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OCPP GEDSI Analysis: Seafood Sector in Bangladesh

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Acronyms and glossary

ALBs	Arms' Length Bodies
ALDFG	Abandoned, lost, or otherwise discarded fishing gear
BBS	Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics
CEFAS	Centre for Environment, Fisheries & Aquaculture Scient
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DEFRA	Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs
DoF	Department of Fisheries
GBV	Gender based violence
GEDSI	Gender equality, disability, and social inclusion
ICAI	Independent Commission for Aid Impact
ILAB	Bureau of International Labor Affairs
IPV	Intimate Partner Violence
ITUC	International Trade Union Confederation
KII	Key informant interviews
LGBTQI+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, Intersex +
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OCPP	Ocean Country Partnership Programme
OPDs	Organisations of Persons with Disability
SAFE	Solidary Center and Social Activities for Environment
SDDirect	Social Development Direct
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SEAH	Sexual exploitation, abuse, and sexual harassment
ToRs	Terms of Reference
VAC	Violence Against Children

Executive summary

This report presents a Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion (GEDSI) analysis for the Ocean Country Partnership Programme (OCPP) in the seafood sector in Bangladesh. Following an assessment by the Independent Commission for Aid Impact in 2023, which rated OCPP as "unaware" on the GEDSI Responsiveness Continuum, this analysis aims to enhance understanding of vulnerable groups in Bangladesh's coastal areas and identify opportunities for more GEDSI-sensitive programming.

This research has taken place over a two-month period involving primary and secondary qualitative research, including key informant interviews (KIIs) with relevant stakeholders and an in-depth literature review. Six KIIs were undertaken with individuals working in the seafood sector in Bangladesh, and over 70 documents were reviewed in depth.

Key findings

Vulnerable and marginalised groups: The analysis identifies several groups facing heightened vulnerability in Bangladesh's coastal communities and within the seafood sector including women, children, people with disabilities, indigenous communities (Adivasis), lower caste groups (Dalits), migrants, and Rohingya refugees. Literature and findings from the KIIs mainly focus on women's marginalisation within the seafood sector, with very little focus on other marginalised communities.

Impacts of environmental degradation on these communities: The analysis highlights the significant impact of environmental degradation on those most dependent on the seafood sector. Key issues include overfishing, pollution, climate change, and the resulting socio-economic vulnerabilities. This degradation manifests through air and water pollution, soil erosion, and increased natural disasters, with further consequences including rising sea levels, extreme weather, displacement, biodiversity loss, and threats to agriculture and livelihoods. Marine biodiversity (species type and quantity) is declining due to overfishing, weak enforcement of fishing laws, and illegal practices, causing economic hardship for fishers and pushing many into poverty, migration, and even illegal activity. These pressures have led to increased gender-based violence (GBV) and vulnerability among women, particularly as men migrate or remain jobless. Women and people with disabilities face barriers accessing early warning systems, while children suffer from undernutrition, school dropout, exploitation, and health risks linked to climate change, showing that environmental degradation in Bangladesh has wide-reaching socio-economic and gendered impacts.

One study discussed found a significant correlation between environmental degradation, socio-economic marginalisation and increased vulnerability among people with disabilities in coastal Bangladesh. The findings highlight the urgent need for targeted policies and interventions to support people with disabilities in coastal

communities by improving accessibility, inclusive disaster risk reduction, and climate adaptation. A holistic, multi-dimensional approach is essential, addressing socio-economic disparities, infrastructure, awareness, and collaboration among stakeholders.

Safeguarding risks: Significant and widespread SEAH, GBV, VAC, child labour, and forced labour, particularly affecting women and children exists in in Bangladesh's seafood sector. These issues are driven by poverty, displacement, weak legal enforcement, and social norms, and are often underreported due to fear and lack of trust in systems. The sector's informality and poor regulation further increases risks. OCPP works with diverse partners many of whom do not have clear safeguarding procedures, which creates potential vulnerabilities in programme delivery.

Stakeholder Engagement Opportunities: A number of stakeholders have been identified as potential partners for advancing GEDSI initiatives, including the Department of Fisheries and WorldFish.

Data Availability and Gaps: While demographic and socio-economic data exist through national surveys and international databases, significant gaps remain in the availability of disaggregated data on vulnerable groups in seafood sector in Bangladesh. Information is particularly limited regarding persons with disabilities, LGBTQI+ individuals, indigenous communities (Adivasis), lower caste groups (Dalits), migrants, and Rohingya refugees.

GEDSI Entry Points: This report highlights various entry points for GEDSI in OCPP's activities in Bangladesh, across various activity areas. It is important to highlight that it is not always appropriate, necessary or safe to seek to be GEDSI transformative in all activities and there may be very good reasons to limit the ambition to GEDSI strategic or empowering, or even sensitive in some cases. There is, however, never a justification to remain GEDSI unaware. Some examples provided were including training on equity issues, rights and gender equality values within the aquaculture farming value chain; ensuring that data on participants is disaggregated by sex and include gender parity as a target; encouraging equal representation of people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups in communication about activities; liaising with local women and youth organisations; engage and train marginalised groups to take part in the project activities such as sampling; and ensuring all staff engaged on studies are gender-balanced. An example provided to ensure activity areas could be GEDSI Transformative was to provide targeted programme of transformative awareness raising and behavioural change interventions with network leaders on gender equality and social inclusion issues, exploring their values and attitudes, and gender and social norms that act as a barrier to women's meaningful participation in these spaces.

Recommendations

The study makes a number of high-level recommendations that are likely to be applicable for the next phase of OCPP programming, regardless of the specific focus of the work (the latter being outside the scope of the assessment):

