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# WOMEN

**IN FISHERIES  
VALUE CHAINS**  
IN SOUTHEAST ASIA  
AND THE CORAL  
TRIANGLE REGION





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# **WOMEN IN FISHERIES VALUE CHAINS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA AND THE CORAL TRIANGLE REGION**



## About this book

The purpose of this Coffee Table Book is to raise awareness on the importance of promoting Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) within the fisheries sector in Southeast Asian and the Coral Triangle Regions. Stronger attention to GESI considerations can be a key driver of a diverse food supply chain and sustainable economic growth. Women make up half of the region's fisheries workforce, paid or unpaid, and they are often overlooked. This book visually presents the lived experiences of women in fisheries, who play significant roles in the fisheries value chains and in their communities in the region.

By collating photographs and stories from various countries in the region, this Coffee Table Book recognizes the roles and lives of women who are involved in the various nodes of the fisheries value chain (fishing, processing, trading, and selling as well as in communities, environment, and livelihoods). All have stories to tell, and some are told in this book. This effort is our contribution to the body of knowledge related to women's work in the fisheries sector and to advocate for increased emphasis on integrating a gender and socially inclusive approach in fisheries projects and interventions, leading to actions and practices that will impact the sector positively today and in the future.

We use the term “fisheries value chain” to recognize the complex processes involved from harvesting/production of fish until the product reaches the consumer, including the efforts to add value to the products, and the power relationships at play at each node. The term “node” refers to each step that the fish product undergoes from harvesting to consumption.

The Women Leaders' Forum (WLF) of the Coral Triangle Initiative on Coral Reefs, Fisheries and Food Security (CTI-CFF) provided most of the stories and photos in this Coffee Table Book.



## About the USAID SUFIA LCD Activity



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The USAID Sustainable Fish Asia (SUFIA) Local Capacity Development (LCD) Activity aims to enhance the capacities of regional fisheries organizations in addressing the challenges of illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing practices in the Southeast Asian and Coral Triangle regions, and to assess the private sector landscape for increased investments in and adoption of sustainable fishing and fair labor practices. SUFIA LCD's Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) analysis of the fisheries sector in the Asia-Pacific and the organizational capacity assessments with its partners identified the need for more knowledge products and communication materials on GESI in fisheries and marine biodiversity in the region, using a variety of ways and materials for messaging, advocacy, and information campaigns within the organizations and externally. This is particularly important in the context of designing policies, implementing projects and initiatives, and addressing the challenges facing the fisheries sector, wherein women and men are involved at each node of the fisheries value chain.

## About the Women Leaders' Forum of the Coral Triangle Initiative on Coral Reefs, Fisheries and Food Security

The CTI-CFF Women Leaders' Forum (WLF) was established in May 2014 when CTI-CFF leaders called upon its six member countries (Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, and Timor-Leste) to actively engage and incorporate gender equality perspectives to achieve its goals and targets. It encouraged all its bodies and partners to integrate women as major stakeholders in its activities, and to document these actions to provide testament to, and serve as a model for, gender integration in marine resources management.

Through the activities of the CTI-CFF WLF, it is envisioned that coastal and marine resources have been and will continue to be more effectively managed due to increased engagement and empowerment of women in decision-making processes at all levels in the Coral Triangle region and in the various CTI-CFF bodies.

The CTI-CFF WLF involves a wide range of partners, and functions as a peer-learning network for women who are playing key leadership roles in sustaining the marine resources of the Coral Triangle region. Since its establishment and launch, the CTI-CFF WLF has been supported by USAID, the US Department of the Interior, and Coral Triangle Center, in collaboration with The Nature Conservancy, WWF, and Conservation International.

The CTI-CFF WLF initiated the development of CTI-CFF's Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) policy which was approved in December 2021 and is now in effect to be implemented throughout the programs and activities of CTI-CFF. The USAID SUFIA LCD is supporting CTI-CFF to socialize the GESI policy and develop implementing guidelines for their member countries and partners.



“An estimated 97 percent of these fishworkers live in developing countries, and **almost half of these workers are women.**”

Source: World Bank, FAO and WorldFish Center. 2012. Hidden Harvests: The Global Contribution of Capture Fisheries. Report No. 66469-GLB. Washington, DC: World Bank.



