



Gender Asia Pacific Newsletter

November 2023 – Issue #2



Introduction

We are pleased to present to you the second issue of the Gender Asia Pacific News for 2023.

The highlight of this issue is the webinar we organized on 17 October 2023 to celebrate the International Day of Rural Women. For this webinar, we selected the topic “gender equality, water and financial inclusion”. We hope that some of you had the chance to join this knowledge event and gained some ideas on the diversity of gender related activities in the region.

We are also introducing three FAO projects from the field including the one featured in the gender webinar. These were selected as good examples that address gender aspects in projects related to water management or fisheries/aquaculture sector.

We developed this Newsletter with various input from colleagues in country and regional offices. We would like to thank those colleagues, and we will continue counting on their commitments as we strive to achieve gender equality.

We hope you will enjoy reading the Newsletter.

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FAO RAP Organizes Webinar on Gender Equality, Water and Financial Inclusion in Asia and the Pacific

The FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (FAO RAP) hosted the webinar “*Breaking Barriers: Gender Equality, Water, and Financial Inclusion in Agrifood Systems in Asia and the Pacific*” on 17 October 2023. This event commemorated the 2023 International Day of Rural Women, focusing on rural women's financial empowerment and aligning with the theme of the 2023 World Food Day, “*Water is Life, water is food. Leave no one behind*”.

Highlights of the webinar:

Robert Simpson, Special Adviser to the Assistant Director-General and Regional Representative at FAO RAP, emphasized the alignment of the initiative with the FAO Regional Gender Strategy and Action Plan 2022–2025 for Asia and the Pacific¹ in his welcome remarks. Moreover, he stressed the urgency of advancing gender equality, as called for by the Sustainable Development Goal number 5 (SDG5).²

Miguel Rafael V. Musngi, Assistant Director and Head of Poverty Eradication and Gender Division at ASEAN Secretariat, in his keynote speech, drew insights from publications such as the ASEAN and OECD publication ‘*Strengthening Women's Entrepreneurship in Agriculture in ASEAN Countries*’³ and the ‘*ASEAN Gender Outlook*’.⁴ Mr. Musngi reaffirmed ASEAN's commitment to gender equality and referred to ASEAN's key frameworks and regional initiatives such as the ASEAN Gender Mainstreaming Strategic Framework.

Sara Duerto Valero, Adviser on Gender Statistics at UN Women Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, explained the underlying causes of the current water crisis and its implications for women.⁵ She highlighted the need for collecting gender-specific data that can provide meaningful contextualization of global indicators related to SDG 6 (clean water and sanitation).

The UN-Water Integrated Monitoring Initiative for SDG 6 (IMI-SDG6) is actively involved in this effort. FAO also conducted a Gender Review and Contextualization of SDG Target 6.4,⁶ providing a gender-sensitive interpretation,

given the lack of human-related variables and sex-disaggregation.

Prasun Kumar Das, Secretary General of Asia-Pacific Rural and Agricultural Credit Association (APRACA), presented success stories from Fiji, Cambodia and Nepal. With emphasis on financial inclusion, he showcased how women's groups and cooperatives in the region have developed bankable solutions with the support of financial institutions. He also stressed on the relevance of land ownership for financial access and the importance of market accessibility in running farms as businesses.

Jam Muhammad Khalid, National FFS Specialist of FAO Pakistan, drawing from Pakistan's experience, shared several factors that facilitated FAO's successful mainstreaming of gender concerns in the field through the project ‘*Transforming the Indus Basin with Climate Resilient Agriculture and Water Management*’. One key element was the inclusion of gender analysis in project design, leading to the establishment of Women Open Schools. These schools provided a platform for rural women to access technical training, take up leadership roles and engage in decision-making processes.

As the event concluded, **Kae Mihara, FAO RAP Gender Officer**, who moderated the event, reiterated FAO's commitment to continuing these dialogues and fostering collaborative efforts to identify practical solutions for enhancing the agency of rural women to pursue a better life, while also contributing to better production, better nutrition, and a better environment.

A press release⁷ was issued to provide further details.



Distinguished speakers discussed the various elements of the nexus between gender equality, water resources and financial inclusion.

¹ FAO. 2022. Regional Gender Strategy and Action Plan 2022–2025 for Asia and the Pacific. Bangkok. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cc2408en>

² Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

³ ASEAN and OECD. 2021. Strengthening Women's Entrepreneurship in Agriculture in ASEAN Countries. <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Background-Report-Strengthening-Womens-Entrepreneurship-in-Agriculture-1.pdf>

⁴ ASEAN and UN Women. 2021. ASEAN Gender Outlook. <https://data.unwomen.org/publications/asean-gender-outlook>

⁵ Information were sourced from publications released in 2023 and 2022 which are respectively accessible through

<https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-07/from-commodity-to-common-good-a-feminist-agenda-to-tackle-the-worlds-water-crisis-en.pdf> and

https://data.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/documents/Publications/APRO_Women-environment-snapshot.pdf

⁶ FAO is the custodian agency for SDG 6.4 indicators. These indicators are related to water use and scarcity.

