

# SHARING OUR OCEANS AND RIVERS – A VISION FOR THE WORLD’S FISHERIES

## What happened to women as fisheries boomed?

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### ABSTRACT

We trace the impacts on women of the post-World War II fisheries boom and the accompanying transformations in domains such as human and economic development, and environmental action. As post War fisheries expanded, states and international agencies supported private, public, and joint investments that accelerated adoption of technologies such as industrial fishing, processing, and distribution networks. In the boom that ensued, experts assumed that industrial development would make small scale operations superfluous. Development assistance agencies and the development strategies of states favoured technology approaches for growth in production, orienting the products to markets and supporting governance. Cross-connections between fisheries development and change in the other domains were strong in some cases, such as between fisheries and environment, but weak in others, especially fisheries and gender equality. Connections tended to build on social and cultural foundations favouring capital, elites and patriarchy. The political economy that enabled the boom has had a determining impact on the outcomes for women, ranging from the way the production-consumption systems have developed through to how institutions and interest groups frame current priorities. Development activities aimed at helping women tend to overlook political economy factors and may even overburden women with more work. Another common response to concerns over gender inequality is to publicly laud individual women’s achievements as signs of increasing progress. In reality, the women’s successes are not signs of transformation but most often result from progress in women’s education, and, in some cases, by particular social advantages. The organisations they join remain little altered. Political economy analyses expose that, for the vast majority, women in fisheries face: exploitation in labour and, in some cases, subjugation and gender-based violence; stereotyping in the gender divisions of labour; and participate only weakly or not at all in decision making affecting them. Structural changes are needed across levels and scale of governance and operations, rather than expecting that women should adapt to fit the current systems. When change is being planned, women must be involved in collaborative and participative planning to co-create solutions that avoid potential negative and unintended impacts and create equal opportunities. In the commoditised fisheries systems now operating, ignoring the majority of the workers and potential business people - the women in all nodes of the value chains - is no longer an option.