

Gender Learning Brief: Mangroves Asia – Cambodia

October 2024

Highlights:

- Women’s livelihood options in the Community Fisheries (CFis) are more constrained than men’s, with negative implications for women’s climate-resilience. Support is needed to create profitable livelihood options for women that meet their needs and preferences.
- Women’s participation in CFi management is limited due to social beliefs and cultural conventions that favor men’s place in leadership roles. Gender sensitivity interventions and targeted knowledge-building for women can help enhance women’s role in CFi management.
- Enhancing women’s role in natural resource management is important for promoting healthy mangrove ecosystems, as evidenced by multiple initiatives in Southeast Asia to support women’s role in mangrove rehabilitation and conservation.
- Findings from the present Learning Brief provide initial information to support a Parliamentary field visit to collect additional data on opportunities and resources needed to strengthen CFis and promote healthy mangrove ecosystems through gender equality.

Background

Community Fisheries (CFis) in Cambodia have been instituted as an integrated community-based intervention to safeguard aquatic ecosystems. Integral to the CFi concept are local community involvement in mangrove restoration, mangrove conservation awareness, and economic incentives for sustainable management. As of 2018, 516 CFi have been created, comprised of 475 inland-based and 41 in the coastal areas, with a total membership of 332,168 individuals.

Although Cambodia’s Community Fisheries Management sub-decree encourages women’s leadership, recent field research with coastal CFis suggests that women’s meaningful participation is limited. The lack of female participation is concerning for mangrove ecosystem health: including women in governance decreases stresses on ecosystems and incorporating gendered ecological knowledge increases conservation efforts.¹ This Learning Brief highlights findings from a baseline survey² and qualitative assessments³ Landesa’s local partners carried out in five CFis in Kampot

¹ Chambon, M., Miñarro, S., Alvarez Fernandez, S. et al. 2024. A synthesis of women’s participation in small-scale fisheries management: why women’s voices matter. *Rev Fish Biol Fisheries* 34, 43–63. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11160-023-09806-2>

² Landesa. 2024. Baseline survey report: Mangroves Asia – Cambodia. Phnom Penh, Cambodia: Landesa.

³ Chrin, Bunsamkaneka. 2023. Background assessment report: Climate-mangrove conditions, community capacities, programmatic environment, and GESI considerations in the pilot sites, Lok Kresna. Phnom Penh, Cambodia: Landesa.

Chrin, Bunsamkaneka. 2023. Background assessment report: Climate-mangrove conditions, community capacities, programmatic environment, and GESI considerations in the pilot sites, MFMA. Phnom Penh, Cambodia: Landesa.

and Preah Sihanouk Provinces, as part of a Coastal Livelihoods and Mangroves project, to provide a glimpse into gender inequities in opportunities to manage CFIs, including the root causes of inequities related to social norms and local beliefs. The barriers limiting women's CFI participation and leadership are also limiting their livelihoods, natural resource rights, and contributions to climate action. The research and project experience in the five CFIs provide insights into effective interventions and pathways for strengthening CFIs through gender equality.

Methods

Landesa's local partners conducted a baseline survey administered over November-December 2023 with 232 people (118 women; 114 men) in 5 CFIs. We also conducted qualitative assessments, including key informant interviews and mixed-gender focus group discussions, with 59 CFI members and primary stakeholders (14 women; 45 men) from across the project sites over October 2022-June 2023.

The 5 CFIs include Koh Kresna CFI Lok Community Fishery, located in Resey Srok Khang Lec, Kampong Trach district, Kampot province; the other four targeted CFIs (Bantey Prey CFI, Samrong CFI, Chumpou Khmao CFI, and Beng Roeung CFI) are located in Prek Kampong Smach Marine Fishery Management Area (MFMA), Prey Nop District, Preah Sihanouk Province.

Gender, coastal livelihoods, and climate-resilience

Although CFI-based livelihoods are important for both women and men, women's livelihood options in the CFI are less lucrative and less climate-resilient than men's.

- Findings from the survey and qualitative assessment show that livelihoods dependent on CFI resources are an important part of the livelihood portfolios for women and men across the CFIs. Women help their husbands collect fish or crab near the mangroves and shallow sea areas. They can also engage in activities such as ecotourism hospitality and post-harvest fishing activities (i.e., sorting fish for selling after the catch; peeling crab). In comparison, besides shallow sea fishing, men engage in deep-sea fishing, fishing operations, and using boats to travel to fishing areas far distanced from the community.
- The livelihood options available to women in the CFI are minimally productive due to poor value chain infrastructure and market challenges, while men's tend to be more lucrative.
- Social beliefs highlighting fishing as hazardous for women and depicting women as supporters of fishing activities, but not as fisherfolk themselves, limit women's economic options in the CFIs. When extreme weather events cause mangrove loss and ecosystem degradation, men can shift into deep sea fishing in response, but women cannot.

Gender and CFI governance

Findings from the qualitative assessment also show that social norms and local beliefs constrain women's meaningful representation and participation in the CFIs.

- Social beliefs that men are the sole heads of their families lead to CFI leadership and decision-making roles being assigned to men. In comparison, women have less opportunity to participate in CFI meetings and related activities, let alone have voice in decision-making, because of homecare responsibilities, husbands' disapproval of wives attending meetings, or women feeling less competent to lead due to less formal education.

- Consequently, although the Community Fisheries Management sub-decree states that women shall be encouraged to stand as candidates for election to the Community Fisheries Committee, the number of women committee members in practice is low.
- Moreover, those women who are on CFi committees tend to hold administrative and financial management roles and are limited from leadership positions.
- Traditionally responsible for homecare-- including cooking, cleaning, childcare and ensuring the overall well-being of the family-- women often manage their work at home alongside income-generation. Consequently, women tend to participate in CFi meetings and resource management activities if they concern their livelihood activities and do not require travel far from their home. If women also receive a financial incentive, their husbands are more likely to approve of their participation in the activities.