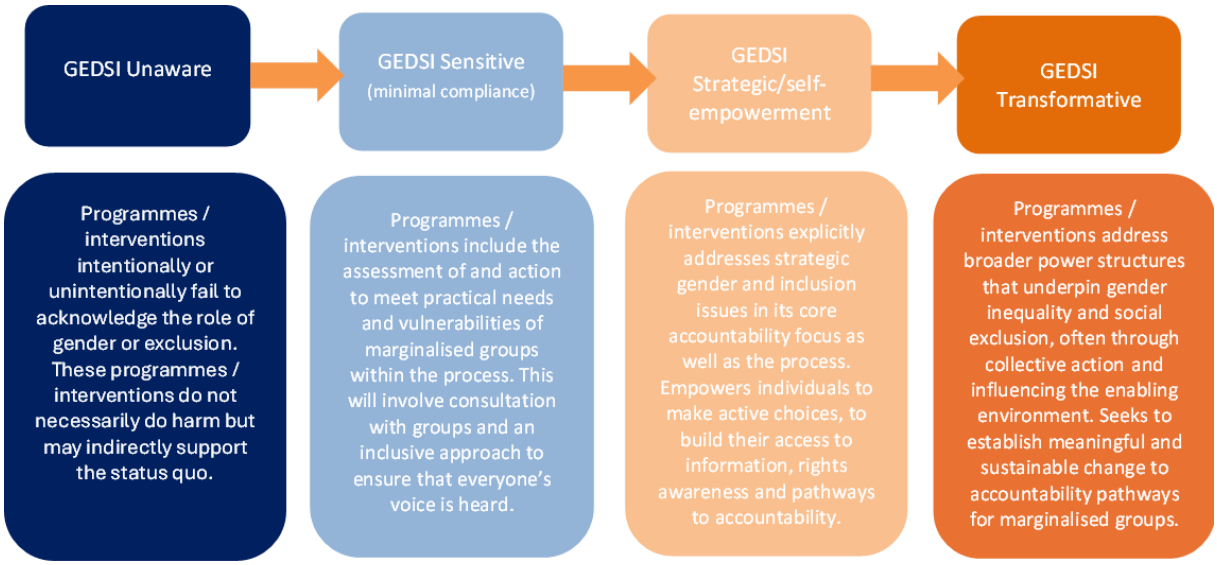
1. **Commitment to GEDSI:** OCPP could strengthen its commitment to GEDSI by ensuring representation of women and marginalised groups within the seafood sector, integrating GEDSI objectives into the programme's Theory of Change, and advocating for inclusive practices.
2. **Safeguarding Policies:** OCPP could review and support the strengthening of safeguarding policies across all partners, conduct risk assessments, and ensure robust monitoring and oversight to prevent SEAH and other safeguarding-related misconduct.
3. **Stakeholder Collaboration:** OCPP could increase its engagement with key stakeholders to leverage their knowledge, experience, and networks in addressing GEDSI issues within the seafood sector.
4. **Data Collection:** OCPP should prioritise the collection, analysis, and sharing of disaggregated data to better understand the challenges and needs of marginalised groups in the seafood sector.

By addressing these key areas, OCPP can enhance its GEDSI responsiveness and contribute to more inclusive and sustainable development outcomes in the seafood sector in Bangladesh.

1. Introduction and overview of the analysis

1.1. Purpose and objectives

Following an assessment by the Independent Commission for Aid Impact in November 2023, where the Ocean Country Partnership Programme (OCPP) was assessed as unaware on the Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion (GEDSI) Responsiveness Continuum, the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (CEFAS) contracted Social Development Direct (SDDirect) to undertake a series of GEDSI analyses to support their requirement to better integrate GEDSI responsive approaches in OCPP. This continuum is a framework used to assess and guide programmes, policies, and initiatives in terms of their approach to GEDSI, helping organisations and practitioners understand how their work either reinforces or challenges existing inequalities. Along the continuum[1], programmes or interventions can range from being GEDSI Unaware, GEDSI Sensitive, Strategic or Self-Empowering, or GEDSI Transformative, as shown in Diagram 1 below. ICAI's assessment of OCPP was deemed to be GEDSI unaware.



In order to meet the requirements of the International Development Act 2002, international commitments to 'do no harm' as part of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA)'s GEDSI minimum standards as per the GEDSI policy, the OCPP must reduce poverty in places it is working and improve conditions for poor people and the most marginalised in this world. It must also ensure this is done in a way that addresses GEDSI and substantially improves the wellbeing of these lives, alongside ensuring

[1] Several versions of the GEDSI continuum exist, including one developed by DEFRA and used by the Uk government, more information at https://oceangrants.org.uk/applicant-resource/gender-equality-disability-and-social-inclusion-gedsi/

that programmes are free from risks associated with sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (SEAH) which may be inherent in programming within fragile states characterised by high levels of poverty and inequality. As such, on behalf of all the arms' length bodies (ALBs) involved in OCPP, CEFAS has contracted Social Development Direct (SDDirect) to undertake a series of GEDSI analyses to support the OCPP's requirement to becoming more GEDSI Sensitive, and where possible, GEDSI Empowering. Country-level analysis has been undertaken for Ghana, Senegal, Sri Lanka and Belize. Thematic analysis is being undertaken on the seafood sector in Bangladesh and marine biodiversity in Madagascar. This report focuses on the seafood sector in Bangladesh.

Objectives: this assignment is intended to further OCPP's understanding of the needs of the most vulnerable groups in the locations where the programme is implemented in Bangladesh. This assignment will enable CEFAS to adapt interventions to become more GEDSI sensitive and address those needs. It will achieve this by providing an intersectional assessment and analysis of the social and economic context in the seafood sector in Bangladesh and identifying key SEAH and GEDSI risks that can be quickly addressed and mitigated.

Scope: this analysis focuses on the seafood sector in Bangladesh. Where evidence specific to the seafood sector has not been found, wider evidence has also been included, for example about people living in coastal locations.

1.2. What do we mean by GEDSI

Terminology
Gender equality is the absence of discrimination on the basis of gender in opportunities, in the allocation of resources or benefits or in the access to services, such that all individuals can enjoy equal standards of well-being. It is the full and equal exercise by women, men, boys, girls and people of other gender identities of their human rights: in this situation, women, men, girls and boys have equal rights and equal access to socially and economically valued goods, resources, opportunities and benefits; the different gender roles are valued equally and do not constitute an obstacle to their wellbeing and finally; the fulfilment of their potential as responsible members of society is possible. **Social inclusion** is the removal of institutional barriers and the enhancement of incentives to increase the access of diverse individual and groups to development opportunities. These barriers may be formal (written laws on spousal property for instance), or they may be informal (e.g. time village girls spend carrying water instead of attending school). In short, social inclusion is about levelling the playing field by making the 'rules of the game' fairer. **Disability**, according to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, "results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinders their full and effective participation in society, on an equal basis with others'" (UN CRPD, 2006). **Safeguarding** means preventing harm abuse and neglect perpetrated by staff, contractors and as a result of programmes that are being implemented. An important component of that

is SEAH being perpetrated by staff, consultants and contractors targeted. Because it is primarily perpetrated by people (usually men) in positions of power it often goes unreported. SEAH and other forms of safeguarding related misconduct is often a form of **gender-based violence** (GBV) and tends to be targeted at either women or children.

1.3. Overview of the report

After the introduction to the report, the second section of the report details the methodology employed, including the literature review, key informant interviews (KIIs), and data analysis processes, as well as the methodological limitations. Section 3 presents the findings in response to each of the research questions (adapted from the Inception Report for the specifics of the seafood sector). This section also includes a stakeholder mapping, and lessons learned. Sections 4 and 5 present conclusions and recommendations, respectively.

2. Methodology and methodological limitations

2.1. Methodology

The GEDSI analysis has been conducted through a secondary literature review and a series of key informant interviews.