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“Fish is the main source of animal protein for billions of people worldwide. **More than 10 percent of the global population depends on capture fisheries and aquaculture.**”

Source: Food and Agriculture Organization, 2018



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Women are involved in every node of the fisheries value chain, with the majority working in pre- and post-harvest, cleaning, processing, packaging, selling and trading, while men largely do open sea harvest and off-shore cultivation.



# ROLES AND CONTRIBUTIONS OF WOMEN IN THE FISHERIES VALUE CHAIN AND COMMUNITIES







**Women do not usually participate in open sea fishing.** This is often due to cultural beliefs (including traditional domestic and child rearing responsibilities) and perceptions of their lack of physical strength, endurance, and ability to stay safe on a deep sea vessel.

However, women do play other roles as they work alongside the men in organizing boat trips, preparing supplies, obtaining financing prior to fishing trips, keeping the fort, and taking care of both productive and reproductive roles while the men are away at sea. Women are also active in buying the fish once they arrive at port.



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**When it comes to participation in aquaculture value chains, women's involvement is higher than in capture fisheries. In the seaweed value chains, women contribute significantly throughout the nodes from production to selling.**

Source: Worldfish <https://www.worldfishcenter.org/pages/why-gender-equality-matters-fisheries-aquaculture>





## Women help develop local blue economy through seaweed production and processing

*in Nusa Penida, Indonesia*

The Covid-19 pandemic has forced many local residents of Nusa Penida Island (near Bali) to rediscover the traditional work of seaweed farming. In Suana Village, a popular tourist destination on the east side of the island, local women created a small venture (Sari Segara Group) that makes and sells seaweed crackers. Sari Segara is run by 32 women who expanded the group's focus from selling dried seaweed into processing the raw material into higher value delicacies.



The current head of Sari Segara, Ni Wayan Sari Wariningsih, explained that the process of making crackers takes less time and is profitable, allowing members to complete their domestic tasks while still being able to take care of their seaweed farms and producing crackers on a part-time basis.

***“Making the cracker dough and cutting it can be done in 2-3 hours, but the drying process can take up to three days,”*** she said. The women are now looking to expand the market of their seaweed crackers all over Bali.

Jenette Cataluña aids local fishermen in preparing *Kappaphycus* sp. (farming seaweed) propagules.



## Leading by example: a woman public official in Central Luzon, Philippines inspires other women to get involved in fisheries work

Jenette Cataluña of the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources in Central Luzon has fished for as long as she can remember. She started working with this government bureau in 2011. She is a role model to women fisherfolk as she exhibits the important role that women play in the fisheries industry through her work in the communities. Aside from performing the scientific and technical aspects of her profession, she also encourages the women she meets to follow her example of performing tasks which are often perceived by society as reserved only for men. Ms. Cataluña believes that by doing this, she is not only fulfilling her task to improve the lives of the fisherfolk in her region, but also empowering the female members of the community to reach their potential.



## Enhanced roles of women in shrimp harvesting

*in East Java, Indonesia*

Some farmers in East Java, Indonesia, harvest shrimp using their bare hands. Using a traditional method called “raga/ragang”, farmers head into the pond, crouch down and gently catch the shrimp. Harvested shrimp are placed in a net called “Angkung” before transferring them into a woven basket for processing. Although traditionally done by men, women are increasingly playing a role in shrimp harvesting and throughout the entire production process.



Some women shrimp farmers have been applying the “raga/ragang” technique since they started shrimp farming. Unfortunately, shrimp harvests today are a lot leaner compared to years past, mainly due to emerging viral shrimp diseases, which affect production, supply, and income. Despite these challenges, the farmers remain positive and resilient in pursuing shrimp farming to support the needs of their families.

## Recognizing the diverse roles of women fisherfolk

*in Balanga, Bataan, Philippines*

Adora Sison describes herself as “an economically content fisher”. Although processing dried fish may be an undervalued job in society, she believes it is a noble one as it enables her to make a living, in addition to being a wife and a mother. Despite society’s perception that fishing is only for men, Adora’s engagement with the fishing industry is a living proof that that perception is not true. She is proud of women’s significant and diverse contributions to the fishing industry in the Philippines, and acknowledges that these are often unrecognized. Fishing has been her occupation for two decades now and she has made quite a good living out of it for her and her family.



