According to a report by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), women contribute up to 90% of the labor in small-scale fisheries in some regions, making them critical actors in ensuring the sustainability of marine resources. In many maritime countries, most of the workforce comprises women in the seafood processing industry. Their crucial role in getting fish from the sea to the table cannot be overstated, as without their labor, restaurants, markets, and stores would have very little fish to sell.

Bangladesh has a 710 km long coastline and a large population dependent on fisheries for their livelihoods, where women's participation in the marine sector in Bangladesh can take various forms, as mentioned above, from research, managing, fishing, processing, and marketing to decision-making.

But all of those can be achieved if we can develop and implement Gender-Responsive Policies and Practices that prioritize women's envelopment and inclusion in this sector. Our pre-decided mind regarding women's research, education, and business in the maritime sector needs to be changed. A recent academic study on the participation of women in the maritime industry has revealed that they are often subjected to discrimination, which requires them to work significantly harder than their male counterparts to prove their worth. Government can take action on policies that provide quotas for women's participation in decision-making processes related to maritime issues. Social value, gender equity, maternity leave, and childcare support can enable women to balance work and family responsibilities. The government can provide education and training programs for women in fisheries management, including sustainable fishing practices and resource conservation. This can be done by forming groups and cooperatives and sharing resources such as boats and fishing

equipment in collaboration with civil society organizations and the private sector. The government can support women's entrepreneurship in the sector by providing access to credit, financial, and technical assistance in business management. This can be particularly beneficial for women engaged in small-scale fisheries and aquaculture.

Additionally, women can establish their businesses in the sector, such as processing and marketing fish. One example of women's participation in the sector of our country is the Coastal Livelihood and Environmental Action Network (CLEAN), a non-profit organization that promotes women's inclusion in the sector. CLEAN supports women's groups to establish community-based fishery management systems, providing training and resources to enable women to participate in fishing activities and establish their businesses.

Not only that, the government can promote ecotourism and other sustainable economic activities that can benefit coastal communities and empower women. For example, the government can establish marine protected areas that can serve as ecotourism destinations and generate income for women in the local communities. The government can also establish a market link between women fisherfolk and high-value markets to improve their income and support sustainable fishing practices. Besides, The flourishing seafood industry of our country can follow gender integration policy in all aspects. The government can promote alternative livelihoods, such as seaweed farming, an environmentally friendly and economically viable alternative to traditional fishing.

Precisely, by ensuring women's participation in the maritime sector, we can build more sustainable and resilient coastal communities in Bangladesh and achieve several SDGs, including gender equality, climate action, and life below water. Investing in the maritime sector can create more opportunities for women, reduce the vulnerability of coastal communities to climate change, and promote sustainable use of marine resources.

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