For the literature review, we reviewed over 70 external documents available from Google Scholar and relevant electronic databases and identified using key search terms as well as governmental and other grey literature documents. Online literature was identified using key search terms such as:

- GEDSI; women; gender; girls; disability; Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, Intersex + (LGBTQI+) Intersectionality; vulnerable/alit; marginalised; poor/ poverty; leave no one behind, do no harm, religion, ethnicity, age
- SEAH; safeguarding; child safeguarding; child labour; gender-based violence (GBV) / gender-based violence; violence against children (VAC); interpersonal violence, sexual violence; sexual harassment; sexual exploitation
- Fishing; Aquaculture; fishermen / women, fishers, fisherfolk; overfishing,' pollution; aquatic animal health; climate change; coast; seafood; marine; coastal livelihoods; blue economy; coastal communities; seafood sector

Full detail of the search and inclusion criteria of external literature can be found in the inception report. The research team have endeavoured to identify and use more recent literature from 2015-present. In some instances, older sources of literature have been cited in the absence of more recent data or information publicly available. A full explanation of criteria for search and inclusion of external literature can be found in the inception report.

Key informant interviews were conducted with six individuals working in the seafood sector in Bangladesh, across government, universities, NGOs and others. They were selected based on their knowledge of the topic, based on both recommendations from OCPP and the National Advisor in the team. Literature and KII findings have been coded in a coding matrix to highlight key findings and themes against the research questions.

2.2. Limitations

Limitations	Mitigations
Limited literature. There is limited literature available on marginalised groups such as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning, and Intersex (LGBTQI+) persons and persons with disabilities.	Efforts are being taken to consult grey literature and speak with a variety of organisations to learn more the impacts on these groups. Where possible we have attempted to obtain country level data and make inferences to risks for these groups.
LGBTQI+ rights are severely restricted in Bangladesh, meaning there were limitations to understanding their experiences through the KIIs.	As above, efforts were made to consult grey literature. Questions in the KIIs were left open for participants to discuss all potentially disadvantaged persons, rather than explicitly asking about LGBTQI+ persons. This was to ensure safety and sensitivity of participants and the researchers.
Some of the literature found is based on evidence / research which is more than 10 years old (i.e. pre-2015) and therefore likely to be out of date.	The literature was supplemented with a series of KIIs to ensure that the analysis is situated in the current context.
A detailed review of OCPP activities or programmes could not be conducted due to the limited programme documentation shared with the research team, and being unable to speak to OCPP partners with great depth.	Meetings were held with point of contact in Bangladesh who shared detail on the OCPP programmes and activities
The examination of SEAH risks were based on our understanding of the GEDSI situation in each country and the broad thematic approach and activities that the programme is taking in the country, based on a discussion with the OCPP team. The analysis was not able to identify specific SEAH risks related to the individual programme activities due not having access to programme documents nor the people engaging with communities through OCPP activities.	SEAH risks identified are generic *potential* risks, based on evidence from other countries, or international good practice and learning. They are intended to identify areas for the programme to explore further rather than as a definitive set of risks to be addressed and actively managed.
During the KIIs, there appeared to be high sensitivity when asking questions around sexual violence and harassment. This could have been due to it not being a topic openly discussed due to shame, fear or social stigma, or because violence against	Efforts were made to discuss these sensitively with KII participants, guided by the discretion of the researcher. Findings were also supplemented by the literature review.

women is normalised in society meaning sexual harassment is not deemed a crime (UN Women, 2024).	
Interviews were conducted remotely, impacting the type of organisations we were able to access – organisations that were better resourced and had internet access.	Efforts were made to accommodate a diverse range of stakeholders and being flexible to accommodate their availability for interviews. Researchers had access to the national consultant's networks in country and are currently undertaking KIIs.
There was no budget to offer reasonable accommodation for key informants who may have required additional support to participate in the interviews.	Online platforms of Zoom and Microsoft Teams were used to undertake the KIIs. The interview questions were shared with the participants beforehand.
Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) and Women's Rights Organisations (WROs) were not consulted as part of the KII process, therefore limiting the data extracted in relation to people with disabilities and other marginalised groups these organisations represent.	The research was supplemented by literature and those who did participate in the KIIs were a mix of university researchers and gender experts.

3. Research findings

3.1. Country context

Bangladesh, officially referred to as the People's Republic of Bangladesh, located within South Asia is the eighth-most populous country in the world. It has a population of 171 million people as of 2023, is projected to increase by 25% to 214 million by 2050 (World Health Organisation, 2024) and ranks 8th in the world by population. It is among the most densely populated country, with 1,350 people per square kilometre.

Bangladesh still has a highly patriarchal society, although strong progress has been made over recent decades. In 2021, Bangladesh had a gender inequality index value of 0.530, ranking 131 out of 170 countries in 2021 (UNDP 2025). However, gender gaps are closing quickly, with Bangladesh emerging as the top performer in South Asia in the 2023 Global Gender Gap Report by the World Economic Forum, with a gender gap score of 72.2% (ibid.). Bangladesh has made unexpected social progress in recent decades that has been both pro-poor and gender equitable, driven by ordinary, often very poor women exercising their agency in their everyday lives (Kabeer 2024).

Women in the labour force are concentrated in the informal economy, which leads to greater vulnerability in employment. Whilst female labour force participation is growing (from 36.3% in 2016/17 to 42.7% in 2022), there is still a wide gender gap with male labour force participation at 80% (UN Women 2024). Women spend 7.3 times as much on unpaid care and domestic work than men, which limits their opportunities for paid employment, contributes to their overall time poverty and undermines their wellbeing (UN Women 2024).

The COVID-19 pandemic slowed down progress on gender equality, resulting in the reversal of some development gains. Between January and September 2020, violence against women and girls escalated, women's unpaid care work burden increased, and many women lost their livelihoods. The pandemic impacted women's health more than men's, intensified pre-existing social and economic vulnerabilities and posed new challenges to social cohesion (UN Women 2024).

Bangladesh has a significant history of strong and vibrant movements spearheaded by women-led organisations asserting that women's rights be respected, protected and fulfilled (UN Women 2024). In 2020, an intergenerational feminist alliance called "Feminists Across Generations" was formed due to nationwide protest on the increased rate of rape cases in the country. Feminist networks and organisations continue to proactively outline priorities and demands for gender equality in the country's development journey (ibid.).

3.2. Who are the most vulnerable, marginalised or disadvantaged people participating in the seafood sector in Bangladesh? (RQ1)

This section summarises key factors of exclusion or marginalisation of people living in Bangladesh in general, as well as drilling down into the particularities of disadvantage or exclusion within communities interacting with the seafood sector where that information is available. Where we were unable to access data focusing on communities interacting with the seafood sector specifically, it is likely that many of the groups listed as vulnerable or marginalised across Bangladesh as a whole (e.g. people with disabilities; LGBTQI+ community; migrants; youth) would face many of the same barriers and challenges as those interacting with the seafood sector. In communities that are remote, isolated, hard to reach or hold more traditional values, attitudinal and infrastructural barriers and discrimination might well be compounded – the absence data should therefore not be interpreted as evidence of no marginalisation.

3.2.1. Cross cutting factors of vulnerability or marginalisation in the seafood sector

While this section outlines key vulnerabilities by population group, it is essential to recognise that these experiences are shaped by intersectionality. This means that while women and persons with disabilities may each face distinct forms of disadvantage, it is at the intersections of these identities—such as being both female and having disabilities —where the most acute forms of marginalisation can occur. Additional factors like age, ethnicity, caste, religion, migration status, and geographic location (e.g., rural or remote areas) can compound exclusion, creating layered and often more severe barriers to inclusion.

