

2008 OPWG Social Equity Committee Findings

For a full report of all of the work of the OPWG up until July 2008, please navigate to the [2008 OPWG Report](#). This document holds only the work of the Social Equity Committee of the OPWG up until July 2008.

2007 WFT Questionnaire Respondent Identification

WFT Equity in Fisheries Observer Program Questionnaire response and an impact assessment of the 5th Conference in the IFOMC series

A. Current involvement in the fisheries observer profession:

Of the 25 respondents in total, 6 were fisheries observers (4 females; 2 males); 4 were shore-based members of an observer provider/contracting company (1 female; 3 males); 12 were staff of a governing body (5 females; 7 males); 12 were users of observer data, for instance, fisheries managers, scientific analysts, NGO members (5 females; 7 males); 1 was a female student; 1 was a male NGO representative; and none were fishers or fishing industry representatives.

B. Gender and ethnicity of respondents:

Out of a total of 25 respondents, there were 11 females and 14 males, none of whom reported being a member of an ethnic minority within the country they represented.

C. Countries represented:

The females hailed from El Salvador, Ghana, Namibia, Brazil, Indonesia, Russia, New Zealand, and the USA (3), while the males came from Peru, Panama, Brazil, Ecuador, Vietnam, Venezuela, Central America, Guatemala, New Caledonia, Canada, USA, 2 IATTC, 1 AIRCP.

Social Equity Complete Analysis

The following summarizes the findings of the Social Equity Committee.

Introduction:

Gender equity in a cultural context was addressed in several ways at the 5th IFOC: A conscious striving to achieve gender parity in CIDA-funded participants; Participation of a WFT gender and human rights specialist, Elaine Ward, in the Observer Professionalism Working Group (OPWG) – paid for by the conference and WFT; Assessment focusing on gender and diversity of the overall conference programme by the WFT specialist; Gender specialist's presentation entitled, "Social Equity in Fisheries Monitoring Programmes" as part of the panel on observer professionalism (identifying factors affecting participation of women in fisheries monitoring programmes and promoting the development of best practices that foster gender equity in general); Participants' evaluation of the conference's role in potentially enhancing future gender and ethnic equity in their own countries' observer programmes; and Participants' evaluation of their home country fisheries observer programmes for gender and ethnic equity by way of a dedicated questionnaire.

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Since the IFO Conference organizers did not screen participants along gender lines, the data obtained from the various surveys were not disaggregated by gender or other diversity categories (e.g. age, ethnicity, religion). However, the Fisheries Monitoring Programme Overview questionnaire, under its Observer Programme Management heading, included a question relating to the gender ratio of the respondent's observer corps. Also, the Safety Survey acknowledged "His/Her Contact Information" via the e-mail; however, it will likely be unclear as to the sex of the respondent given only their e-mail address.

In the OPWG survey, specific gender-related questions were not asked; however, there were opportunities within the Short Answer and Additional Comments sections to address matters otherwise not explicitly covered in the Definitions and Multiple Choice sections. Therefore, if a survey respondent wished to elaborate on gender-sensitive issues with respect to wages and benefits, support and opportunities, or employment standards and definitions, they could do so.

Gender parity in conference participation was not fully achieved: 7 out of 22, or 32%, of the CIDA-sponsored participants were female. The numbers reflect the current lower participation of women in fisheries observer-related programmes worldwide. Previous International Fisheries Observer Conferences had resulted in a ratio of female participants to male participants of 2:3 which was considered by organizers as a fair representation of people employed in this sector. Nevertheless, female participants appeared to be largely very active at the 2007 conference and two well-respected women served on the IFOC Steering Committee.

Some of the quantitative indicators of increased gender equity included a determination of the following: The Observer Professionalism Working Group (OPWG) leadership exhibited gender parity, with a female Steering Committee Liaison and a male Working Group Leader. Thirteen other members of the OPWG included four females and nine males, each of whom served on one of five sub-committees. By conference's end, the gender specialist was made a permanent member of the OPWG. A number of conference participants commented that there were surprisingly more female observers in attendance and actively working in fisheries monitoring programmes than expected.

