

Gender in the Western Region

Report on two week visit to ICFG program, 13 – 27 March 2010



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Cover Photo: Fish trader in Sekondi Harbour, Western Region, Ghana

Cover Photo Credit: Cambria Finegold

Field Visits

Visits were made to a beach landing site in Accra, and to fishing communities all along the Western region shore, from east of Takoradi to Half Assini in the West. Some common findings emerged from these visits and observations are similar to many made in the community reports compiled by FoN and CRC staff. Observations will be summarized first, followed by suggestions for further follow-up to clarify some important issues.

Observations

Gender division of labor: the gendered division of labor is quite clear in the fishing communities visited. Men fish, women process and market. However, at higher levels of marketing (i.e. internationally), men are also involved in fish trade. During my visit, I attempted to investigate the level of cooperation and collaboration between men and women. There is considerable diversity along the coast. In some instances, women reported that only a 'cash and carry' system was in operation for getting access to fish, others reported that they were able to buy on credit. The latter system seems to be more prevalent when the fisherman and the fish monger are married and during the bumper season.

On the boats, there is a division of labor based on age and experience and ownership of the means of production. On the beach, there is differentiation between more and less successful fish mongers and those who also work for the fish mongers in processing and in other aspects of the trade. Fishermen also differ in economic status according to ownership of canoes and gear and use of different crafts (motorized or not, size of canoe, etc). Fishermen also work under the governance of a chief fisherman and in many areas the fish mongers work under a Queen Mother. However, there are indications that in some areas the authority of Queen Mothers is undermined by the particularly successful and powerful fish mongers. Thus, among fishermen and fish mongers, there is social and economic differentiation, though it remains to be determined to what degree. My visit was short, so the analysis of the complexities of these divisions and the interactions between them remains superficial.

I did not have the opportunity to explore the gender division of labor in agriculture, nor the ownership of and access to land and other agricultural resources

Livelihoods: Fishing certainly fuels the economy along the Western Region coast. In the communities I visited, it was the primary livelihood activity with some supplementation by agriculture or by petty trade. The viability of this livelihood varies by community (e.g. those suffering from the algal bloom), and by season. Fish provides access to ready cash which is then used to purchase food, household items, and to pay for school and health expenses. Most of those I interviewed invest any profits back into their fishing or fish processing/trading business. A few of those interviewed, diversify and invest in buildings or in starting up shops that sell goods in the community. Many of the communities I visited lived in temporary shelters on the beach and any investment in housing was made in their 'home' communities from which they originally came (even if they migrated decades ago). In most of the communities I conducted interviews in, there were essentially two communities: a fishing community and an agricultural community. Each depends to some degree on the other, but the division is quite

apparent in most and is accompanied by a difference in ethnicity. This fact is also noted in the community assessments. Livelihoods in these areas are affected by access to markets, quality of roads, access to extension services, inputs (whether it is for agriculture or for fishing) and preservation methods. The further the community is away from Takoradi/Sehomdi, the more often women reported that smoked fish fetched a higher price and provided a more reliable income than selling fresh fish. This response differed in Sekondi/Takoradi due to access to markets and to cold storage. Firewood for smoking seems both available and to be a fairly reasonable cost (I saw stacks of it in very community I visited). The type of smoking ovens differed along the coast, from metal to clay and of varying sizes and construction types. In Sekondi, there had been a project in which improved smoking ovens were constructed and placed in a covered shed. All these ovens are in use and there are more, of the non-improved kind, outside the shed. The processors all hoped that more improved ovens and further sheds could be built. Fresh fish sellers complained that they had no access to loans or capital in order to erect cold storage facilities which they suggested would improve their business profitability.

Migration: A striking feature of the communities that I visited all along the coast was their ethnic diversity and composition. In the majority of the sites I went to, those involved in fishing or selling or processing were composed of Fante or sometimes Ewe who lived along the beach. Those who resided and did business just back from the beach were usually of another ethnic group, most commonly Nzema where I went. Clearly, there is much migration of Fante along the coast and many of those interviewed said they originally came from Central Region. Most of those I spoke with did not farm, though some said they had requested plots on a temporary basis (which in some instances lasted decades) from the Chief. It appears then that those involved in fishing have little access to productive resources away from the beach and no secure tenure in these areas (though this assertion needs ground truthing). This fact means that income diversification that involves access to land or even perhaps to a plot for business might be very difficult. My impression is that any investment in property is done in their home communities in other parts of coastal Ghana. While those residing on the beach lack access to land further inside the coast, relations between the two communities seem perfectly cordial. However, any interventions will have to take into account these social dynamics and how targeting one community might affect the other.