⁷ <https://www.fao.org/asiapacific/news/detail-events/en/c/1653775/>

Mainstreaming Gender Aspects in Climate Resilient Fisheries and Aquaculture Systems in Bangladesh

Since 2019, FAO Bangladesh has been implementing a project to lift the barriers to effective adaptation to climate change in the fishery and aquaculture sector. The ‘Community-based Climate Resilient Fisheries and Aquaculture Development in Bangladesh’ project (GCP/BGD/055/LDF) sought to build resilience of women and men fishers through capacity building for policy makers and fisherfolks, promoting the use of climate-smart innovative strategies and technology in fisheries and aquaculture, and policy reform.

The project focuses on the south-west coastal area and the north-east *hoar* (wetland) area of Bangladesh. The south-west coastal area has witnessed rising sea levels, saltwater intrusion and storm surges, while the north-east *hoar* has been increasingly affected by flash floods, erratic rainfall and drought. The project targets poor households and women-headed households, the majority of whom have been dependent on aquaculture and fishing for their livelihoods.

The project’s gender strategy and action plan specify gender mainstreaming efforts across its activities. The project committed that women make up at least 40 percent of the total trainees across all capacity building events – and achieving this target required specific training for women to participate in community planning, pursue alternate income generating activities and use climate-smart technology.

The project has been working with community-based organizations (CBOs) established in the area. Members of these CBOs have undergone a series of training sessions, covering a range of topics, including climate change awareness, the ecosystem approach to fisheries management, innovative climate-resilient practices for fisheries and aquaculture and gender mainstreaming and women's leadership. Additionally, the project guided local women to engage in vegetable cultivation on the banks of ponds and water bodies, helping them gain more access and control over these natural resources.

Attention to gender issues was also given when assessing climate-related hazards and developing appropriate policies and programmes. In April 2023, a gender budgeting training was organized for government representatives and experts from academia. This training contributed to efforts in mainstreaming gender issues. For example, the training highlighted how resources should be used in the fisheries and aquaculture sector while taking gender issues into consideration. The initiative received positive response, and participants requested for a supplementary policy-level plenary session. Through its participation in policy dialogues and the provision of

technical support, the project has offered recommendations to mainstream gender aspects into the Bangladesh Fisheries Policy and national fisheries strategy. For instance, the project has advocated for the promotion of climate-smart technologies tailored to the specific needs of women and men. Some of these technologies include crab fattening, duck rearing, and daytime guarding of fish/prawn/shrimp/crab farms using simple equipment.

As part of the project’s knowledge sharing activities, FAO conducted a dialogue in September 2023 in Khulna District to spotlight the involvement of women in fisheries and aquaculture sector. The dialogue was one of the sessions organized for the United Nations (UN) Joint Mission among five UN agencies to discuss the range of interventions intending to advance gender equality in climate vulnerable areas. During the event, women CBO members shared their success stories in addressing the challenges of climate impacts. Takeaways included the importance of enhancing women’s access to markets and promoting the participation of the private sector in catalysing women's economic empowerment.

Recognizing women’s pivotal role in the fishery and aquaculture sector, the project has been actively working to ensure women’s participation in decision-making processes through the engagement of women’s groups and organizations in the project areas. These women will contribute to the development of community plans on fish farming and fishing calendars that consider trends in climate change events.

The initiative aimed to guarantee that nearly half of the targeted 400 000 people benefitting from the project are women. The recent project activities reflect the commitment of the project team to achieving this target.



Mukta Das, President of the community-based organization in Dumuria Upazila, shared her experiences during the UN Joint Mission held in September 2023.

Transforming the Indus Basin with Climate Resilient Agriculture and Water Management

The impact of climate change is threatening the future livelihoods of farmers and the agriculture sector in Pakistan. Due to its semi-arid environment and heavy reliance on the Indus River Basin for agricultural water supply, Pakistan is particularly vulnerable to climate change. A shift towards climate-resilient agriculture and water management strategies in the Indus River Basin is necessary.