As evidenced during the Conference and within the questionnaire responses, some of the qualitative indicators of enhanced gender equity included: a willingness to identify barriers which exist for women's participation with respect to wages, benefits, opportunities, support or employment standards; an appreciation concerning certain working conditions which adversely affect the equal participation of women; several suggestions to improve opportunities for women and to influence equity; and an acknowledgement of lessons learned about overcoming barriers faced by women, as well as ethnic minorities and local communities, in participating equitably in fisheries observer / monitoring programmes.

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Fisheries Observer Program Equity Questions and Responses

What have you learned about overcoming barriers that women, ethnic minorities or local communities face in participating in fisheries observer/monitoring programmes? Will these be applicable to your situation?

Cultural barriers and discrimination:

Two women reported discrimination based on sex and cultural barriers (ie. boats that won't take women onboard due to superstitions and/or concerns from fishermen's wives). One man from Ecuador acknowledged cultural barriers, but indicated that generally speaking, having women conducting interviews has really positive effects on the results achieved.

Conditions on vessels at sea:

Two women reported inappropriate conditions on board vessels as a barrier to women's participation (Indonesia and USA), indicating that some boats have no bathrooms.

Potential future social equity initiatives:

Three women expressed the need to do better in terms of practicing gender equality and educating girls and women about the fisheries observer profession (El Salvador, Ghana and Brazil). Another woman was heartened by the participation of so many women at the Conference. One woman from New Zealand acknowledged many barriers worldwide, and suggested that in the future, for example, a woman's group deliberating on safety and employment issues would be in order. A number of men looked to the future to overcome some of the barriers----to better utilize female observers (Panama), to involve more women in recruitment (Ecuador), community empowerment for better participation (Vietnam), to look for opportunities to start placing women on boats (IATTC), and to find ways to apply the theme of social equity (Venezuela and Central America).

What barriers exist for ethnic minorities and/or local community members to work in observer programmes?

Three women reported no barriers existed in their countries, one of which was Russia. In contrast, eight males reported no barriers existed in their countries based on ethnicity, race and/or local community status, which included Peru, England, Panama, USA.
Educational barriers:

Two women reported that education was a barrier. In Ghana, the fisheries observers come mainly through agricultural training colleges. In the USA, the educational requirements are high, but could be lowered without compromising the integrity of data. The same barriers exist for observers that exist for minorities in the sciences in general.

Four men reported education as a barrier in that ethnic minorities and local community members usually have lower levels of education. They are also usually poorer and hence have more limited access to secondary or university levels of education. They also lack

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adequate funding to support their own schooling. In the USA, observers are hired from a pool of natural sciences college graduates, an area of study not traditionally sought by minorities.

Cultural barriers:

One woman cites a cultural barrier, in that there are strong feelings that having women on boats will lead to problems among the crew and their family, especially their wives. One man reported discrimination and harassment as barriers to immigrant observers or female observers---one incident every three years (Eastern Canada). Another man reported language and cultural barriers between a local community and the management authority. (USA)

Economic barriers:

One woman reported that the equipment, the safety issue, and a lack of financial resources are three factors which prohibit the equitable involvement of minorities in her country.

Institutional barriers:

One woman reported that because the fisheries observer profession is just beginning in terms of government and law, they have created an association in Brazil, but are yet to be organized.

What barriers exist for participation by women with respect to wages, benefits, opportunities, support or employment standards?

Five women reported no barriers, including Russia and Ghana. Six men reported there were no perceived barriers or discrimination with respect to wages, benefits, opportunities, support or employment (including Peru, England and USA).

Conditions on board vessels:

One woman reported poor conditions on vessels (lack of bathrooms). Another woman reported that sometimes women are not deployed on some vessels (USA), for apparently good reasons (which were not cited). One man reported that some aspects of working on small vessels discourage women, although the playing field is more level in terms of post observer employment with government agencies (Canada). Another man from Panama reported that while women are able to become fisheries observers, vessels are very small or uncomfortable to accommodate different sexes and hence women are not working in observer programmes.

Discriminatory practices:

One woman reported a lack of female participation in a local association (Brazil), and that women are sometimes utilized as volunteer observers rather than receiving pay as men do.

Three men reported discrimination against women as a barrier---citing harassment (USA), common occurrences of sexual harassment, and the fact that female observers only achieve the scientific ship observer degree. One of these males acknowledged that women may require various support systems that males may not need to the same degree. Another man admitted that some vessels prefer to not carry a female observer (USA), although that did not change the fact that a female observer will get on their vessel.