Social restrictions and limited mobility can inhibit women's access to information important for effective CFi management, further limiting women's opportunities to contribute to CFi management and governance.

- Survey results show that women understand the rules for living and working in the CFi; however, women may have less knowledge of issues related to broader management of the CFi, such as strength of the CFi boundaries and outsider violations of CFi rules.
- For example, a substantially higher proportion of women than men are unsure of the likelihood of outsider violations of CFi rules, including pollution of a mangrove area (through private aquaculture/industry waste or other), fishing illegally, and cutting down a mangrove tree.
- Women's lack of information can be due to their limited mobility and restricted opportunity to engage with others across the CFi through meetings and other related activities.

Women and mangrove rehabilitation and conservation

Other findings from Southeast Asia show that supporting women's role in mangrove management, including rehabilitation and conservation, can help promote healthy mangrove ecosystems and women's livelihood development.

- With government and NGO support, the Women's Union in Tien Lang district in Vietnam has played a fundamental role in mangrove planting and community awareness-raising on the multiple benefits of mangroves.⁴ The expertise they have gained in mangrove planting has also facilitated their involvement in seedling nursery businesses.
- Community-wide gender-awareness trainings, along with additional interventions to promote women's meaningful participation in a community-based ecological mangrove restoration project in South Sulawesi, Indonesia, have led to the development of "Womangrove" groups who participate in decision-making on local mangrove resource use and management.⁵

⁴ USAID. 2017. Why gender matters in sustainable coastal resource management within Vietnam's mangrove forests. Our Coast Our Future Pilot Brief no. 1.

⁵ Brown, B., Fadillah, R., Nurdin, Y., Soulsby, I., & Ahmad, R. 2014. Case study: Community based ecological mangrove rehabilitation (CBEMR) in Indonesia. *S.A.P.I.E.N.S*, 7(2). Retrieved from <http://sapiens.revues.org/1589>

- A Fisheries, Coastal Resources, and Livelihood project in the Philippines supported women's leadership in sea patrol groups and promoted women's livelihood development in an aqua-based business school.⁶ Women participants learned how to add value to local seaweed products, invested in a processing center, and planted mangroves to protect coastal areas against storm damage.
- A focus of Landesa's Coastal Livelihoods and Mangroves project in Cambodia is gender-equitable training for women and men CFI members on mangrove nursery management and planting, among other interventions, to support and enhance women's role in stewardship of the mangrove ecosystem.

Gender and the Landesa-led Coastal Livelihoods and Mangroves project

Landesa's ongoing Coastal Livelihoods and Mangroves Project includes efforts to improve the equity of CFI governance through developing women's leadership, advocacy skills, and public speaking. For example, the project facilitates networking opportunities for women CFI members to promote their interaction with women from other CFIs, enrich their understanding of the CFI's significance, and foster a sense of solidarity and community among women. Over the course of the last year the project has supported 150 women CFI members to participate in district- and provincial-level CFI networks' meetings and events in Preah Sihanouk province. The project also provides capacity strengthening to women and men CFI members on mangrove nursery management and mangrove planting and works with community members to identify viable livelihood investment options.

Conclusions

Findings from recent field research in five CFIs in Kampot and Preah Sihanouk provinces shows that women often have fewer viable livelihood options in CFIs than men due to social views defining gender-appropriate economic pursuits. Restrictive societal norms hinder women's ability to respond to climate change and explore economic diversification opportunities through current CFI-related livelihoods.

Women's contributions to CFI management and overall participation are constrained by cultural conventions that define women's and men's roles. Women also lack important information for CFI management concerning strength of the CFI boundaries and non-member infractions of CFI rules.

Supporting women's role in mangrove management can help promote healthy mangrove ecosystems. Such efforts require facilitating women's opportunities to participate in mangrove rehabilitation and conservation and promoting sustainable livelihood development that aligns with women's needs and preferences.

Suggestions:

⁶ IFAD. 2022. Women-led sea patrols in the Philippines are protecting livelihoods and the ocean. Retrieved from <https://www.ifad.org/en/w/rural-voices/women-led-sea-patrols-in-the-philippines-are-protecting-livelihoods-and-the-ocean>

To create more equitable, inclusive, and sustainable community fisheries that empower women and address barriers preventing women in target areas from fully participating, government and relevant stakeholders can take the following actions:

- Promoting alternative, more profitable livelihood options for women, including skills training, financial support, and market access.
- Increasing women's participation and leadership in CFi management through leadership trainings, peer support, male and female champions, and other strategies to challenge gender-discriminatory social norms; also, raising coastal communities' recognition of the value of women's work in fishery sectors from pre- to post-harvest stages.
- Knowledge-building among CFi members, especially women, on how to monitor, analyze, and report the causes and status of CFi resource degradation through activities such as community research and journalism to better equip women and men to equally engage in CFi resource management & governance.
- Enhancing gender mainstreaming in fisheries policies and regulations: These include ensuring gender equality provisions in the sub-decree on CFi management and other relevant policies, setting quotas for women in community fishery committees and leadership positions, and developing gender-responsive management plans and monitoring systems.
- Including gender equity principles in the fisheries legal framework, such as by amending the Fisheries Law to require gender-responsive practices, allocating dedicated funds for gender equality, and monitoring the implementation of gender equity in policies and programs through organizing field visits or other data collection activities.