Since 2020, FAO in Pakistan has been working with the Ministry of Climate Change along with federal, provincial and local government units in implementing the project 'Transforming the Indus Basin with Climate Resilient Agriculture and Water Management' (GCP/PAK/146/GCF) to improve agriculture in the Basin. The project seeks to increase the resilience among the most vulnerable women and men farmers and strengthen the government's capacity in supporting their communities to adapt. The project directly targets 1 300 000 individuals (around 49 percent women farmers) as well as professionals involved in project capacity development from eight selected districts of Punjab and Sindh Provinces.

The project's gender action plan (GAP) specifies the gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment efforts integrated within the project's results framework. The GAP ensures proactive mainstreaming of gender related concerns and women's interests into project activities during design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

The project has three components. The first one involves the development of local capacity to use technology in collecting climate-related information essential for agriculture and water management. Under this component, the GAP aims to engage female technicians to work on information services for agricultural and water management. Since men often dominate this sector, efforts will be made to guarantee that at least 10 percent of the technicians are female.

Under component 2, farmer field schools and 960 women open schools (WOS) will be established to directly train 24 000 women and youth and another 24 000 indirectly through field days on climate resilient agriculture (CRA) and on-farm water management (OFWM) practice. In the process, 16 female facilitators and 320 female extension workers will be engaged for wider adaptation. Awareness raising on gender issues will also be provided to relevant government officials, landowners and farm managers.

Under component 3, multimedia information and awareness raising campaigns on CRA and OFWM will include gender mainstreaming themes aired through radio programmes. SMS and voice mass broadcasting on climate resilient agriculture will be provided and tailored for women. A total of 1 170 youth beneficiaries (of whom at least 1 000 will be young women) will be trained on climate-responsive services including the usage of e-agriculture services.

The project will also guide financial service providers to be responsive to the needs of producers facing threats of climate change. Through the project, credit and insurance products can be better designed using climate-related information and analysis. Financial-risk evaluation officers will receive gender mainstreaming trainings to guide them in designing financial services most suitable to women beneficiaries' needs and interests.

To date, the project has formed women's savings groups, trader groups and entrepreneur groups. Through the farmer field schools, climate business field schools and WOS, over 5 360 farmers (43 percent women) were trained on CRA and improved water management practices. Women received agriculture inputs and training in homestead gardening for summer and winter vegetables. They also learned indispensable skills for business plan preparation to pursue climate-resilient livelihoods. Technical trainings were conducted using FAO's 'Jam's 4 colours'.⁸ Introduced by FAO Pakistan in 2018, the 'Jam's 4 colours' allows farmers to translate facts into colours, and colours into decisions. This facilitates learning and analysis in agro-ecosystem evaluation among individuals with mixed literacy levels.

The project is supported by the Green Climate Fund and will be implemented until 2026.



Women farmers train on homestead gardening.

⁸ Jam, M.K. 2021. *Understanding the farmer field school agro-ecosystem analysis board*. Multan, FAO. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cb6742en>

Empowering Women in the Small-Scale Fisheries Sector in Southern Philippines

Traditionally, the Philippine fisheries sector is a male-dominated value chain where women's labour is rendered invisible and, on many occasions, unpaid. According to *'The Status of Women in Agrifood Systems'*,⁹ globally women constitute 28 percent of all workers in the aquaculture primary sector, 18 percent in the fisheries primary sector and 50 percent in the entire aquatic value chain from pre- to post-harvest. However, they hold only 15 percent of the full-time positions in the aquaculture and fisheries primary sectors, most of them (71 percent) are engaged in part-time processing. Despite their contributions to the sector, women are often unrecognized and excluded from decision-making processes.

FAO Philippines heeded the call for focused interventions that would recognize and empower women in the fisheries sector through the project *'Implementing the Small-Scale Fisheries Guidelines for Gender Equitable and Climate Resilient Food Systems and Livelihoods'* (FMM/GLO/155/MUL).¹⁰ The project adopted a dual strategy encompassing organizational development for women small-scale fishers in the project sites and capacity building for local government offices. The project supported the formation and strengthening of small-scale fisheries (SSF) organizations for women in the municipal levels. It also assisted the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) and local government bodies in strengthening their skills in the area of gender and development (GAD). The project scope involved four municipalities in Misamis Occidental and Misamis Oriental in Northern Mindanao.

Five women small-scale fisheries organizations (WSSFO) were created and three existing WSSFOs were strengthened. To formalize the existence of the WSSFOs, the project aided in the registration of the WSSFOs with the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) and their accreditation with the municipal council.

Capacity development activities were progressively conducted in succession and benefited 362 women small-scale fishers. In July 2023, a *'Learnings Sharing Conference'* was conducted as a knowledge sharing event for the provincial government to reflect on the key takeaways from the project and to inspire adjoining coastal communities to also support and build the capacities of WSSFOs in their respective jurisdiction.