What components of working conditions affect the equal participation of women in fisheries monitoring programmes?

Three women reported there are none, and one went on to say that fishermen are gentle with them.

Inadequate onboard conditions:

One woman reported that hardships exist at sea or during field work, especially for women (Russia). Another woman reported that in Brazil, for example, there are only a few boats structured to receive a woman onboard, i.e. a separate bathroom for them. Two women indicated that there is little to no privacy (i.e. no toilets or showers) to perform bodily functions, and that sharing rooms or bunk space with men might deter some women (USA). Two women reported harsh living conditions onboard vessels which they considered were “not the best for females”.

One man from Panama indicted that working conditions in his fleet are the first barrier to women’s equal participation. As to the issue of respect, he went on to say that except for the purse seine tuna boat, the rest of the fleet is very uncomfortable with gender equity “but the thing is that there are no such programmes”. Another man from Peru suggested that gender inequities arise because of rough working conditions at sea for his fisheries (small vessels, long trips in some or most fisheries, etc.).

Three males, one from England, acknowledged that it is mainly shared accommodation and washroom facilities that hamper the type of vessel female staff can go to sea on. Two other males spoke directly to the issue of a lack of privacy on fishing vessels and also mentioned the lack of a separate bathroom for women.

One man from the USA felt the working environment may be less palatable to a woman than a man because of certain environmental conditions specific to sex. Another American male thought that, depending on a female observer’s personal level of comfort, small vessels with no head (wash/bath room), on extended day trips may hinder their ability to cover them. Finally, one male spoke of the safety conditions of ships as being a concern.

Discriminatory practices and cultural restraints:

One woman acknowledged that while observers have been traditionally a male-dominated in Ghana, recently a woman has been recruited. Two others reported pornography as a problem, which can create a hostile working environment onboard a

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vessel. Couple that with being the lone woman on a boat full of men far from land could potentially be scary, says one woman from the USA. Another woman reported that for some skippers, a woman onboard could cause problems at home with jealous wives or feed into a cultural superstition of a resultant “bad fishery”.

One man concurred, indicating that sometimes fishers believe that having women on board affects their success at fishing. Another man agreed that some skippers make a fuss. And a Canadian male reported that “a culture in which participation of women in the fishery is slowly gaining acceptance is also a factor. I still hear complaints from fishermen’s wives – ridiculous I know!”

Two men mentioned the fact of all male crews, implying that gender bias onboard vessels may exist. Another man pointed out that regarding relationships with the crew, in his country, it feels uncomfortable to have a female observer onboard. A different male reported that women are rare as observers due to traditional views from fishermen (i.e. what he termed the “Latin view of women”).

What suggestions do you have to improve opportunities for women in fisheries monitoring programmes?

One woman and one man did not have any firm suggestions on how to improve the situation.

Occupational health and safety while at sea:

One woman suggested that it is important to guarantee women’s safety. Another woman from Russia called for the improvement of observer work conditions, especially on-board of small to medium size vessels, while one man suggested making the working platform or vessel more female-friendly.

Awareness-raising and education:

One woman from Ghana suggested that more girls should be made aware and encouraged about the observer, since their lack of participation stems from ignorance of it and the fact that they feel it’s for boys and men. A Brazilian woman thought it necessary to offer courses and promote the fisheries observer profession. She acknowledged that there is still much prejudice surrounding women at-sea, and it is a continual obstacle that needs to be overcome.

One man indicated that what is needed is a change of mind and more education. Another felt that worldwide, increasing women’s literacy levels would help. An American male recommended that female observers need to be well-informed of working conditions in advance and then left to make their own choices.

Observer professionalism:

One male indicated that it is important to increase professionalism of some female observers who have sexual liaisons with fishermen onboard vessels. He believed this to

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be the source of a lot of gender harassment as the conduct was felt to be quite common onboard vessels and that fishermen begin to expect it.

Employment equity and affirmative action:

A Canadian man recommended the hiring of more women and inviting those who are already participants to help pave the way for others. Another male from Panama expressed his opinion that the idea to give opportunities to women are very interesting, but respect that could take some more years to achieve this. Within the at-sea observer working environment, one man from the USA recommended making sure that living conditions do not impose sex-specific limitations upon female fisheries monitors.

