

ORL-GA&F-04**Gender in Aquaculture and Fisheries**

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Nepal has growing aquaculture sector, with five percent of its total area occupied by different freshwater aquatic habitats, including rivers, lakes, reservoirs, swamps, ponds and irrigated paddy fields (Jha, 2022). However, only two percent of the available water resources are utilized for aquaculture production. The country environment is suitable for producing warm, temperate, and cold-water fish species across the country, offering many opportunities to increase both aquaculture production across the value chain and economic benefits for Nepalese (Dhakal *et al.* 2022). Currently, total national fish production is 113,736 MT of which 20 percent is contributed by capture fisheries while 80 percent is from aquaculture. Aquaculture and fisheries production continue to grow at a rate of 17.1 percent and contributes to 0.44 percent of the Gross Domestic Products (GDP) and 1.88 percent of the Agriculture Gross Domestic Products (AGDP) (MoALD, 2023). Average fish consumption per person in Nepal is approximately two kg which is much lower than the global average of 20.2 kg per person (OECD-FAO, 2022). Though fish is important source of protein diet, the family food basket composition and intake are largely determined by the low average purchasing power of the family as well as weak decision-making role of women within the households.

In terms of national priorities towards aquaculture and fisheries, the national Fishery Development Policy, 2022 aims for enhanced productivity, commercialization, mechanization, diversification, competitiveness to increase employment, income and as well as contribute to food security objectives as spelled out in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (MoALD, 2022). From the government side, fisheries also getting increased attention as it is included in the super zone programme of Prime Minister Agriculture Modernization Project (PMAMP). The project's annual progress up to fiscal year 2080/81 shows that there are 32 hatcheries, 43 live fish shops under the project initiatives. Furthermore, it contributes to 43.57 percent by area and 47.55 percent by production (MoALD, 2024). The field visit to one of the fish super zone area of Bara district shows that, about 20 percent of the fish farms are registered in the name of women. However, the registration is mainly motivated with the incentives given for the women. The registration is actually intended to contribute to overall leadership development, enterprising, business development and empowerment (Author's field visit to Bara in 22-24 September 2023).

The fishery sector has huge potential to contribute to employment creation, import substitution and better food and nutrition security through inclusive and adaptive research, breeding, technological enhancement, market management, tourism development and many more. There are favorable policy environments to promote gender responsive system development in the country. However, the fishery specific policies, info-sheets, annual report of central fisheries promotion and protection center, PMAMP report, and other documents hardly capture the issues, concerns, potentials and barriers related to women-responsive aquaculture and fisheries aiming to capture the potentials related to women-led enterprises, women's meaningful participation in fisheries chain for their voice and influencing the decisions, adaptation of education and training modules and promotion of women-friendly technologies including machinery, documentation and promotion of success stories of women leading the fisheries production and marketing related business are missing opportunities. Therefore, exploitation of opportunities to make aquaculture and fisheries more women-responsive and gender-friendly is an utmost important topic to bring in to public discourse and make the state and other actors accountable.