Gendered experiences in small-scale aquaculture in Myanmar: Implications for programs in the community

Authors: Surendran Rajaratnam, Chan Chin Yee, Nhuong Tran and Naw Tha Ku Paul

Introduction

- Myanmar's small-scale aquaculture sector has the potential to improve fish consumption, increase incomes, and reduce expenditure on purchasing fish products for rural communities.
- However, gender inequalities, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the security situation in Myanmar have impacted the lives and livelihoods of people involved in the aquatic food system.

Aim

The gender study was conducted as part of the SPAITS project in Myanmar to examine how gender norms and relations influence the participation and benefits of aquaculture interventions.

Methodology

- Qualitative case study methodology
- Due to COVID-19 and security-related restrictions this study was conducted via phone interviews.
- A team of researchers in Myanmar was trained virtually on the question guide & mobile phone interview.



Method	Participants	Number
Key-informant phone interview	Men village/community leader	4
In-depth phone interview	Women fish farmers	10
In-depth phone interview	Men fish farmer	10

Findings

Here are some of the major findings:

1 Access to and control over resources

- Common resources (e.g., water bodies) within their family are accessible to all and are not differentiated by gender.
- Women and men were found to have different levels of access to productive resources (e.g. knowledge, technologies, ponds, seeds and inputs, fishing grounds, fishing gear and credit) in different social classes.
- Intangible resources such as social capital & information were found to be gendered:
  - Men were found to have better access to knowledge - through training from governmental and non-governmental organisations.

> "I go to the training when my husband is busy with other things. If the training is held in a nearby location, I attend it; but if it is held in a township, my husband attends it. (Women, 56 years old)"

2 The roles and responsibilities of women and men in small-scale aquaculture

- Women are predominantly responsible for their household chores; feeding the fish, monitoring it & the pond as part of their daily aquaculture activities.
- Also there are no roles which were mentioned to be not conducted by women in the community in aquaculture especially when needed.
- In some circumstances, such as illness and other emergencies, either gender can take over the responsibilities of the other to keep their fish farming activities are on track.

> "There are no unusual jobs for women. We also don't assign separate tasks to different gender. Because my spouse and I share the same tasks, it's hard to bring out the differences. However, due to my knee injury, I can now assist with managing things from home. So, my husband assists in putting lime, water pumping, household chores, and fish sales (Women, 60 years old)"

3 Gender relations & their decision-making in small-scale aquaculture

- Women make decisions about household finances and the distribution and consumption of fish.
- They are also involved in a variety of fish farming activities, including marketing the fish they produce - they are in a position to make decisions about these activities.

> "My wife mainly decides about family consumption, livelihood, and selling the products. We don't take any advice from other people regarding the family's business. Even if we have different views, my wife can do the better job in selling the products because she is expert in that. (Man, 62 years old)"

4 Other constraints faced in small-scale aquaculture

- Sustaining fish farming - poorer community members can't afford the investment, typically over a period of six months.
- Registration of land for fish farm is challenging for some.
- Lack of markets for expansion, especially larger markets - middle class farmers.
- Substance abuse & gambling - alcoholism and lottery games hinders their capacity to engage and sustain the aquaculture.

> "Men, love drinking alcohol, and their actions might impact the business. On the other hand, women can focus well on the business and do no negative things that could affect the business (Women, 51 years old,"

Key recommendations

- Identifying different groups of women and men and providing them with social and technical support based on their interest and needs through a gender integrative interventions/programs.
- Providing fish farmers with access to key inputs and market linkages are key to ensure their engagement in small-scale aquaculture remains sustainable.
- Identify and address social issues in the community that impacts the lives of women and men, including those who are engaged in aquaculture.

Limitations

- Limitations of using mobile phone interviews - challenges of building rapport with the informants, with network connections, the limited time required to conduct the interview.
- Rapport building may not have been as effective as in-person interviews if it was conducted.
- The number of informants in this study was small, and the duration of the call was shorter than in typical face-to-face interviews.