3.2.2. Women participating in the seafood sector

Age, position in the family, resource ownership, knowledge or education and how long they have been married all influence Bangladeshi women's decision-making power in the household (Haque et al. 2020). Older educated women and women who have been married longer have more household decision-making power (ibid.). Whilst poorer women are generally more marginalised, women from wealthier middle-class households face more social restrictions (Haque et al. 2020; Kruijssen et al. 2016). For example, widows and wives of migrants are allowed to work in the field, and poor women can work in factories, but wealthier middle-class wives face more social stigma if they do these types of work (Haque et al. 2020.).

Women participating the seafood sector in Bangladesh are often from more marginalised groups, such as female-headed households. Several studies state that women working in the seafood sector are more likely to be unmarried, often through widowhood or divorce, as well as being poor, landless and with lower levels of educated (Belton et al. 2018; Zarin 2015; Terry 2014). The tendency to be unmarried is higher amongst Rohingya women (Belton et al. 2018) and there are reports that outmigration of men, related to environmental degradation (see section 3.3), is contributing to rising divorce rates and the abandonment of wives, increasing women's vulnerability (Ahmed et al. 2012; Jahan and Farnworth 2014).

Whilst women interacting with the seafood sector are often highly marginalised, some studies point to their work in the seafood sector increasing their income and decision-making power within the household (Shanta et al. 2024; Terry 2014; Ahmed et al. 2012; Ahmed et al. 2010). For example, fry fishing[2] is a valuable livelihood activity for the most marginalised groups in coastal communities, including women and children and in particular landless women, and some fisherwomen have experienced improvements in their household and community status because of their financial contributions to their households (Ahmed et al. 2010). Recently, crab fattening factories for international export have been created in the southern coastal part of Bangladesh, creating jobs for rural women who are both educated or not and those who are skilled or semi-skilled, giving women income-earning opportunities and leading them to engage in further income-generating activities within rural households (Shanta et al. 2024).

On the other hand, findings show women do also lack decision-making and leadership opportunities in the seafood sector and within their households. A key informant noted that women often lack decision making power in various forms, for example within the household there are few opportunities for women to participate

[2] "Fry" or "fish fry" refers to young fish that have just hatched. In Bangladesh, fry and fingerlings (young fish) are produced in hatcheries and nurseries and sold to pond owners for aquaculture.

in the income-generating activities. Due to the conservative communities and social stigmas which surrounds women leaving the house, their participation in decision-making is very limited. Additionally, a lack of participation in decision-making for women can be found in processing factories. A key informant noted that women feel restrained by and resentful of their lack of decision-making power or ability to participate in leadership roles at the processing plants, due to socially ascribed gender norms. Rahman et al (2024) also found women are often excluded from fisheries related policy and decision-making processes, as fishing is a male-dominated activity and often undervalues women, reinforcing their vulnerability in the coastal communities. Due to limited mobility, weaker market access and less developed marketing skills, their opportunities for greater financial gain are also limited. The study found women in the fishing community were limited in their opportunities to participate in productive decision making, they had access to fewer leadership roles and less control over resources, which contributes to high levels of disempowerment.

Women lack decision-making power both within and outside of households (Kruijssen et al 2016; Haque et al. 2020; Gurung et al. 2016). In their study in northwestern Bangladesh, Haque et al. (2020) find that women's decision-making power has increased compared to 10 years ago, due to their greater involvement in income-generating work. In a study on commercial aquaculture fishing, it was found that men consult women in their household at the initial stage of adopting commercial aquaculture fishing, but women are completely excluded in the later stages, such as marketing the fish (Gurung et al. 2016). Outside of the household, women have less bargaining power as they are not recognised as economic actors (Kruijssen et al 2016).

There are an estimated 1.4 million women engaged in Bangladesh's aquaculture and fisheries sector, out of an estimated 17.80 million jobs (FAO 2017). Women are employed in a range of roles across the seafood sector, with their roles strongly shaped by their socio-economic status, as well as their location in the country, religion and marital status (FAO 2017; Choudhury et al. 2017). For example, Kruijssen et al. (2016) found women in Hindu families to be active in fish farming, whereas women's participation in fish farming was low in conservative Muslim families due to *purdah*.

Women's roles in the seafood sector include:

- **Shrimp value chain**: Women are heavily involved in the shrimp processing industry in Bangladesh – representing an estimated 88% of over 1 million factory workers, but the sector is highly gender-segregated with women being concentrated at the lower end of the value chain (FAO 2017; Terry 2014). Women are estimated to make up less than 1% of shrimp pond owners/farmers (FAO 2017). On shrimp farms, women are involved with

feeding shrimp and fish, supervising and managing farms, cropping vegetables grown on dikes separating the ponds, harvesting, sorting and weighing, and marketing (e.g. Ahmed, Allison, et al, 2010). Women are also involved in post-larval shrimp harvesting, which will be discussed on the following page.

- **Fishing**: Within fry fishing, male and female fishers use different technologies. Only men use boats to fix bag-nets across water bodies, because women have no access to boats due to socio-cultural norms and lack of resources. Women and children wade into river estuaries up to their chests using pull-nets, which can create various health issues such as skin conditions (Terry 2014). Men work on larger boats whilst women engage in fishing with small implements, wading and gleaning the shores for shellfish and collecting seaweed (Ahmed et al. 2012). In artisanal fishing communities, in addition, women are mainly responsible for performing the skilled and time-consuming jobs that take place on shore, such as net making and mending, processing the catch and marketing it (Ahmed et al. 2012).
- **Pond aquaculture**: Women and men both engage in paid and unpaid fish production roles, but women are not recognised by male household members as fish farmers, and their work is considered an extension of their unpaid care work (Kruijssen et al. 2021). In a study by Kruijssen et al. (2021), only between 2% and 5% of the interviewed households considered the woman in the household as the main decision-maker for aquaculture, and no women were found as intermediaries, retailers, or as hired labourers.

Women are engaged in the shrimp processing plants as well, specifically post-larval collection. Particularly in the Bay of Bengal, around 0.42 million people are involved in shrimp post larvae collection, including both men and women and a high percentage of younger groups (Azad, Lin and Jensen, 2007; Key Informant A and E). A study by Azad, Lin and Jensen (2007) on the socio-economic perspectives of wild shrimp larvae harvesting in coastal zones in Bangladesh found that at certain sites, few women were found to engage in post-larval collection because of seclusion (*purdah*) and only able to harvest fry in the evening time. However, at other sites, more young females were engaged with the post-larval collection, for example Amtoli and Kolapara. These females had migrated from far villages and settled at *Gucchagram* (a neighbourhood in Bangladesh) and were able to harvest during the daytime. This ability to harvest during the day is because they had already broken traditional norms by leaving their households or because they were separated or deserted by their male family members (ibid).

