

# Gender Inclusion in Marine Fisheries Projects: A Holistic Approach

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In my article titled “Women Integration in Marine Sector Promotes Climate Resilience”, published in the "Daily Sun" newspaper on April 26, 2023, I mainly highlighted the importance of gender integration in the marine fisheries sector. Drawing from my expertise as a woman fisheries specialist, I emphasised the specific facilities and resources that can enhance our ability to actively contribute to the development and progress of the marine sector. As a follow-up to my earlier article, I only offer my thoughts on the plans or factors we should consider offering gender-friendly projects in the marine sector.

Actually, for sustaining gender equity, an effective and practical approach is needed. Researchers and management agencies must adopt a comprehensive social-ecological model for any project development that embraces biophysical, ecological, social and economic elements. In most cases, we adopt strategies considering a single component, in which either beneficiaries or the environment benefited and, in the long run, these projects fail to reach the objectives. Additionally, in maximum marine projects among the beneficiaries, a single group comes under consideration like either men or women. But when we go for a holistic approach, it will help us understand the entire situation. This will benefit the livelihoods of fishing communities and contribute to the overall well-being and resilience of coastal ecosystems and societies.

If I talk in the context of Bangladesh's marine projects, adopting a comprehensive social-ecological model or a holistic approach for gender inclusion considering and integrating

various factors related to the marine environment, including biophysical, ecological, social and economic aspects, may help us go for practical input on gender equity and gender balance.

Let's go for an example. In holistic approach system to ensure a gender-friendly project in marine fisheries would involve understanding the biological characteristics and behaviour of different living organisms and their habitats in their biological components. It might consider different fish species' reproductive patterns, migration routes and feeding habits to assess their vulnerability and resilience to fishing pressures. Then the ecological consideration would involve examining the interactions between marine organisms and their environment, including the impacts of fishing activities on the ecosystem. After that, we will consider the social aspects, like the roles and contributions of women and men in the ecological balance of the marine environment. It would recognise the diverse contributions of women and men in different stages of the fisheries, like the value chain, including pre-harvesting and post-harvesting activities. It would also consider the social dynamics and power relations within fishing communities, ensuring the inclusion and participation of men and women in decision-making processes related to fisheries management. And finally, the economic consideration would focus on understanding fisheries' economic activities and benefits. It would assess the economic contributions of women and men in the sector, including income generation, employment, and entrepreneurship. It would also examine the gender-specific barriers and constraints that affect women's access to and control over resources, such as credit, markets and fishing gear. Additionally, it would consider the economic implications of sustainable fishing practices and gender-responsive policies for long-term economic viability. By considering all of those factors together in a holistic approach, gender considerations in marine fisheries projects can be ensured.

Let me now give an actual example of the village of Sonarpara in Jaliapalong, Ukhia, Cox's Bazar. The village is surrounded by rich greenery and is known for its lovely landscapes, vibrant marine life and the cultural heritage of its fishing community. To address the gender disparities in the fishing industry and promote gender equality, various groups have come together to work in Sonarpara. And by combining the expertise and efforts of these various groups, the aim to address the gender disparities in Sonarpara's fishing industry and improve the overall well-being and empowerment of the community, fostering a more inclusive and sustainable future has been achieved.

To initiate their work, the researchers immerse themselves in the everyday lives of the villagers, spending time with men and women engaged in fishing activities, visiting local markets and conversing with community leaders. Through these interactions, they gain valuable insights into the intricate social dynamics, cultural norms and economic dependencies that shape the roles and responsibilities of men and women in the marine fisheries sector. This immersive experience allows them to understand the challenges and opportunities ahead comprehensively.

Building upon this foundation, the researchers and agencies introduce a social-ecological model for their target project that reflects the interplay between the environment, society and the economy. By incorporating gender considerations at each stage, from policy

development to project implementation and evaluation, the researchers aim to ensure that women's voices are heard, their expertise is valued and their needs are addressed.

Collaborating with local stakeholders, the researchers planned and implemented their project, focusing on capacity building and empowering women in the marine fisheries sector. They organise training programs that provide women with the necessary skills and knowledge to engage in various fishing activities, such as net mending, fish processing and entrepreneurship. Additionally, the researchers facilitate the establishment of women-led cooperatives, enabling them to collectively negotiate fair prices for their catch, access financial services and engage in decision-making processes.

Recognising the importance of engaging men in the change process, the researchers organise awareness campaigns and workshops that challenge traditional gender roles and promote a more inclusive and equitable environment. They work closely with community leaders, religious figures and influential individuals to foster a supportive atmosphere encouraging men to embrace new ideas and support women's empowerment.

As the interventions take root and the community begins to experience the positive outcomes of gender-inclusive practices, researchers and management agencies continue to monitor and evaluate their efforts. They collaborate with local institutions and academia to conduct rigorous studies that measure the impact of gender considerations on the well-being of individuals, households and the overall resilience of the marine ecosystem. The findings from these studies serve as evidence-based recommendations for policy development and inform the scaling up of successful interventions in other coastal communities across Bangladesh.

So, over time, the community of Sonarpara has witnessed a transformative shift in its marine fisheries sector. Women, who were once marginalised and underrepresented, now hold positions of influence and actively contribute to the decision-making processes. The benefits of gender-inclusive practices are evident with increased household incomes, improved resource management and enhanced social cohesion. The holistic approach adopted by the researchers and management agencies has not only advanced gender equality but also laid the foundation for sustainable development and resilience.

Last but not least, indeterminately adopting a holistic approach to developing gender-friendly marine projects is essential for promoting equality, inclusivity and sustainable development in our oceans. By considering all genders' unique needs, perspectives and contributions, we can create marine projects that address environmental challenges, empower local communities and promote social justice. This approach requires collaboration and partnerships between stakeholders, including government agencies, non-profit organisations, academia and local communities. By integrating gender considerations into the design, implementation and evaluation of marine projects, we can ensure that women, men and non-binary individuals have equal opportunities to participate, benefit and thrive in marine conservation and management initiatives. Moreover, gender-friendly marine projects can foster more significant innovation, resilience and adaptive capacity, leading to more effective and sustainable solutions for our oceans' complex challenges. By embracing this

holistic approach, we can forge a more equitable and prosperous future for marine ecosystems and the diverse communities that depend on them.

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***The article was published in [The Daily Sun](#) newspaper on May 25, 2023***