Governance: The strength and involvement of the chief fishermen appears to vary by community as does that of the Queen Mother. In some areas it appeared that their role was quite limited to the beach and landing site and in others they worked with the Chiefs and the Queen Mothers of the wider community in which they are located. It also appears that the Chief Fisherman and the Queen Mothers essentially look after their own and do not often come together over issues. Perhaps this situation varies by community. It was also apparent that those residing in the fishing communities had little interaction with the District Councils or anyone from fisheries. I discussed CBFM with people in nearly every landing site and most were very interested in it but only one Chief Fisherman seemed to have any knowledge of it. So, clearly CBFM never really got rolled out in these communities. When asked whether they thought they should and would be able to participate in such structures, the fish mongers all replied in the affirmative. It has taken Malawi many years to get government sign-off on devolution through participatory fisheries management so it is not surprising that a donor-instigated project on devolution has essentially stalled.

Problems in Fishing and Fish Selling: There seemed to be fairly universal agreement and recognition that light fishing is not a good practice. Both fishermen and fish mongers were mostly unanimous in this view. Fishermen complained that the practice drove the fish further out to sea and that it ultimately made the fish scarcer. The fish mongers complained about the quality of the fish from this and from the

use of dynamite and poison. The consensus about the problem was matched by a consensus about the solution. All interviewed wanted the government to make it clear that light fishing is illegal and so give the power to chief fishermen to enforce the law or get assistance from the Navy or Police to do so. They felt that without Central Government making such a law clear, they would have little hope of discouraging the practice or enforcing against it. Whether this is accurate or not, this is what was stated to me repeatedly.

Other issues that were raised included lack of access to capital to improve their businesses (whether it be fishing or processing/selling), the cost of inputs, and the algal bloom in areas further west.

Areas for further exploration and analysis

Livelihoods: For those living in beach communities, there appears to be very little other option than fishing or selling/processing fish and it is the trade with which they have grown up and have great experience. However, in talking to both young men and young women, many expressed an interest in doing something else if possible, but they had no ideas as to what. The older men and women had little interest in moving out of fishing as they felt it was too late to try something else.

Lack of land tenure by Fante living along the beach in many of these communities suggests that moving into other natural resource based livelihoods other than fishing will be quite difficult. Am not sure however how hard it is for land in these rural communities to be granted to those from other ethnic groups. In my experience elsewhere on the continent, it can be difficult to impossible.

Would be useful to know more about where those residing in communities along the beach invest their money if they have any to invest and what level of tenure they have in the communities from which they originally came.

The two groups in villages along the coast – those residing on the beach (often Fante) and those living inshore, have very different livelihoods strategies and very different abilities for diversification or improvement. Pigs are kept in many villages in the west and this could perhaps be developed further if there is sufficient market. In the community assessments, most complain of soil fertility issues on their farms but there is little information about what they currently do about it or why it is so infertile (perhaps it is naturally even before being cultivated). As interventions will presumably target both the fishing community and those living further inshore, it would be helpful to know more about the dynamics between the two groups, particularly over access to resources and about the farming systems found inland. In any assessment of these farming communities, data should be disaggregated by gender.

In addition, more information about decision-making concerning natural resources would be useful (again, with attention to gender differences). How are decisions made (i.e. cutting down trees, accessing water, allocating land), and by whom and who benefits from the exploitation of natural resources in these communities. There is some information on this already, but it stays pretty much on the surface.

Also with regards to ownership of resources, it appears that women do (though I am under the impression they are still the minority) own canoes, nets, motors, etc. It would be good to know more about patterns of ownership and how this influences exploitation of natural resources. Does the boat

owner dictate to the crew what to do and where to go or is the crew given freedom to make their own decisions? Also worth greater investigation are the hierarchies and divisions within boats and among fish mongers/processors. This information is important in designing interventions to understand how all might be affected and in different ways.

With declines in fishing catch, does the economic impact affect fishermen or fish mongers more? What strategies do fish mongers deploy when there are declines in fish? Do they travel longer distances? Do they process the fish differently? When I asked fishermen who makes more money from fish, almost all of them replied “the fish mongers”. When I asked the fish mongers, it was the same in reverse: “the fishermen”. It would be interesting to know the actual answer to this question in order to see how changes in the fishing industry affect men and women differently. Also, how much do people rely on informal credit to purchase both food and other necessities? And how much are fishermen and fish mongers able to save? And where do they invest money?

With regards to alternative income generation activities, in addition to the fish value chain study, it would also be important to assess the other main commodities (which might already be part of the plan). In addition, knowing how much fish contributes to the wider economy and livelihoods of people would be useful for policy purposes. Various ancillary businesses are focused on providing some good or service to the fishing communities and to fishers and processors/sellers.

