

Workshop on Women fisheries and coastal resource management in Atauro Island

(10th to 14th of October 2022, Atekru - Maker - Akrema)

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Introduction:

Three workshops of one-day each were organized in three different villages of Atauro Island: Atekru, Maker and Akrema (Figure 1). These workshops aimed to bring together different groups of women to discuss about the state and evolution of marine resources, and exchange about their views and role in coastal resource management.

The workshops involved a total of 44 women between the ages of 21 and 71 years old. Each locality was represented by 14 to 16 women. These groups of women were known at the village level for their active implication in gleaning and local fisheries. Three local facilitators from each locality were also engaged to help organize logistics.

In order to better encompass the different types of marine resources in the island and women's interactions with the marine environment, the selected workshop sites sought to represent the different types of coastal morphologies from Atauro (Table 1). All these sites have protected marine areas named "tara bandu" and established between 2017 and 2018.



Figure 1: Workshop localities in Atauro Island

Locality	Date	Number of women involved	Locality coastal morphology
Atekru	10 th of October	16	Sandy beach with narrow fringing reefs
Maker	12 th of October	14	Rocky shore and narrow fringing reefs
Akrema	14 th of October	14	Sandy beach with extended seagrasses beds

Table 1: Workshop localities & assistant specificities

In order to engage discussions different activities were designed and proposed to attendees, such as: presentation of various types of molluscan shell specimens and marine species visuals aids to engage into discussions about women's ecological knowledge related to each species (local name, habitat, ecological associations). Each woman was invited to choose and present one to three species and talk about their fishing techniques, uses, distribution-abundance status and vulnerability face to coastal change and human pressure (Figure 2 and 3). Other group games were also proposed, for instance, women were divided into groups of four and given visual aids of moon phases and paper cards containing the names of the months of the year. Questions about seasonality of resources and women's activities were asked. Each group of women discussed about the specific related question and presented their response to the other groups.



Figure 2 and 3: Women in Akrema providing local names to the different species and discussing about species ecological specificities and fisheries.

Findings and experiences

In the different localities, at the beginning of the workshop, women referred to the workshop as a "training". This might be due to the fact that the majority of community meetings deployed in the area by development and governmental agencies are intended to "train" women for capacity building. These workshops were not intended to be a "training" nor to provide a top-bottom vertical knowledge transfer about a specific topic to the local community. On the contrary, the workshops were designed to propose spaces of dialogue and exchange where knowledge was shared horizontally between all attendees - including the external animators. We used an ethnoecological approach to develop dialogues, activities and exchange of information, paying particular attention to local taxonomy, seascape classification, toponymy, fishing dynamics and coastal management. Women were happy to rename the workshop "encounter", and appreciated the fact that the "trainers" were considered to be them and not the animators/organizers. This recognition and the value of their unique local knowledge by the

animators provided a positive environment for sharing their knowledge. Women felt empowered to expose their views, knowledge and feelings.

Women fisheries in Atauro target a high diversity of marine species of fish, mollusks, crustaceans, echinoderms and sea worms. There is a high diversity of techniques used to harvest these species. The harvesting techniques involved might imply or not the use of fishing gears.

Women explained that the abundance of certain species, such as, giant clams (*Tridacna maxima*, *T. crocea*, *T. gigas* and *Hippopus hippopus*), commercial gastropods (e.g. *Rochia nilotica* and *Turbo marmoratus*) has considerably decreased during the last decades. Women engaged in dialogues to define the causes of the decline of these species, and agreed to the fact that the increase in the size of village population, fishing pressure, and species extraction for commercial purposes have impacted their current population and availability. Indeed, women agreed that various species of mollusks were still available and abundant.



Figure 5 : *Tridacna maxima* species are partially embedded in corals.

Sea urchins' fisheries were present in Atekru and Akrema and absent in Maker. According to Akrema women, the best time to fish these species was during the full moon "when the flesh is tastier and thicker". They believed that this was due to the fact that during this phase of the moon sea urchins fed more than during any other moon phase. On the contrary, the best time to capture octopus occurred during the new moon and particularly during the months of February to April when octopus were highly abundant on top of the rocks and not hiding in the rock caves.

Regarding Marine Protected Areas (MPA, locally called *tara bandu*) there were contrasted views within a same locality. In Atekru, from 16 women involved in the workshop, 14 raised their voices to say that they were unhappy with *tara bandu* due to the fact that their children could not easily access fishing grounds. It is important to highlight that in each village where the workshop took place, the *tara bandu* areas are found just in front of the village. In Maker and Akrema, women were in majority happy with the *tara bandu*, as they thought it could bring more fish in a near future. Some women, indeed, highlighted the need to open the *tara bandu* area for a lapse of time, and after closing it again. In both localities -Maker and Akrema - women expressed concerns regarding accessibility to the *tara bandu* area just for swimming. As a fact, the rules as are currently designed, imply that local villagers including children cannot take a swim in these areas, without paying the same amount as external visitors (\$2 a day). This is a considerable sum for the local communities and makes that children are no longer able to swim in front of the village, near their houses. In Akrema and Maker women highlighted the fact that since the implementation of *tara bandu* there has not been any community meetings to discuss about the implementation of those MPA. In Atekru women affirmed that the only money collected from *tara bandu* areas

throughout the last four years was when a chinesse boat entered the *tara bandu* zone without knowing its protected status, and the community met to impose a fine of 200 dollars.

In each village women discussed about creating a new community group focused on women's fisheries and considered the possibility of contacting the commission for *tara bandu* areas to discuss about current *tara bandu* principles. They also expressed their will to have access to some tools such as googles, to be able to look for mollusk's species found in the subtidal area.

Conclusion:

Local women in Atauro are highly implicated in gleaning activities. Their interaction with the sea, makes them highly knowledgeable of the diversity, distribution and abundance of species, as well as local fishing dynamics and human pressure on species. Indeed, their fisheries are often unreported and their knowledge is still not taken in account in the management of coastal areas. In a way, these workshops have contributed to empower women to raise their voices and engage community dialogues regarding not only men targeted fisheries or commercial species, but to focus also on many other aquatic resources targeted in women fisheries.



The day before the workshop, women who were invited to the workshop met and went together to glean and look for shell species that after being eaten in their respective houses, were used to make shell games during the workshop.

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