

RURAL WOMEN IN FISHING COMMUNITIES

CIRDAP's Action Program

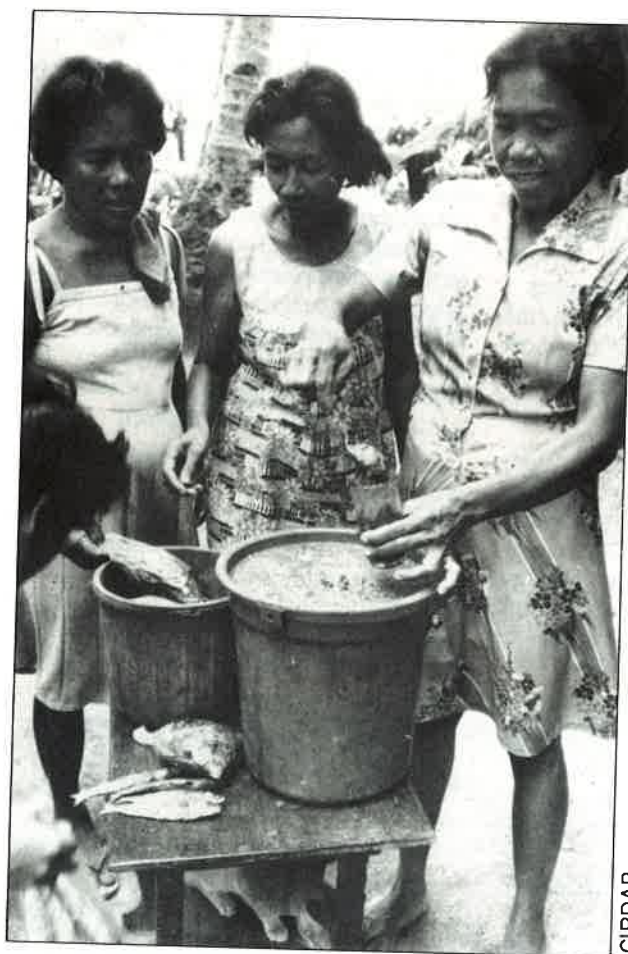
In 1984 the Centre on Integrated Rural Development for Asia and the Pacific (CIRDAP) launched a 3-year action research project on Rural Women in Fishing Communities in Indonesia, Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Vietnam with financial support from the Government of Japan and technical support from the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). The participating countries designated agencies to execute the project and coordinate with national authorities and CIRDAP.

The project sought to develop a model of participatory data collection on women's role and activities in fishing communities as a basis for planning, monitoring and evaluation; and to help them improve their living and working conditions by establishing pilot action projects to provide inputs and services to help meet their basic needs.

The program was operationalized by: (a) conducting socioeconomic surveys to construct a primary database on households and the activities of women in selected villages; (b) forming target groups based on the collected data; (c) providing on-the-job training; (d) organizing village seminars and in-country workshops; (e) identifying potential leaders of women's groups; and (f) monitoring and evaluating the project. The projects have been by and large successfully completed in the participating countries.

The Consultation

In January 1988, CIRDAP convened an expert consultation to assess the action research project. The project coordinators, fisheries experts, social scientists and representatives from several organizations participated.



Women of Romblon Province, Philippines, preserve surplus from an abundant catch by salting and making fish paste.

Country profiles of small-scale fisheries development, presented during the consultation, revealed that, in general, experiences and conditions of small-scale fishermen vary from country to country. For example, in Bangladesh, fisheries resources are underexploited; while in

Indonesia

In Indonesia, the project was implemented in eight villages in West Nusa Tenggara Province. Information on the

Malaysia, overexploitation is causing concern.

Despite the differences, there are many underlying similarities. First, fisheries, as a whole, constitute a major sector of the national economy in terms of supply of cheap protein and absorbing a large segment of the population. In turn, small-scale fisheries dominate the fishing sector in terms of the total fish production and employment generation. Second, small-scale fisheries, in general, face problems of inadequate capital, low productivity, low levels of improved technology in catching, handling and processing fish and weak organizational bases. Third, government measures, in most cases, fall short of providing benefits to the small-scale fisherfolk.

During the consultation, a representative from each participating country presented the activities and impact of the action research project as implemented in their respective countries.

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Fisherwomen of West Lombok, Indonesia pose with CIRDAP project workers.

women's socioeconomic and demographic situation, and their developmental needs were collected and analyzed. Rural women were trained in fish preservation and processing, credit, public health, child care, cooperative management and participation in community development. To improve their economic situation, they organized themselves and engaged in fish marketing and fish processing.

The project was considered successful, particularly in augmenting household income and raising the women's level of participation in organizational activities.

Philippines

The National Council on Integrated Area Development (NACIAD) implemented and coordinated the project in the Philippines. Sixty two women from three fishing villages in the municipality of Looc, Romblon Province, received financial assistance and training to undertake projects on fish processing, preservation and marketing, etc. Profits earned helped to augment their incomes. The beneficiaries also acquired information on community development, health and sanitation, education and fund-raising.

Sri Lanka

In Sri Lanka, the Welfare Division of the Ministry of Fisheries was designated as implementing agency. Thirty women from three villages: Thaldeka, Mankuliya and Paiyagala, participated in various stages of project implementation such as conduct and analysis of baseline survey, skills training, refresher courses, on-the-job-training and project monitoring.