Women's work in the seafood sector is likely to be underestimated as it is less visible, often seen as an extension of their household unpaid care work and superseded by their role within the household (Choudhury 2017; Terry 2014; Haque et al. 2020; Kruijssen et al. 2016). For example, while male labour in the

shrimp value chain often takes the form of permanent jobs, female employment tends to be informal and flexible, which also makes the employment more vulnerable (Terry 2014). A key informant noted that in the southwestern part of Bangladesh, women and children tend to catch the fingerlings, but they are "*not taken into account when calculating the contribution to the fisheries sector, so are neglected in that sense and also marginalised. It is kind of their daily routine and is their economic contribution to the family, but it is not well accepted or documented."*

Women lack access and control over resources related to the seafood sector (Choudhury et al. 2017; Kruijssen et al. 2016; Haque et al. 2020; Gurung et al. 2016; Jahan and Farnworth 2014). Within the household, men have more decision-making power over household assets such as land and ponds, whilst women may have some decision-making power over the resources which they own and men do not use, such as poultry and sewing machines (Haque et al. 2020). This constrains women's ability to successfully engage in the seafood sector, for example because as fish farmers they have less decision-making power over ponds and the fish produced (Kruijssen et al. 2016). In a study in a predominantly Hindu rural community, Choudhury et al. (2017) found evidence of women trying to negotiate access and control of the homestead pond in order to meet their own future financial goals.

Women have lower levels of education and literacy, which limits opportunities for higher paid, formal work in the seafood sector (Kruijssen et al. 2016). Rigid gender norms and inequality mean that even with an education, opportunities for promotion or more senior roles remain limited for women in the seafood sector, for example in shrimp factors (Choudhury et al. 2017). In turn, this may further feed into the norm of not educating girls to higher levels, since it is less likely to lead to better work opportunities (ibid.).

Women have very low rates of land and asset ownership, which is a major barrier to them participating in economic activities such as aquaculture (Kruijssen et al 2016; Ahmed et al 2012; Bunting et al. 2023). Only 1% of pond owners in Bangladesh are women (Kruijssen et al. 2016). This lack of property ownership is related to asymmetrical rules of inheritance. Hindu women do not inherit full ownership of property, but receive a life interest in property[3] whilst Muslim women are entitled to an inheritance both as daughters and as wives but it is not equal to men and a male guardian will usually control ownership and decision-making around the property (Ahmed et al 2012).

A lack of land and asset ownership limits women's ability to access finance to enter and expand their economic activities in the seafood sector (Gurung et al.

[3] A 'life interest' relates to only being able to use/control the property during their lifetime and not being able to sell or transfer it (i.e. as a usufructuary).

2016; Jahan and Farnworth 2016; Ahmed et al. 2012; Bunting et al. 2023). For example, the entry costs into shrimp culture are very high, and some locations are entirely controlled by elite groups (*mahajans*) who determine employment opportunities and salaries, and are sometimes the only source of credit for fishers, generally provided at very high interest rates (Jahan and Farnworth 2014). Female fish fryers are more likely to obtain low prices for their fish, perpetuating their need for credit and trapping them in a cycle of debt (Terry 2014, Key Informant C). Commercial aquaculture fishing also has high entry costs in terms of capital investment, which means only wealthier households are able to enter the market, with women particularly excluded from the necessary formal credit (Gurung et al. 2016). Whilst Bangladesh has a strong history of providing micro-credit to women, for example through the Grameen Bank and BRAC, the small loan sizes are not enough to enter ventures such as commercial aquaculture fishing (Gurung et al. 2016). Adivasi women are further constrained from accessing credit, as they face systemic exclusion from financial institutions and social safety net programs (see section on Adivasi people below for more information) (Pant et al. 2014).

Some banks or lenders have been working closely with women by providing microcredit that supports them in setting up businesses and women's groups. A key informant noted that NGOs and lenders such as Grameen Bank and BRAC have provided microcredit to women's groups in rural Bangladesh. Hundreds of women's groups have formed using microcredit loans to support other women with economic productivity within villages, which has gradually *"released the suppression and oppression of women."* For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, many female-owned businesses in aquaculture in Bangladesh suffered from large financial losses due to diminishing supplies, infrequent delivery of feed, and fish markets being closed during lockdown. This significantly impacted women's lives and family businesses, placing extra burden on women to balance familial responsibilities and secure alternative incomes. Therefore, the World Bank and Department of Fisheries arranged for cash transfers to over 4,000 women fish farmers (World Bank Blogs, 2022). Importantly however, there were a total of 78,074 transfers distributed among fish, prawn and shrimp farmers across 75 *Upazilas* (administrative regions), meaning only 5% of these cash transfers were for women. This further exemplifies how women have less access to key financial services that support their livelihoods, or that these services reach women far less than they do for men.

Bangladeshi society has strong gendered social norms which limit women's ability to engage in the seafood sector (Choudhury et al. 2017; Kruijssen et al. 2016; Haque et al. 2020; Gurung et al. 2016; Jahan and Farnworth 2014). There are robust social norms around women's and men's roles both within the household, i.e. that women's role is primarily limited to unpaid care work, and outside of the household, for example that women cannot operate machinery (Kruijssen et al. 2016). By going against these norms, women and their families face social

stigmatisation. For example, female factory workers, from lower social classes, are unlikely to marry a man from a higher social class (Choudhury et al. 2017). However, as above, there are exceptions to these formal rules where it becomes more socially acceptable for women to work outside of their homes, mostly for poorer women, women with absent husbands or whereby the male household member has a disability (Kruijssen et al. 2016; Choudhury et al. 2017; Jahan and Farnworth 2014).

Social norms limit women's mobility, especially related to Islamic religious norms around purdah, which prevents women, particularly Muslim women, taking on certain tasks in the seafood industry (Terry 2014; Jahan and Farnworth 2014; Kruijssen et al. 2016; Haque et al. 2020; Ahmed et al. 2012; Bunting et al. 2023). Throughout Bangladesh, women rarely enter markets as vendors, since this is considered to damage their honour and reputation, leading to them and their families suffering social marginalisation (Jahan and Farnworth 2014; Zarin 2015; Haque et al. 2020). For example, female fish fryers have to sell their fry on the shore or from their houses, making them dependent on middle-men and unable to compare terms with a variety of traders to make the best sale, unlike male fish fryers who are able to do deals with a variety of traders (Terry 2014). The same has been found for Adivasi women engaged in aquaculture (see section on Adivasi people below for more information) (Pant et al. 2014). Mobility constraints not only affect the selling of produce, but also inputs, with women in the farmed fish value chain having limited access to high quality inputs such as seed, feed and fertilisers if the vendors are not close to their homes (Kruijssen et al. 2016). A key informant noted that Hindu women are more likely to be fishers and have more freedom than Muslim women, which is backed up by a study by Sultana, Thompson and Ahmed (2002).

