

## **DISMANTLING BARRIERS: WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN REDUCING THE USE OF PLASTICS IN FISHING VALUE CHAINS**

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Women's role in the fisheries sector is not limited to productive and reproductive activities but extends to empowerment dimensions such as access to and control of resources. Being able to participate in decision making is a woman's right and enables her to transform her life towards achieving a higher level of well-being. The case of plastics use in the fisheries value chain is an urgent social and environmental concern. It has been reported that the Philippines is the world's third plastic polluter in the oceans (Ocean Conservancy and McKinsey Center for Business and Environment, 2015). In fishing, single-use plastics abound in processing and marketing --- i.e., for repacking, packaging, selling/retailing.

This paper posits that dismantling the barriers to women fishers' participation in decision making related to plastic use and plastic disposal will reduce plastic wastes/litter in the oceans. Findings show that there is a significant gender differential in knowledge, attitude and perception regarding single-use plastics. Specifically, female fishers know more than male fishers do, that single-use plastics is an environmental problem. Female fishers are more willing than their male counterparts to tell their families and friends about the risks of the increasing use of plastics and its irresponsible disposal to the seas. Female fishers are more willing than the male fishers to buy fish with as little plastic packaging as possible. But do women have significant roles in deciding the use of plastics in the fishing value chain?

There are barriers to women's participation in decision making. First, the perception that women's roles are focused on household responsibilities limits her participation in decision making about fisheries practices and resource management. Second, when she has lower income contribution to the family coffers, her ability to make independent decisions about resource use is further limited. Third, when she has few or no opportunities for capacity building (e.g. training in sustainable fishing practices and resource management), she is less confident to make informed decisions. Fourth, for women who challenge traditional power structures at home, at work and in the community, social pressures and cultural norms make it difficult for them to assert their interests in resource use decisions. Finally, women's economic dependence on men reduces their autonomy to make decisions and participate in discourses related to the use of plastics in fishing and its impact on the marine environment.