## Women fisherfolk are the backbone of small-scale fisheries

This community has natural water sources for fishing, which is a traditional livelihood for the local fisherfolk. It is typical for them to create their own fishing gear. In addition, they started farming fish when the topography of the land was changed after the eruption of Mt. Pinatubo, which made the area flood-prone. Families adapted to their environment and started catching and growing fish in flooded areas by enclosing them with pond dikes. While men do the fishing and farming, the women make sure that fishing equipment such as rods and nets are in good condition in order to have a bountiful catch. Such practice makes these women the backbone of an efficient small-scale fisheries for food security of households and the community.





## Men and women net fishing at My Khe Beach

*in Da Nang, Vietnam*

Even though My Khe Beach is a tourist hotspot, residents would often come out to fish for food and to sell, especially in the afternoon. Unlike many fishing activities, men and women work together throwing the nets out, pulling the catch ashore, and selling fish right on the beach. Most of the fish caught are small, with the occasional larger-sized jellyfish. Although the work is physically demanding, many of the men and women fishing are over 50 years old.



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**Although evidence has shown** that women are predominantly involved in the processing, trading, and selling of fisheries products, they are also found mending nets, gleaning or foot fishing in the nearshore areas, and sorting and cleaning fish.





## Women play a critical role in sustaining Indonesia's blue swimming crab fisheries

Everyday, 47-year old Titi Swanti assists her husband in picking blue swimming crab (*Portunus pelagicus*) from the net before boiling and selling them to local processing plants. Titi is among the many women in Kuala Teladas Village, Lampung Province, Indonesia, who works as a blue swimming crab picker. Each woman can earn up to IDR 50,000 (USD 3.5) per day for sorting 10 kilograms of blue swimming crab. Women perform a major role in quality control so that all the catches can meet export standards. Blue swimming crab is a high value fisheries commodity and is Indonesia's third largest fishery export product in terms of value. Women also play a key role in water conservation as they utilize the stock used for boiling the crab in making tasty crab/fish crackers. These women were trained on product development and business management in blue swimming crab fisheries by the Coral Triangle Center (CTC) in collaboration with the Committee for Sustainable BSC Fisheries (KPPRB).



Women play significant roles in the buying and selling of fisheries products. Increasingly, women are starting and growing their own fisheries enterprises as well. This contributes greatly to employment and income to support their families and communities. However, women continue to face barriers in gaining access to financial resources and opportunities such as securing low interest loans, consolidating capital, and gaining market access.



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**Women selling seafood products** at the city markets. They are among the many women in Cambodia who are part of the market economy, contributing to their family's income, food security, and wellbeing.

## Women and girls play important roles in fish sauce production and trading

*in Kampot, Cambodia*

The women at Trapeang Ropov, a rural coastal fishery community in Kampot province, Cambodia, utilize available local resources, especially anchovies to produce tasty fish sauce, one of the most popular products in the country. Typically, the production takes around 8-12 months. The women are solely responsible for the production of the fish sauce, while the men help in planning the production processes. Young girls (usually their daughters) may also be involved in sorting and mixing fish, as well as in helping to check the cleanliness of the jars and in collecting the fish sauce. Through this, the young generation are learning and acquiring experiences in their family's fish sauce business.





## Women and their roles in fish processing

*at the Nam Hum Reservoir, Lao PDR*

Ms. Ween works from a makeshift shelter at the Nam Hum Reservoir area. While she used to get her products from fish re-sellers, she now buys the fish from the fishers directly. She got her start leading a women's fish processing group, but the group since broke up because most of the women started individual businesses. Ms. Ween has taken courses on seafood sanitation, hygiene,

marketing, and packaging – all in order to add value to products. Shortly thereafter, she began selling different types of dried, fermented, packaged, and cooked fish. One of her most popular dishes is Pla Thong (fermented fish wrapped in leaves), which she sells for 20 Baht a piece. Her increased income from selling processed fish supplements her husband's truck driver salary.