Women in Bangladesh spend almost 6 hours per day on unpaid care and domestic work, compared to less than 1 hour for men (UN Women 2021). This disproportionate responsibility is related to gendered social norms around who is expected to undertake certain tasks (e.g. cooking, cleaning, caring for family members). This acts as a major constraint on their ability to participate in economic activities related to the seafood sector, as they lack the time to engage (Choudhury et al. 2017; Haque et al. 2020; Ahmed et al. 2012; Kruijssen et al. 2016; Gurung et al. 2016; Bunting et al. 2023). Some aquaculture projects have unintentionally increased women's workload and led to increased intrahousehold conflict (see section on GBV / VAWG below) (Kruijssen et al. 2016).

The impacts of these various barriers mean that women are constrained to low-income and informal sector roles, leading to a high gender pay gap in the seafood sector. Evidence from 2006 found that women in the shrimp value chain were earning approximately 64% of men's earnings as fry catchers and sorters, between 60% and 80% of men's wages in processing and 82% of men's wages in shrimp farming activities (Gammage et al. 2006). Whilst this evidence is quite old and

likely to be out of date, there is no evidence that the gender pay gap has closed. In late 2010, SAFE researchers surveyed 700 female workers, employed both on a permanent and contract basis at 36 seafood processing plants in south-west Bangladesh, finding that 73% of them were paid less than the national minimum wage (SAFE, 2012).

Women often lack opportunities for stable careers at the Department of Fisheries (DoF) and struggle for their voices to be heard when they are in these positions. Additionally, women face a very low glass ceiling and feel restrained in their professional and occupational lives. For example, it is very difficult for them to take on decision-making roles in the DoF and often lack power in any positions within the DoF. A key informant noted that "*you might be in a decision-making position, but are you actually able to make decisions? I have talked to one or two Bangladeshi women who are professionals, and they say that when they go to the World Bank Meetings, they are often shunted off into an insignificant position and don't progress in their careers, despite them seeming visible."*

Women working in the seafood industry often face poor working conditions, which can lead to health issues. Women working in shrimp factories face difficult conditions which can cause physical and mental health issues, with women working 8-12-hour shifts on their feet in very cold temperatures and handling shrimp with sharp edges and ice (Choudhury et al. 2017; FAO 2017). Workers in shrimp factories have been found to have high rates of skin diseases, airborne diseases and physical conditions such as arthritis and inflammation (Zarin 2015). When women work in the water, for example using pull-nets and increased saline intrusion, they are at risk of health conditions such as skin conditions, diarrhoea, and gynaecological issues (Key Informant B; Terry 2014; Jahan and Farnworth 2014; Zarin 2015).

3.2.3. Children and youth

Bangladesh has a very young population, with the largest share of the population being 15-19-year-olds (UN Women 2024). According to government statistics from 2015, around 33% of the Bangladeshi population are under age 18 (UNICEF Bangladesh n.d.).

Some children and youth experience more marginalisation, due to their age and other identity characteristics, which can make them more vulnerable to harm and abuse. Whilst the overall primary school completion rate is 85.85%, only 62.25% of children with a disability are enrolled in primary school (UNICEF Bangladesh n.d.). Whilst rates of child marriage are declining, over 50% of women have been married before the age of 18, and 15% have been married before the age of 15 (UNICEF Bangladesh n.d.). According to a survey carried out with 7,200 street children across Bangladesh in 2022, there could be millions of children living on the street, facing harsh conditions and high risk of abuse and harassment (UNICEF

Bangladesh 2023). As discussed below, there are high rates of child labour in Bangladesh, including in the seafood sector.

There is evidence of child trafficking, forced labour and child labour in the seafood sector in Bangladesh. United States Department of States 2024 Trafficking in Persons Report found evidence of trafficking in the shrimp and fish processing industries, dry fish production and fishing industry. Additionally, there was also evidence of forced labour and trafficked child labour in dry fish processing, along with children working on fishing vessels and doing dangerous jobs in the fishing industry. This was also captured in the Monterey Bay Aquarium Seafood Watch Seafood Social Risk Tool Profile, with evidence of hazardous child labour in shrimp farming (wild fry catching) and forced labour of both adults and children in shrimp processing.

3.2.4. Indigenous communities - Adivasi community

The term Adivasis is used in the Bangladesh context to refer to Indigenous peoples. Estimates range from 1.6 million Adivasis living in Bangladesh to more than 4 million, from around 1% - 2.5% of the total population (IWGIA 2025). The Adivasis of Bangladesh include at least 50 indigenous communities (Drong 2021), which are all distinct from one another but share major ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic differences from the majority of Bengalis (Minority Rights Group 2018). They can be broadly classified into ‘Adivasi of the Plains,’ who reside in the plains of the North and Northeast of Bangladesh, and ‘Pahari’ or ‘Jumma’ (hill tribes), who are concentrated in the Chittagong Hill tracts (Pant et al. 2014).

The Adivasi population is marginalised due to a combination of social, economic, and ecological factors (Pant et al. 2014). At the government level, the Constitution of Bangladesh, through an amendment in 2011, asserts that ‘the people of Bangladesh shall be known as Bangalees as a nation’, effectively excluding the indigenous non-Bengali population from the national identity (Minority Rights Group 2018). They also face systemic exclusion from a number of social safety net programs, such as the Amader project as well as from financial institutions (Pant et al. 2014). Adivasis also face increasing incidences of land dispossession and eviction from ancestral lands, including related to coastal tourism (Pant et al. 2014’ Minority Rights Group 2018). Related to overfishing and environmental degradation, they are also facing declines in natural fisheries resources, the major source of dietary animal protein (Pant et al. 2014).

3.2.5. Lower caste / Dalits

Bangladesh, like other South Asian countries, has a social structure of a caste system, which defines structural social hierarchies related to the Hindu religion. Dalits are considered at the bottom of the caste hierarchy and face high levels of discrimination and injustice. There are 5.5 – 6.5 million Dalits in Bangladesh,

the majority of whom belong to the Hindu religion along with some representation from other religions including Islam, Christianity, and Buddhism (Siddique 2023). As Bangladesh is a Muslim-dominated country, the caste structure is not as visible as it is in neighbouring countries, India and Nepal (ibid.).

There is very little data available on the Dalits in Bangladesh, but they are known to face widespread discrimination. The majority are landless. There is a lower literacy rate than the general population, they live in segregated settlements and have almost no political or social power (Siddique 2023). They face discriminatory practices based on the concept of Dalits being 'impure' and 'polluting' people of higher caste if they come into contact, such as non-Dalits not sharing food with them, not sitting next to them and not renting houses to them (ibid.). Dalits face a higher risk of modern slavery, with the majority working in jobs dependent on physical labour and with low incomes and substandard working conditions (ibid.). There is also believed to be a higher prevalence of child marriage among Dalits, particularly girls, whilst Dalit women who are divorced, abandoned or widowed are rarely allowed to remarry, leaving them facing even more discrimination and marginalisation (Jahan and Farnworth 2014).