Through a seed fund established out of the CIRDAP grant, the women were able to take up income-generating projects like

fish processing, fish drying, and marketing, these being the most appropriate enterprises on account of the abundance of fish in these villages.

Some constraints affected the degree of involvement of the beneficiaries. These included the status of women, a low literacy rate, and the lack of integration and social coordination into the project. Also, the women leaders needed training



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Filipina fisherwomen marketing their catch.

on bookkeeping and basic project management.

Vietnam

In Vietnam, the National Sea Products Export Corporation (SEAPRODEX) implemented the project in the Western

and Eastern Vien An villages. These had been ravaged during the war and lacked basic infrastructure and services. The focus was to improve the living standards of war-widows undergoing financial difficulties. From the CIRDAP grant, loans were given to 28 women whose families were recipients of land for shrimp farming.

Difficulties included poor communication and transportation, undetermined ecological effects of shrimp culture, and low literacy rates and cultural awareness of the people. Despite these, the project helped the families to manage stable jobs and had a favorable impact on the social and cultural life of the fishing families.

A total of 310 rural women participating as cooperators were beneficiaries of the action research project. Socioeconomic data revealed that all the selected communities were below the poverty level.

These traditional communities faced a host of occupational problems like lack of credit facilities; uncertain sources of fish stocks; and inadequate knowledge and technical skills to improve their standard of living. Other problems were the lack of health and sanitation services, water supply, transportation, education and other basic facilities.

Through the project, training courses and workshops were conducted in the villages. Loans enabled the beneficiaries to undertake projects on fish processing, marketing, drying, salting, smoking, fermentation, fish paste making, and fish/shrimp culture. They realized their capabilities as income-earners and decision-makers and substantially contributed to the development of their families and communities.

Local and national development authorities expressed appreciation for the

results by suggesting that the project expand its coverage.

The project has generated a participatory development model both for data collection on women's role and activities in selected fishing communities; and for monitoring and evaluation of the project activities.



Vietnamese women sun-drying a harvest of cultured prawns.

Recommendations

Based on the project results, the consultation recommended that government policies and programs explicitly recognize the specific needs of rural women in fishing communities. Some of these needs are: (i) opportunities for knowledge and skill acquisition; (ii) support and extension services including credit and marketing facilities; (iii) viable economic organizations to institutionalize and sustain their role in development programs; (iv) recognition of their important contribution to the development of the family and the fishing community; (v) sensitization of different disciplines, donor agencies and the scientific community to the problems of rural women in fishing communities; and (vi) continuous monitoring of the impact of policies and programs on rural women in fishing communities.

The summary of recommendations, for the attention of CIRDAP member countries and CIRDAP, are as follows:

1. The project is important in enlisting the direct participation of fisherwomen in development activities. The project strategies should be reflected in the national policies and programs of the government.

2. Greater attention should be given to training components. Village seminars, workshops and training programs should be periodically followed-up.

3. The success of such an action research project largely depends upon inter-agency coordination and strong support services/policies. The project should be supported by community-level agencies and sustained by a coordinating council.

4. Donor agencies are urged to provide financial support to continue and expand the project to other communities.

5. Income-generating projects should be supported with improved technologies to foster greater financial results.

6. Such action research projects should also take up health, nutrition, education and social services; and also focus on other aspects such as environmental protection and cultural participation of the fishing communities.

7. An institutional mechanism should be established at the village level to continuously monitor and evaluate project activities using participatory methods.

8. The long-term success of any community action program could also be attributed to local-level organizations and their supports. Working with these groups and non-government organizations (NGO's) should be encouraged.



Condensed from a January 1988 report, *Rural Women in Fishing Communities: An Action Programme*, by the Centre on Integrated Rural Development for Asia and the Pacific (Chameli House, 17 Topkhana Road, GPO Box 2883 Dhaka, Bangladesh) in collaboration with the National Council on Integrated Area Development (FBI Bldg., 60 Timog Ave., Quezon City, Philippines).

Letter to the Editor

Fish introductions

How right you are about the emotional nature of the subject of fish introductions (Naga, October 1988). To a person who started on the other side of the fence opposing introductions (Fernando 1956, Ceylon J. Sci. 7(2):201-217), through a long apprenticeship of learning about fish introductions both at first hand and through literature and meetings, I feel that our perspective on fish introductions is crucial to arriving at a scientific appraisal of fish introductions worldwide. There is a curious dichotomy in North American thinking. They do not approve of fish introductions without a strict protocol, but some Americans have been responsible for the most destructive fish introductions - L. Titicaca, L. Atitlan (Black bass mercifully died out in Lake Lanao).

When I saw the Barel et al. paper on the Nile perch introduction, I asked one author why at least one native African had not been involved. I suppose South Africans are also native Africans. It would have been more balanced if somebody from Jinja had been involved in that paper.

Incidentally I do not agree completely with Acere's analyses although I can see his point. I think the issue is more complex than what one was led to believe in the Barel et al. paper. We (Fernando and Holcik 1982; Hydrobiologia 87: 127-140) added a strong caveat about introduction of fish species to lakes with old and highly diversified fish faunas. Maybe we were not cognizant of the fact that these diverse faunas are more likely to buffer the effects of predators than lakes with indigenous but less diverse faunas coupled with weak lacustrine faunas like Lake Titicaca (*Cyprinodontidae*) and L. Lanao (*Cyprinidae*).

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