What programmes exist to train local community members and/or ethnic minorities to participate in fisheries observer programmes in your country?

One female and three males reported there were no such programmes in their respective countries.

A Brazilian woman indicated a national observer programme exists, including the Projeto Albatroz Observer Programme; however, she went on to say that most are biologists or “oceanographers.”

Another female reported that such programmes exist at regional and local levels in Russia. A woman from Ghana mentioned the Community Based Fisheries Management in her country.

One American woman only knew of the hook programme on longline, tuna purse seine, and shrimp trawl net fishery in AluLike, Hawaii. Similarly, an American man acknowledged that programmes, like AluLike in Honolulu, Hawaii, are “fabulous avenues for including local populations (natives) in the observer workforce. Nevertheless, you must be careful to guard that the standards be kept as high as possible (given the environment) so that professional respect is not lost.”

An Englishman reported that all sections of the community are equally able to receive training to become observers. And a Canadian male said that because he works in an enforcement context, he prefers to avoid use of observers from the same community as a vessel, knowing this exerts extra pressures. He goes on to say that in Canada, First Nation participation is his prime concern in opportunities for ethnic minorities.

A Peruvian man indicated that in his country, NGOs work with locals to become observers (either fishermen or former fishermen and others). Another male indicated that local courses are sponsored by a government agency. A man from Panama indicated that his country’s authority does not have any observer programme working at this moment, and that all monitoring programmes are lead by Commission or ONG’s.

Is there a policy in place to handle such matters as sexual harassment in the observer programme that you work with, and if so, what are the procedures?

Four females reported there were no specific sexual harassment policies in their programme, including Russia and Brazil. However, the latter reported that every time a female observer boards a vessel, she is “reminded about the behaviour”. Three males reported there were no such policies they were aware of.

Legislation, Policies and Procedures:

Three women reported there were policies. Underpinned by a Domestic Violence Bill, sexual harassment is not treated lightly in Ghana, and people report occurrences to the authorities. Likewise, in the USA, individuals are encouraged to confront the situation immediately, document the incident, report it to the OP personnel and/or report to the employer.

One man from England reported his organization had a sexual harassment policy prohibiting such behaviour and any such act is dealt with using the appropriate legal channels. Another man from Panama was aware that his country has some legislation in this matter, but could not elaborate since the two observer programmes have only males working.

One male enforcement officer from Canada reported that it is treated as a criminal matter and would involve the police. He went on to say that in terms of pro-activity, he stresses that all observers merit the same respect regardless of gender or ethnicity. A male from the USA indicated that one of the first things a debriefer will ask upon returning from sea is whether there have been any enforcement issues, and he felt that is where sexual harassment should come out. Another male from the USA indicated the procedure to follow was to first report the incident to the observer coordinator, and then to the law enforcement arm in order to investigate and prosecute if necessary.

Harassment is rarely reported says one man. Another says that the policy is to report to office staff and government officials. Finally, one male indicated there was such a policy, even though he didn't know what it was. However, he contemplated the fact that he too could be the recipient of unwanted sexual attention.

Do you feel that the observer programme can influence equity in the fishing fleet?

Two women responded in the negative (Russia and USA), the latter indicating that it is not an objective of any observer programme at the moment and suspects that NOAA Fisheries would NOT support any sort of activity in this direction because it is outside the scope of the Agency.

Five women responded positively, including Ghana. All eight men responded favourably to this suggestion, acknowledging the need for better coverage (England), leading by example (Canada), setting and modeling equity standards (USA), encouraging and educating a fleet by not bowing to a request for a male observer (USA), exposing the fleet to a better way, and demonstrating over time that women are equally competent as fisheries observers.

Other Comments

From female respondents:

One female thinks the future is bright for females taking part in observers in Ghana. She says that females need to be encouraged and their awareness raised. Another female indicated her responses were more general to the USA environment; however, her observer experience was in the North Pacific.

From male respondents:

One male felt that fishing data are very few, and that Panamanian authorities are actually changing structures. Another male agrees that data are few, and that statistical analyses are basic, unspecific and based on landings.