There is very little data on Dalits participating in the seafood sector in Bangladesh. Fishing is stated as one of the traditional occupation of Dalits, alongside occupations related to waste and sanitation, brick kiln work, and agriculture (Siddique 2023). Generally, the fishing profession is still considered as a 'lower job' as it is related to the lower caste, which can lead to social stigma from the non-fishing community (Islam and Herbeck 2013).

3.2.6. Migrants

It is common for fishers to migrate within Bangladesh towards destinations such as Chittagong on a seasonal basis as well as on a shorter-term (weekly/monthly) basis, in order to chase the fast-moving Hilsha fish. This migration also happens in response to climate change and environmental degradation (Islam and Herbeck 2013; Dewan 2023, Ahmed et al. 2012). These temporary migrants are often men, leaving women at home in their origin communities continuing with unpaid care work and taking over the agricultural work (Islam and Herbeck 2013). Whilst migrating for better fishing opportunities carries financial incentives, migrants often live in fishing camps with limited access to basic facilities and isolated from community and social capital (ibid.).

Bangladeshi women are more likely to migrate outside of the seafood sector, for example from coastal communities to Dhaka for garment or brick kiln work. Class, education, urban-rural lifestyle, and kinship networks shape different migration opportunities for women (Dewan 2023).

3.2.7. Rohingya refugees

There are nearly 1 million Rohingya refugees living in makeshift camps in the southern coastal district of Cox's Bazar after fleeing attacks and violence in Myanmar (UNICEF 2024). They are highly marginalised, relying on humanitarian assistance for protection, food, water, shelter and health, and living in highly congested camps (ibid.). Gender-based violence incidents in the camps are on the rise and refugees are increasingly resorting to negative coping mechanisms, including child marriage and polygamy, and falling victim to trafficking (UN Women 2024). Gender-diverse persons and women and girls with disabilities in both the camps and host community remain at higher risk of marginalisation and abuse due to stigma and discrimination (ibid.).

Although the refugees cannot work legally, some have found informal work related to the seafood sector. This includes working on fishing boats, helping to push the boats out to sea, shattering ice blocks to preserve the seafood catch in the searing heat, mending nets or repairing boats (Kilcoyne 2018). Some Rohingya women have found work drying fish at a yard in nearby Nazirartek, for daily earnings of 100 taka to 200 taka ($1.20 to $2.40) (ibid.). In the fish drying sector, Rohingya refugees have been found to face lower wage rates and social marginalisation (Belton et al. 2018). Rohingya women and girls, particularly those that are unmarried, are at high risk of SEAH (Belton et al. 2018). For example, in the dried fish sector, Rohingya workers are seen as ‘outsiders,’ meaning they are often ill-treated and more vulnerable to harassment from their ‘local’ managers (WorldFish 2018). Various NGOs, such as WorldFish, have been supporting the Rohingya communities in the Cox Bazar flats, through supporting livelihood improvements and leveraging the biodiversity conservation in the Bay of Bengal to support this (Key Informant B).

3.2.8. People with disabilities

People with disabilities in Bangladesh face significant economic and social challenges (Hussain 2021). Despite receiving some government financial support, people with disabilities often experience increased financial strain due to inadequate access to income and resources, exacerbating their exclusion from economic opportunities. Challenges in accessing healthcare services, education, employment, and social integration further contribute to the economic vulnerability of people with disabilities in Bangladesh (Key Informant B).

In coastal areas, challenges for people with disabilities are exacerbated. Higher exposure to natural disasters like cyclones, which can result in physical injuries and trauma, contribute to the prevalence of disabilities, whilst environmental factors such as climate change-induced events like sea-level rise and coastal erosion can disrupt livelihoods and exacerbate living conditions, impacting the mental and physical well-being of coastal residents (Samiullah et al., 2024). At the same time, more limited access to healthcare services, inadequate infrastructure, and socio-economic

vulnerabilities leads to further exclusion of people with disabilities in coastal areas (ibid.).

People with disabilities are often neglected or excluded from decision-making and specific policies. A key informant noted that "*it is a disaster in the sense that our society is not thinking about people with disabilities. We have always neglected them because we do not have the social awareness of their needs. They have the same rights as me, and society should become more aware, so the burden is not just on the families."* This shows that people with disabilities, and their families or carers, experience marginalisation and are at risk of increased vulnerability, given the lack of consideration across key services, processes and policies.

A study by Rahman (2024) found there to be a significant correlation between environmental degradation, socio-economic marginalisation and increased vulnerability among people with disabilities in coastal Bangladesh. The findings highlight the urgent need for targeted policies and interventions to support people with disabilities in coastal communities by improving accessibility, inclusive disaster risk reduction, and climate adaptation. A holistic, multi-dimensional approach is essential, addressing socio-economic disparities, infrastructure, awareness, and collaboration among stakeholders.

3.2.9. LGBTQI+ community

In Bangladesh, the LGBTQI+ community faces significant legal and social challenges. Same-sex sexual activity between consenting males is criminalised under Section 377 of the Bangladesh Penal Code and punishable by imprisonment. It is unclear as to whether Section 377 also includes female same-sex sexual activity, likely related to social invisibility of female same-sex relationships (UK government, 2024). Though rarely enforced, Section 377 is used to arrest, harass and extort individuals based on their sexual orientation, contributing to a climate of fear and repression for LGBTQI+ individuals (ibid.).

The Hijara population describes a group of gender-diverse people that may include eunuch, intersex, effeminate males, people who remove their male genitals and others (RSH 2024). The sociocultural identity of a Hijra is established through their ritualistic integration into the Hijra community and accepting a master-disciple system, with its own spirituality, dialect and customs (ibid.). The population size is unknown, with different sources stating 12,000 and 120,000 people (ibid.). They are one of the most marginalised communities in Bangladesh, facing extreme discrimination and harassment (ibid.). The Hijra population were legally recognised as a 'third gender' in 2013 (UK government 2024). There is no legal framework for recognising other gender-diverse people outside of the Hijra community (UK government, 2024), which places them at risk of being unable to access their rights.

The Hijara population face increased SEAH risks related to their gender expression across different spheres of life, including family, community, education and the workplace. This can include intimidation, verbal, physical, sexual and emotional violence (RSH 2024). For example, they frequently experience bullying and sexual harassment at educational institutions by fellow students and teachers (ibid.).

LGBTQ+ persons are often stigmatised, leading to discrimination, social exclusion and hostility. Many face pressure to hide their sexual orientation or gender identity to avoid harassment and violence (UK government, 2024). There have been found to be higher rates of self-harm, suicidal ideation and suicide attempts among the LGBTQI+ communities (Mozumder 2024).

No evidence or data was found relating to LGBTQI+ communities interacting with the seafood sector. The Hijara population are usually engaged in specific livelihood activities (e.g. begging, performing at weddings) which are not related to the seafood sector.