## Helen Eva Guzman: from Economist to Fishpreneur

*in Cagayan, Philippines*

A woman with formidable strength and intelligence, Helen Eva Guzman is known as Moana by residents of her hometown Claveria. With a degree in Economics, Ms. Guzman spent many years working overseas but returned to the Philippines in 2008 to take over the operation of their family's fish trading business. Her business employs six people and they sell large fish such as sliced blue marlin, dorado, red snapper and grouper. In addition to buying and selling fish, Ms. Guzman also finances open sea fishing trips.



## Women taking the lead in fish trading

*in Tam Quan, Vietnam*

In Tam Quan, central Vietnam, women are most present in tuna trading, and are often at the head of fish trading companies. Their husbands work to provide fuel and ice for the fishing vessels. These women work every morning at the market to be sure the tuna they buy is of good quality. They are the ones keeping the books, yet their power of decision making regarding the business is equal to that of their husband's.





## Women in shrimp processing

*in Sidoarjo, Indonesia*

Women workers process shrimp to prepare for packing in a processing plant in Sidoarjo, Indonesia. Women are the majority of workers in shrimp processing facilities in Indonesia. Despite this, women are under-represented in company leadership positions. The Asian Seafood Improvement Collaborative is partnering with small and medium-sized processing plants to increase gender equality and support women's rights. This includes encouraging access to leadership opportunities for women, as well as building a gender-responsive workplace through expanded maternity leave, changes to the hiring process, and childcare provision.

**Not only do they constitute a large share of global fish workers,** but women also play an important role in supporting their households and communities. Reproductive roles, such as domestic and familial responsibilities (caregiving, child-bearing, housework, managing family and household finances) and community work, naturally fall on the women, oftentimes reinforced by society due to traditional beliefs in gendered roles.

Source: FAO, 2020





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## Women fisherfolk

need to balance between their work and domestic roles. These roles should be recognized as they contribute greatly to food security and livelihoods of fishing households and communities.

## Empowering community women fishers

*in Kei Island, Indonesia*

*“My main job is looking after the household, but I also earn some income from processing fishery products, such as dried fish floss and dried salty fish. Our products have started to get us attention from the government at local and national levels.”*

*“Before that, nobody saw us as a fishing village with the potential to have a commodity of smoked fish and dried salty fish. We didn’t really process the fish. We only dried the fish on the wall, roof, or water tank. We now work wearing aprons, face masks, and gloves. I can proudly say we know how to make sure the area is clean, hygienic and organized for processing fish.”*





### Siti Boy Naba Rahanyaan

is 31 years old. She was born in Ngan Village in Kei Island, a remote fishing village in Indonesia's Maluku Province.



“As women, we are always associated with domestic work,

but right now we can do public speaking because we were trained well by **SeaNet\***. The women from Ngan Village can lead and speak more about fishery issues because we have concrete things to prove. We are no longer shy at the women group meetings.

Instead, we are brave enough to promote our products before the Head of Subdistrict and other women leaders.”

Siti Boy Naba Rahanyaan



**Remarks(\*):** The SeaNet Project was funded by the Australian Government and implemented by the Coral Triangle Center and Tierramar between 2017 to 2019. It has paved the way for the introduction of new sustainable income sources for fishing communities in program implementation sites, resulting in 80% increase of income of women participating in post-harvest livelihoods project, through increasing the market value of low-value fish stocks, opening new markets for fish products in cities across Indonesia.

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## Women's participation

throughout the small-scale fisheries value chain and their lives in the communities are closely intertwined with the biodiversity and the sustainability of the marine and coastal environment.





## Women in fisheries and their livelihood

*in Atauro Island, Timor-Leste*

The reefs around Atauro Island in Timor-Leste hold the world's highest number of reef fish species. A biodiversity survey in the waters of Atauro Island, situated 36 kilometers north of Timor-Leste's capital Dili, revealed that the Island hosts the highest average fish diversity globally. However, many of the reefs around Atauro Island have been damaged due to human activities. Women in Atauro Island are connected to the abundant and biodiverse reefs through their involvement in small-scale fisheries, fish processing, fish selling, and seaweed farming to generate income for their families, underscoring the impact of marine protection to the community's livelihoods.