One of the key achievements of the WSSFOs was the significant increase in the number of women registering to the Fishery Registry System (FISH-R). The FISH-R has been

regulating entry into municipal waters and facilitated the government assistance. The registration of WSSFO members to the FISH-R formally recognized them as fisherfolk, legitimized their fishing activities, and enabled them to directly benefit from government programmes.

The project meanwhile helped the government in promoting GAD through a gender brief on women in the fisheries sector in the Philippines. Technical assistance was provided to BFAR and the local government units (LGUs) in Misamis Oriental and Misamis Occidental in incorporating GAD concepts in their programmes and plans. The assistance benefitted from the project-hosted *'Training on the Development of the National Plan of Action for Small Scale Fishers'*. In May 2023, the government partners received training on the use of gender transformative approaches in small-scale fisheries which was facilitated by FAO. These initiatives contributed to enhanced knowledge, skills and appreciation of GAD concepts by government partners which motivate them to develop and execute GAD plans and budgets.

This project was complementary to another project, *'Adopting the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines): An integrated approach to improving the food security and nutrition situation of fisherfolks in selected coastal areas of the Philippines'*.



Members pose for a photo during the launch of the women small-scale fishers' organizations.

⁹ FAO. 2023. The status of women in agrifood systems. Rome. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cc5343en>

¹⁰ This project is part of the global project *'Creating an Enabling Environment for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries'* (GCP/GLO/965/SWE).

Mushroom Farming – A Boon for Rural Afghan Women

Several decades of conflict left many Afghan families to lose their male breadwinners, forcing some women to negotiate mobility restrictions to provide for their families. FAO Afghanistan has been supporting women entrepreneurs through training and provision of production inputs to help them build livelihoods around mushroom farming. In the past, mushroom farming proved to be a backyard industry that helped rural Afghan women feed their households and earn a living.

Read about the story of Ms. Latifi,¹¹ a widow from Char Asiab in Kabul Province. She was trained and supported by FAO in becoming a mushroom entrepreneur, along with the other female members of the Common Interest Group in her village.

Improved Processed Fish Enterprises for the Banyuwangi Women in Indonesia

FAO Indonesia has partnered with the Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries (MMAF) in the project *'Implementing the Small-Scale Fisheries Guidelines for Gender Equitable and Climate-Resilient Food Systems and Livelihoods'*. Through this effort, the women of Banyuwangi's coastal areas engaged in fish processing have been receiving training on production methods, product diversification and digital marketing. Women's groups are mobilized to support the beneficiaries to expand their businesses.



Members of *Berkah Abadi*, one of the women's groups in the coastal area of Banyuwangi, learn how to expand their processed fish enterprises.

¹¹ <https://www.fao.org/afghanistan/news/detail-events/en/c/1647233/>

¹² <https://www.fao.org/indonesia/news/detail-events/en/c/1645506/>

¹³ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KDP_74MKyGM

In a recent article,¹² FAO Indonesia reports that this initiative helped increase the income of the fisher family beneficiaries by 40 percent.

Advancing Livelihoods of Women Farmers through Organic Farming in Nepal

FAO Nepal recently released two videos of women farmers from Karnali province who were beneficiaries of the project *'Strengthening Capacity of Public and Private Sector Stakeholders for Promotion of Organic Agriculture in Karnali Province of Nepal'* (TCP/NEP/3804). In the video, Sita Thapa,¹³ an orange farmer from the district of Dailekh, relayed her experiences in learning organic farming practices. The other video shared the story of Kalpana Pulami Magar¹⁴ from the district of Surkhet, who learned how to make and use organic fertilizer and biopesticides for her organic ginger farm. Both farmers saw significant improvement in the quality and volume of their produce. As their incomes increased, they have achieved a level of financial independence. In addition, they developed the skills to speak in public through their active participation and sharing during training sessions.

Gender Spotlight Initiative Pakistan

The Gender Spotlight Initiative Pakistan¹⁵ is a brochure that showcases examples of the initiatives FAO has been implementing to help the country's efforts to advance gender equality and empower women. It features results achieved through good practices carried out with development partners. The projects featured in the brochure include *'Improved Land Tenancy in Sindh'*, *'The Horticulture Advancement Activity'*, *'Australia Balochistan Agribusiness Programme Phase I and Phase II'* and *'Empowering Women in Balochistan through Agri-entrepreneurship'*.

The key takeaway from these experiences is how crucial gender quality is to achieve sustainable development as societies recover from major shocks such as the impact of climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic.

¹⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iETAV2B3J9o>

¹⁵ FAO. 2023. Gender Spotlight Initiative – Pakistan. Rome. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cc5970en>

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