Dialogues in gender and coastal aquaculture: Gender and the seaweed farming value chain

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With funding support and methodology inputs from SwedBio of the Stockholm Resilience Institute of Stockholm University, GAFS has joined with partners in India (ICAR-Central Institute for Fisheries Technology and ICAR-Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute) and Kenya (Kenya Marine and Fisheries Research Institute) to implement a project on women in seaweed farming. Researchers from the AIT and the Lagos State University, Nigeria, will also be on the project advisory group.

In seaweed and other coastal aquaculture enterprises, women are locally relevant yet considered marginal in business and development, presenting challenges for creating dialogues among equals that enable women’s voices and concerns to be heard. Recognizing this and the important role women play in seaweed farming, location-specific gender dialogues in seaweed farming, collecting and purchasing areas of Tamil Nadu, India, and coastal Kenya will explore viewpoints on who controls what resources and the political and economic relations that cause and are caused by the distribution of these resources. The gender dialogues aim to allow the participants to better understand the labor allocations for seaweed aquaculture and post-harvest, and provide a wider and hopefully joint understanding of livelihoods and the households’ priority on labor distribution around production as well as reproductive activities. Deepening gender dialogues could help in defining good practices and in learning by practicing. Gender perspectives will also allow participants to understand better the access of different people to resources, particularly land-space. Attention will also be paid to markets critical to the seaweed value chain, and institutions embedded in the aquaculture political economy.

The project will be undertaken in 2020 and final reports are due in early 2021. The project’s specific objectives are the following:

1. To find or create the motivation(s) at each site for holding the dialogues.
2. To promote engagement of fishers, farmers, researchers, policymakers, NGOs and industry representatives in participatory and interactive collaborations on gender and policy implications, including actors from outside the traditional fisheries/aquaculture field.
3. To elucidate how the impacts of globalized markets, small-scale fisheries guidelines implementations and contextualized institutions (formal and informal) determine conditions for the exclusion and struggles of women at local levels.
4. To share views and experiences on how distribution of benefits and quality of participation affect social and economic advancement.
5. To indicate emerging areas of gender and environmental policy inquiry.

At the date of writing, the project has completed its scoping work at both the India and Kenya field sites, and is well advanced in preparing the dialogues planning meeting that will be done electronically. Most international and domestic travel has been suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, and the project teams have developed plans to cope with three different scenarios—short-term, medium-term and long-term lockdown arrangements.