## Women and fishing

*in the Solomon Islands*

A woman in Utupua Island, Temotu Province, Solomon Islands, spends her day out in the coral reefs, fishing for her family (mostly subsistence). Women in Utupua are active fishers like their male counterparts. Fishing is a main activity for them as the Island is rugged. Women are faced with limited access to land resources so they spend most of their time out at sea.

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## Women in CBFM

*in Mehulio Community, South Malaita Province,  
Solomon Islands*

In community-based fisheries management (CBFM) activities in Malaita province, Solomon Islands, girls and women are seen as important participants as boys and men. This is because they also play important roles in coastal fisheries as fishers, fish vendors, and managers of household income, among others. Their contributions to discussions are seen as important as that of their male counterparts because they are also actors in fisheries management. Therefore, although Malaita community considers men more important than women in decision making, in every CBFM interventions, there have to be women representatives so their views and thoughts could be captured. The women participate in CBFM training and they are able to express their views and thoughts on management of their fisheries resources for the present and future generations.



Women of Mehulio community in South Malaita Province, Solomon Islands participating in resource management training.

By the road, stalls operated by women sell Lokan (*Geloina polymesoda*) and other bivalves gleaned locally.

## Setiu wetlands' diverse small scale fishery: a communal way of life

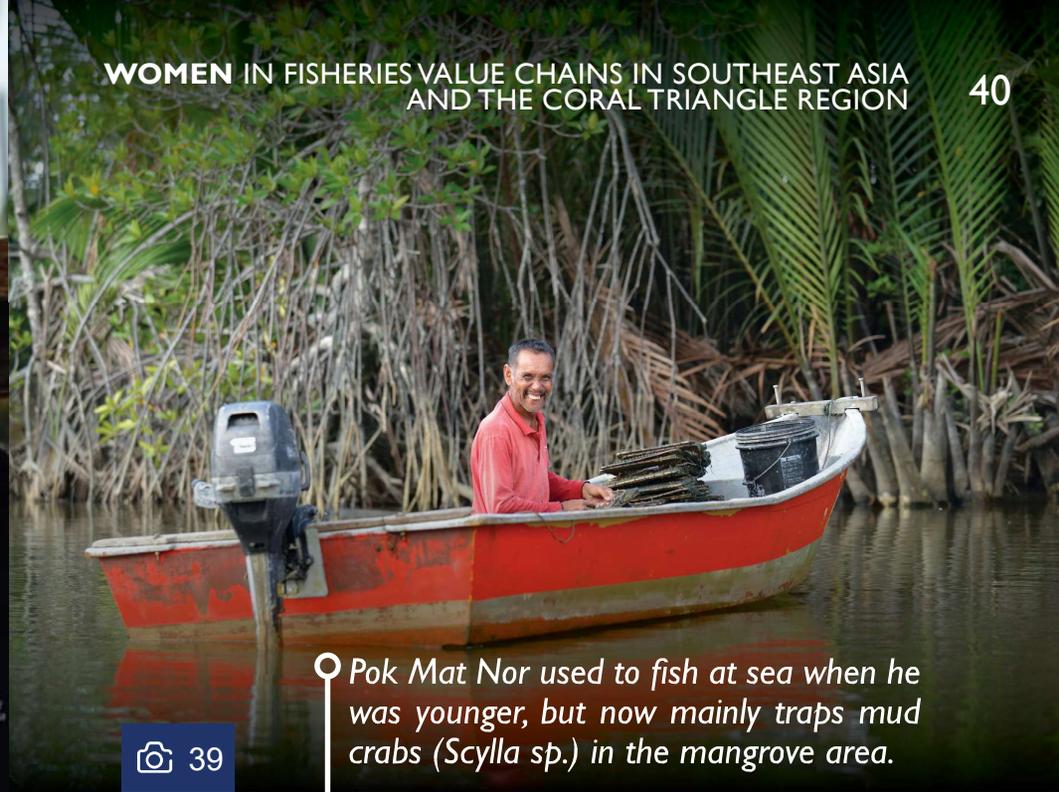
*in Terengganu, Malaysia*

Living between the sea and the coastal hills of Northeast Terengganu, the people of Setiu Wetlands are representative of Peninsular Malaysia's East Coast traditional fishing communities. Everyone, from children to the elderly, both men and women, contributes towards their extended family's livelihoods. The men start to fish at a young age and retire well in their 70s, while the women perform foot-fishing (gleaning) and handle post-harvesting activities: fish processing and selling. Their children also help the family after school and during the holidays. Unable to fish, the elders help mend the nets while sharing their fishing tales, transferring their knowledge and skills to the next generation.



Fatimah is very proud of her Belacan Setiu, made from the locally harvested Udang baring, a krill (*Acetes sp.*) that seasonally occurs in abundance right after the monsoon season.

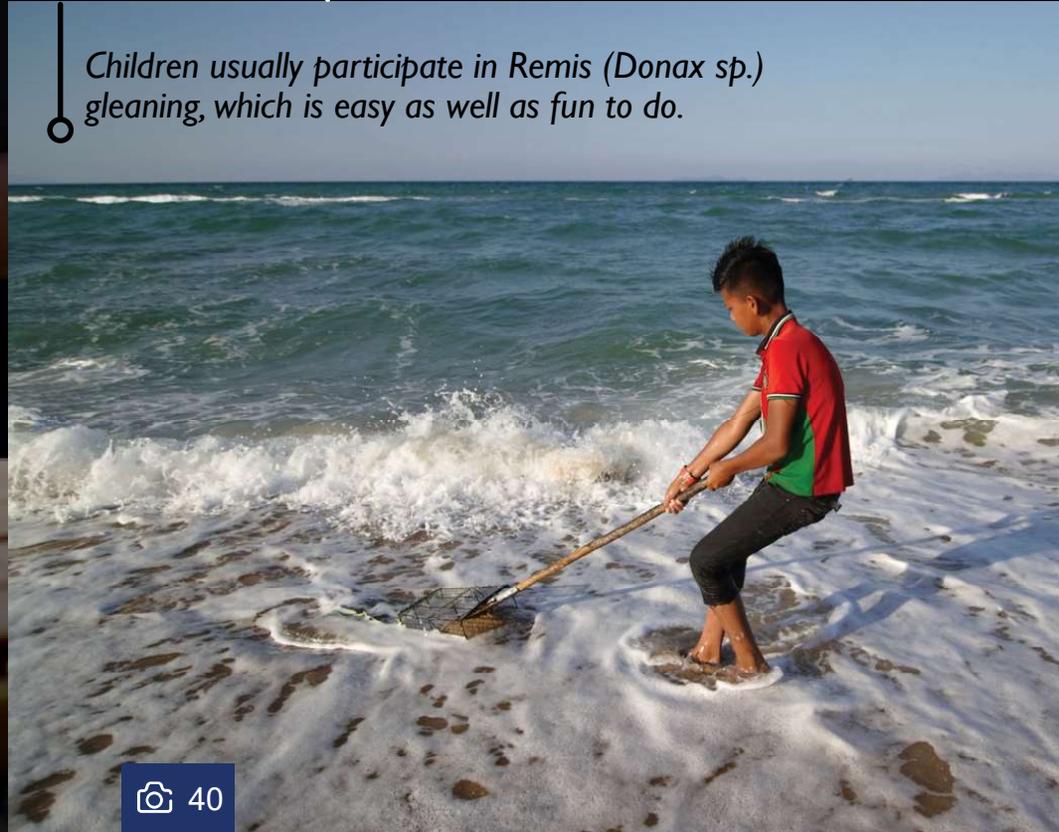
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Pok Mat Nor used to fish at sea when he was younger, but now mainly traps mud crabs (*Scylla sp.*) in the mangrove area.

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Children usually participate in Remis (*Donax sp.*) gleaning, which is easy as well as fun to do.



