



POLICY BRIEF 3

RIGHTS OF WOMEN IN SMALL-SCALE ARTISANAL FISHING COMMUNITIES OF BANGLADESH

BACKGROUND

Bangladesh has achieved self-sufficiency in fish production, and while a large part of the production comes from fresh-water inland capture fisheries and aquaculture, marine capture fisheries account for more than half of the production. And within the marine fisheries sector, artisanal small-scale capture fisheries still account by far for the biggest share of the production, even though the marine industrial fisheries sub sector has also been growing steadily.

A sector-wide human rights impact assessment (SWIA) was carried out in small-scale artisanal fishing communities in Barguna and Cox's Bazar Districts in Bangladesh during 2019-2020. With the support of DIHR, the SWIA examined the living- and working conditions of poor small-scale fishers and their families through a human rights lens. The report contains findings on the labor conditions, the standard of living, the situation of women – and the environmental and climate change-related human rights issues at stake in the fishing communities. This Policy Brief presents the situation of women in small-scale fishing communities, with a focus on the human rights issues identified in the SWIA, along with a series of recommendations to improve the situation.



Mapusher Jonno
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COAST
Coastal Association for
Social Transformation Trust



BIFFA



Sweden
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THE DANISH
INSTITUTE FOR
HUMAN RIGHTS



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NO
POVERTY



5
GENDER
EQUALITY


THE SCENARIO

Bangladeshi society is generally described as male-dominated and patriarchal, and it is widely documented that many women hold disadvantaged positions and live with multiple forms of discrimination. Women whose husbands work on fishing vessels live with a high degree of insecurity. They do not feel safe in their own homes when their husbands are, at sea, and the fact that fishing is a dangerous profession with a relatively high risk of injury or death constitutes a fundamental threat to their own and their children's means of livelihood. The fundamental insecurity of women in fishing communities go beyond the economic insecurity that come with the dangers fishermen are exposed to. In their daily lives too, women lack protection of their personal safety and integrity. While fishing at sea is an almost exclusively male occupation, some women make an income from fishing in estuaries or near the shore, or from post-harvest activities on land, such as cleaning of nets and sorting of fish, fish-drying, and fish processing.




MAJOR FINDINGS FROM THE SWIA







75% of the female respondents who have experienced loss or grave injury of a husband, father or son at sea, did not receive any compensation




40% manage with help from relatives and cut back on their own food intake to make ends meet, 26% stop sending their children to school




68% of the female respondents report that they have experienced problems and harassment when male family members go to sea



64% of the females interviewed claimed making an income from post-harvest activities on land, such as cleaning of nets and sorting of fish, fish-drying, and fish processing



93% male respondents stated that women do not get equal pay for equal work








Many working women experience stigmatization when working with men

RECOMMENDATIONS

Women in the small-scale fishing communities are marked by the dangers and insecurity that characterize their husbands' occupation (fishing). Their situation is vulnerable in both economic and personal terms, and the main human rights issues for women in the small-scale fishing communities identified in the SWIA include:

-  Poor economic security, high risk of poverty
-  Poor access to social security allowances when their bread-winning husbands are injured or die at sea
-  Unequal pay when engaged in wage-earning work
-  Widespread sexual harassment and abuse causing a general sense of insecurity

The SWIA findings point towards a need to take strong action to protect women from violence and abuse and secure their economic wellbeing and freedom from poverty, in line with the commitments under Sustainable Development Goals 1 and 5. The findings also call for prioritizing women in poor, small-scale fishing communities under such initiatives, and for all actors to take pro-active steps to change social norms and practices that allow for discrimination, harassment and abuse of women in these communities. Major specific recommendations are:

-  Promote women's economic security and freedom from poverty, and protect them from discrimination, violence and abuse
-  Recognize the vital role of women in small-scale fisheries and promote their equal rights and opportunities as per the FAO's Guidelines for Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries
-  Promote and protect women's right to equal pay for equal work
-  Make sure social security allowances reach vulnerable women from small-scale fisheries dependent households when needed (e.g. in connection with loss of their husbands' income when they become disabled or pass away in an accident at sea)
-  Show by example that sexual harassment and violence against women is illegal and punishable by law through adequate follow up

