

**ORL-GA&F-06****Gender in Fisheries in Nepal**

Kanchan Lama

Mahalaxmi-2, Balkumari, Lalitpur, Nepal  
kanchan.lama01@gmail.com

Women's contributions to fisheries and aquaculture in Nepal have historically been overlooked, despite their significant role. According to a 2016 FAO report, women account for 50 percent of the workforce in the sector when considering secondary activities like processing and trading. This highlights their crucial role in food and nutrition security, yet their efforts often remain invisible. Women in Nepal typically assist in supportive roles, such as weaving fishing nets, preparing fish carriers, and managing feed, which are undervalued. Meanwhile, men dominate more visible roles, such as fish marketing and fishing with large nets in rivers.

In western Nepal, indigenous Tharu women engage in group fishing using traditional round nets, but their contributions are largely unrecognized. Social beliefs perpetuate the idea that men have superior fishing skills, further marginalizing women's involvement. However, women often influence decisions on selecting fish species for pond farming, prioritizing species preferred by children and elders, while men focus on market demand. For example, in Mahendranagar, women actively participate in decisions on fish species, as noted by a local fishery owner, Hariram Chaudhary, who credited his wife's input in balancing marketable and locally preferred species.

Around 90% percent of fisheries in Mahendranagar are registered in women's names, largely due to a government policy that offers a 20 percent fee discount for women-owned enterprises. However, these registrations often mask the reality that men still control the operations, with women's roles being used primarily to access discounts and facilities. This highlights a gap between policy and practice, as women miss out on opportunities for skill development and training, which are typically offered to men.

In the broader fisheries sector, women face systemic gender-based challenges. They lack access to resources, education, technology, and leadership opportunities, and are often excluded from decision-making processes. The FAO (2023) emphasizes that women are primarily involved in small-scale fisheries and pre- and post-harvest activities, such as net mending and fish processing, but these contributions are informal and rarely remunerated.

To address these issues, organizations working in food security and nutrition must transform institutional structures to eliminate gender inequality. This includes integrating gender issues into fisheries policies, strategies, and programs, and ensuring that women and men are equally represented in decision-making processes. Sex-disaggregated data is also essential to understanding women's engagement and addressing their specific needs in the sector.

The proposed research will document the roles of women in small-scale fisheries in Nepal, focusing on their direct and indirect contributions to managing fisheries and aquaculture. It will also explore governance systems that fail to prioritize women's issues. By adopting a feminist and intersectionality approach, the research will gather evidence from indigenous fishing communities, such as the Rana Tharu, Rajbanshi, and Danwar women. This study will provide insights for policymakers on promoting socially just and sustainable fisheries in Nepal.