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## Women leading coastal conversation activities

*at the Taggat Beach, Cagayan, Philippines*

An advocate of fisheries conservation and a natural leader, Helen Eva Guzman was elected President of the Deputized Fish Wardens formed by the Department of Agriculture's Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources in Region 2. Her awareness on the importance of resource conservation was strengthened through her active involvement in conservation programs of DA-BFAR. During lean days, she initiates cleanup activities along the shore together with the youth. She believes that the youth must be taught the value of resource protection, conservation, and sustainable resource utilization. For Eva, the sea needs to be taken care of as coastal communities are dependent on it for their subsistence and livelihood.



The coastal municipality of Claveria in Cagayan is famous for its legendary rock formation which resembles an old man called “Lakay-Lakay” located in Taggat Beach. Helen Eva regularly initiates cleanup activities to keep its pristine condition and to appease the “spirits” that dwell in the rock formation.



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## Women fighting illegal, unregulated, and unreported fishing

*in Cagayan, the Philippines*

As partner of the Department of Agriculture's Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources in safeguarding the sea, a local woman-owned business serves as a coordinating center for law enforcement activities and rescue operations. Sightings of foreign vessels and local poachers are also reported by local businesses on the beach to the Navy, Coast Guard, and law enforcement agencies. The picture on the left shows illegal fishing nets being confiscated by the Philippine National Police Maritime officers following a report from a resident.

*Officers of PNP- Maritime and Helen Eva lead the confiscation of fine-meshed net illegally used as fishing gear at Taggat fishing ground which is prohibited under Section 93 of the Philippine Fisheries Code as amended by Republic Act 10654.*

## Fisherwomen adopting sustainable fisheries practices

*in Pakbara, Satun, Thailand*

Mrs. Echa Thintalay is a small-scale fisherwoman who sometimes goes with her husband to fish in the coast of the Andaman Sea in Pakbara, Satun Province, Thailand. Her main responsibility is to clean and prepare the daily fish catch, or process the catch into dried salted fish to sell in local markets. The fisherwomen in Pakbara communities play important roles in running small seafood businesses while their husbands go fishing. Mrs. Echa's family also adheres to sustainable fishing methods as they use sustainable fishing gears and avoid catching young fish to preserve marine resources.



Rindah Melsen (center)  
© WWF-Pacific/ Alfred Ralifo



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## Taking the lead towards ocean sustainability

Rinda Melsen is the President of the Nusatuva Women's Savings club, Solomon Islands. The club enables women to save money and start micro-businesses, which helps to secure household needs while reducing dependence on the ocean as their main or only source of income. Established in 2013, the initiative started off with a group of just five women in Nusatuva, and now boasts 70 members. As part of a network of 15 Women's Savings clubs that has grown to include over 1,000 women, Ms. Rindah represents the growing number of women leaders who are driving forward community-centric solutions towards ocean sustainability.



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More than 1,000 women are now part of the Women's Savings Clubs

MAKE WOMEN'S  
ROLES AND CONTRIBUTION  
IN THE FISHERIES VALUE CHAIN  
**VISIBLE**





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**“Since the beginning,** women have worked alongside men, run their own enterprises and carried out fisheries work that has complemented men’s. They also take care of their households and communities. It’s time to count and recognize all their work and help them achieve decent work and equal opportunities,” - Dr. Meryl J. Williams, Gender in Aquaculture and Fisheries Section of the Asian Fisheries Society (GAFS) Chair.

Source: “Women Work in Fisheries, Too!” webinar on 29 November 2021 organized by the Gender in Aquaculture and Fisheries Section of AFS (GAFS), the USAID SUFIA LCD Activity, the Central Institute of Fisheries Technology (ICAR-CIFT) and the Coral Triangle Initiative on Coral Reefs, Fisheries and Food Security (CTI-CFF) .





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## **Women's roles and participation in the fisheries value chain**

need to be recognized to enhance their legal and political rights, safety and welfare, and decision-making power.





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**The promotion of women's empowerment and participation,** as well as gender equality in the fisheries value chain, is a key driver of sustainable growth and food security in Southeast Asia and the Coral Triangle region.