Governance: My visit was too brief to get a sense of the dynamics of governance on the ground. How much do the Queen Mother and the Chief Fisherman work together on issues or do they stick to their own group? How does the chief fisherman interact with the Chief or District Assembly? And the same for the Queen Mothers. I got the impression that issues surrounding fishing do not get much attention by local government and the community assessments echo this observation and suggest even more strongly that the District Councils are not active in community issues.

It would be good to know more about whether women communicate their concerns to decision-makers or whether there is little opportunity. And, if given the opportunity, would women take the time to attend meetings and would they feel at ease doing so? My impression is that this would not be an obstacle but it is only an impression. Also, as fishermen are either out to sea or resting, it is hard for them to participate unless meetings occur on taboo days when they are not working.

Food security: I was not able to explore this issue, but it is important to know the degree to which fish contributes to food security both for those whose livelihood it is and for those who are farmers living in the same community. In addition, are there differences in consumption patterns between men and women, young and old, and small children? How much fish is given out free on the beach to children (as happens quite often in Malawi)? How does food security shift over the seasons from lean to bumper and what do people depend on when fish is scarce? On average, how many meals do people consume a day during the different seasons and is it affected by scarcity or lack of time to prepare meals given work demands?

Education: Given both my observations of children on the beach, together with the community assessments, the quality of both the education itself and of the educational facilities is quite low. This situation drives young people into fisheries as a better avenue for their future than education. The education provided does little to prepare students for secondary school or for jobs in the formal sector. Unemployment is mentioned in the assessments with considerable frequency. A multi-sectoral

approach might be able to bring in some of these educational issues to design long-term sustainability for the Western Region (i.e. more vocational education and training).

Biodiversity: While I was unable to get much information about wetland use, other than the fact that women cut mangroves for fuelwood, I do think the gender dimensions of biodiversity can be explored further. In the community assessments, the biodiversity focus appeared to be fairly limited to wildlife. However, it might be useful to have a wider understanding of biodiversity that includes forest, wetland, and even on-farm. Presumably this is already addressed by the biodiversity studies.

Social networks: Another area important to explore are social networks and how they work for men and women. How do these networks provide access to information, resources and credit?

Policy/networking: I would advise that the ICFG also ensure that attention to and awareness of the importance of gender issues be integrated into partner and collaborator NGOs. Perhaps a way to achieve this is to hold a seminar on the topic and how it is important to specific implementation activities. Also useful would be to engage with policy and rights NGOs who may already have a focus on gender and try to encourage them to include fisheries issues/fishing communities concerns in their work.

Monitoring and Evaluation: In addition to gathering gender disaggregated data to aid in designing interventions, a system of gendered monitoring and evaluation should also be devised whereby the impacts are measured for both men and women (of all age categories) and both are engaged in the process of developing indicators for measuring impact.

Meetings with Staff at FoN and CRC

I carried out meetings with the field staff of FoN and CRC who are conducting the community assessments to suggest ways they manage gender issues and gather information on how gender is important in all the components of their study. One thing to keep in mind is that gender does not simply mean women but women and men and how their identities and livelihoods and options are constructed by gender ideology. Furthermore, men and women from different ethnic groups, from different ages, and those who pursue different livelihood activities will have different perspectives and constraints. These differences within communities should be well understood and considered in designing interventions. Staff appear already very aware and sensitive to gender issues.

Meetings with faculty at University of Cape Coast

Had a meeting with three faculty in the sociology and anthropology department to discuss gender in natural resources and how gender is important in fisheries. We talked about designing a syllabus that could be used to integrate gender into fisheries studies. Faculty from the department will be engaged in specific topical studies, all of which I suggested should contain attention to gender and which would address some of the issues raised above. The importance of the gendered nature of fisheries and its implications should also be highlighted in discussions with government.

Gender mainstreaming

The program should ensure that gender analysis has been carried out as an integral part of standard procedures (i.e. gender disaggregated data gathered, gendered monitoring and evaluation indicators, etc). Activities and interventions should ensure that the following criteria are included:

gender disaggregated data is collected throughout the project.

gender-sensitive strategies and implementation plans are incorporated and reflected in the activity budget

specific means are designed to help overcome any identified barriers to

women's full participation in a given activity

strategies are adopted to ensure gender equity not only participation in an activity but also in control of the activity

gender-sensitive indicators including impact indicators are developed for monitoring and evaluation

Integration of gender needs to be done at each stage of the project cycle. A critical analysis of gender dynamics will ensure that men and women are not represented as separate from the web of social relationships that affect their well-being.

As the project continues, training on gender analysis and preparing gender sensitive monitoring and evaluation will be needed.