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- The enhanced roles of women in shrimp harvesting in East Java, Indonesia
- Women in shrimp processing in Sidoarjo, Indonesia

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- Empowering women fisherfolk through fisheries technologies in Central Luzon, Philippines (Leezen Morten)
- Recognizing the diverse roles of women fisherfolk in Balanga, Bataan, Philippines (Leezen Morten)
- Women's roles in creating and mending fishing gears in Magalang, Pampanga, Philippines (Leezen Morten)
- Building her own fish trading business: Eva Guzman, a self-made “fishpreneur” in Cagayan, Philippines (Fatima Baceros, Aileen Silva)
- Women leading coastal conversation activities at the Taggat Beach, Philippines (Fatima Baceros, Aileen Silva)

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- Women help revive Blue Economy through seaweed production and processing in Nusa Penida, Indonesia
- Women play a critical role in sustaining Indonesia's Blue Swimming Crab fisheries
- Empowering Community Women Fishers in Kei Island, Indonesia (in collaboration with SeaNet project)
- Women in Fisheries and their Livelihood in Atauro Island, Timor-Leste

## Individual Contributors

- **Agnetha Vave-Karamui**, Ministry of Environment, Climate Change, Disaster Management & Meteorology, Solomon Islands: Women Fishers in Solomon Islands
- **Arlene Nietes Satapornvanit**, RTI International: Women and their roles in fish processing at the Nam Hum Reservoir, Lao PDR
- **Assaneth Buarafi and Peter Kenilorea**, Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources, Solomon Islands: Women in CBFM in Mehulio Community, South Malaita Province, Solomon Islands
- **Chin Leakhana**, Fisheries Administration, Cambodia: Rin Tith: Women and girls take part in fish sauce processing in Trapeang Ropov Village, Kampot, Cambodia
- **Jarina Mohd Jani**, Universiti Terengganu, Malaysia: Setiu Wetlands' diverse small scale fishery: a communal way of life in Terengganu, Malaysia

## Individual Contributors

- **Jia Ling Lim**, World Wide Fund for Nature: Taking the lead towards ocean sustainability
- **Rachel Sundar Raj**, Université de Liège, Belgium: Men and women taking part in catching fish at the My Khe beach, Da Nang, Vietnam; Women taking the lead in fish trading business in Tam Quan, Vietnam
- **Waraporn Raksaphram**: Fisherwomen adopting sustainable fisheries practices in Pakbara, Satun, Thailand

## Photo Contributors

Number	Contributor
35	Agnetha Vave-Karamui
44	Alfred Ralifo
45	Arlene Bax
1,4,7,20,21,23	Arlene Nietes-Satapornvanit
29,30,31	Coral Triangle Center/SeaNet Project
10	Danilo Lamyong, BFAR III
13	Diego Resubal, OPA Bataan
28	Elsye Takarendehang
2,3,5,6,19,32,47,48	Farid Maruf
11,12,26	Firman Nara/ Asian Seafood Improvement Collaborative
14	John Paul De Guzman
43	Mr. Kamphol Thintalay, Leader of Pak-Nam Small-Scale Fisheries Association, Satun Province Thailand
24,41,42	Lady Princess G. De la Peña
16,17	Lauren Bader
7,8,34	Marthen Welly/Coral Triangle Center
37,38,40	Mohamad Alias Shakri
36	Peter Kenilorea
15,25	Rachel Sundar Raj – Université de Liège, Belgium
22	Rin Tith, Trapeang Ropov Fisheries Community, Kampot, Cambodia
39	Suzairi Zakaria
33	Underwater Tribe/Coral Triangle Center
9,18,46	Yoga Putra/Coral Triangle Center

**Design and Illustrations:** Songphon Chindakhan

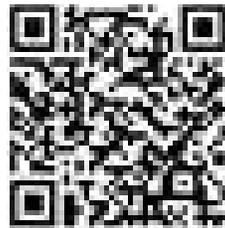
**Editorial Team:** Arlene Nietes Satapornvanit, Kullanit Nitiwarangkul, Mark Granius, Novena Rena Parengkuan



## **Women in Fisheries Value Chains in Southeast Asia and the Coral Triangle Region**

USAID Sustainable Fish Asia Local Capacity Development Activity

<https://www.rti.org/impact/usaidsustainable-fishing-program>





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