3.2.10. Fishers living in the poverty margins

Within the seafood sector, there are fishers who live on the poverty margins who are at risk of marginalisation and exclusion due to the social hierarchies. A key informant discussed different social hierarchies within the sector, particularly among landlords who hold significant power by charging high rents for land from poorer people, including fishers. This is also the same for those who are providing credit to fishers. A key informant provided an example of small shopkeepers or small entrepreneurs within the crab business who would need a loan to pay for nets or fishing equipment. Montu and Ahmed (2020) explains that fishers are unable to receive loans from banks, so they take loans from businessmen or wholesalers at very high interest rates and with stringent conditions locking them into being unable to sell their catches to anyone else. These fishers then fall into a trap where their earnings are only enough to cover their living expenses and repayments to their creditor. The initial loan may have lifted them out of poverty, but they now find themselves in a credit trap, where it is almost impossible for the fishers to earn enough money to pay back their debt and ties them to the lender for another year. This practice is also significantly impacted by the depleting fish stocks, fishing bans and protected areas, which leads to an increase in illegal fishing (discussed further in the 3.3) (Montu and Ahmed, 2020).

Artisanal fishers experience more marginalisation in the seafood sector in comparison to industrial fishers. According to a key informant, artisanal fishing communities are considered a disadvantaged community in society, living hand to mouth. Due to their limited income, they are less likely to be able to afford fuel for boats, fishing equipment such as nets, and lifesaving equipment such as lifejackets

or insurance. They then become dependent on moneylenders to purchase the resources they need and fall into the abovementioned credit trap.

3.3. How are those most dependent on the seafood sector at risk from future environmental degradation? (RQ2)

This study has found that environmental degradation has an impact on people who are most dependent on the coastal resources in Bangladesh, and affects livelihoods, income, safety and sustainability of the coastal and marine life.

3.3.1. Who is most dependent on the seafood sector in Bangladesh?

This section overlaps with Section 3.2, as most of the vulnerable and marginalised communities in Bangladesh's coastal region are those most reliant on marine and coastal resources. These communities include fishers, women, children, people with disabilities and Rohingya community, Adivasi, and migrants. As noted, there is no evidence to show how LGBTQI+ people are engaged within the seafood sector, however it does not mean they do not participate, and therefore the next discussion on how these communities are at risk from future environmental degradation could also apply to LGBTQI+ people who are working in the seafood sector but not disclosing their LGBTQI+ identities.

3.3.2. In what ways are these communities/ populations at risk from future environmental degradation?

Being a low-lying and densely populated nation, Bangladesh faces major environmental challenges that threaten sustainable development and public well-being. Key contributors to environmental degradation in the country include deforestation, increased urbanisation, lack of education and consciousness of people, unplanned industrialisation, and poverty. The main features of environmental degradation in Bangladesh include air and water pollution, soil erosion, increased natural disasters such as flooding, drought, cyclones and storm surges. Further effects include rising sea levels, extreme weather and global warming which will eventually cause population displacement, area inundation, coastal islands being threatened, a loss of agricultural production and destruction of coastal shrimp productions, alongside effects on the biodiversity of fish. From a socio-economic viewpoint, environmental degradation can also negatively affect the economy, health, food security and livelihoods, of Bangladeshi adults and children, and even security. (Kabir, 2025).

The country's location and reliance on natural resources make it highly vulnerable. Deforestation in hill areas and wetlands causes habitat loss and erosion, while air pollution from brick kilns and vehicles poses serious health risks, especially in Dhaka. (Kabir, 2025). Rivers such as the Ganges, Brahmaputra, and Meghna are increasingly polluted by industrial waste and sewage, harming ecosystems and health. Freshwater is also being contaminated by saltwater intrusion due to the sea level rising, which effects the drinking water and agriculture, along with fish stocks in

rivers. This also causes gynaecological and skin diseases for women. Additionally, 11% of the population along the coast can be displaced with only one meter of sea-level rises and destroy the coastal aquatic resources and shrimp producing farms (Kabir, 2025).

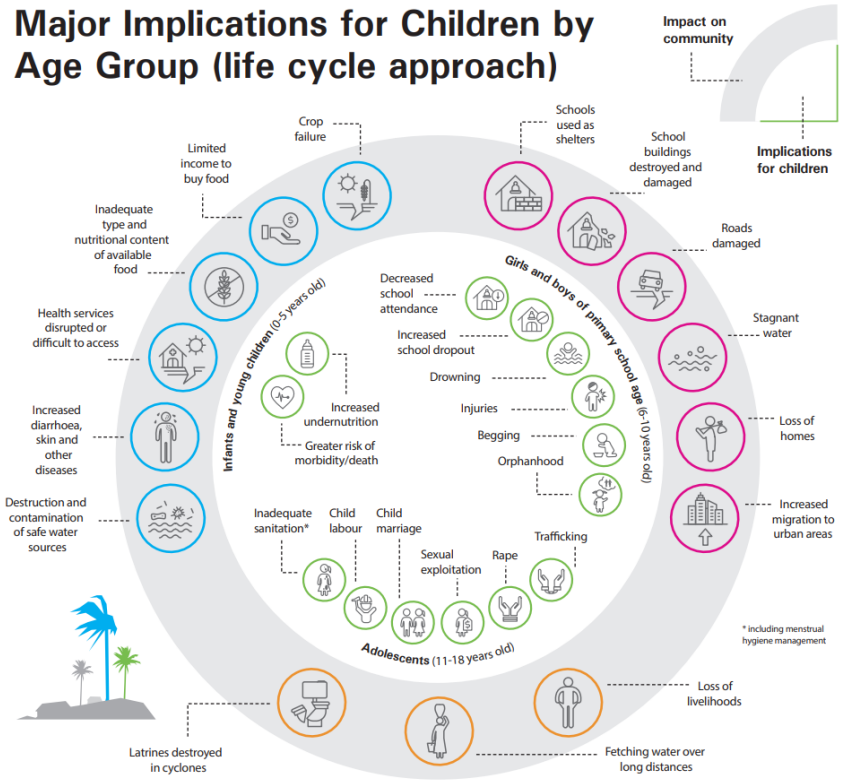
Bangladesh is facing declining marine fish stocks and diversity of marine life. Due to the lack of knowledge among fishers, poor implementation of the Marine Fisheries Act[4], and rapid use of industrial trawlers and unauthorised fishing gear in permitted fishing zones, fish stocks and marine biodiversity has been significantly affected (Mongbay, 2024). Rahman, Nahiduzzaman, and Wahab (2021) found that marine fish species have depleted from 475 species in 1971 to 394 in 2021 due to various anthropogenic activities such as juvenile catches, overfishing, disrupting migration patterns, pollution and climate change (Mongabay, 2024). All key informants concurred that overfishing and saline intrusion are huge problems for the environment and livelihoods in the coastal region. Mongabay (2024) interviewed a fisher from Chittagong, who described how 20 years ago he could get a modest income from 24 hours in week at sea, however now he must venture twice for the same period to get the same amount of fish, but of lower diversity. Consequentially, there has been a rise of illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing in Bangladesh, due to the lack of appropriate and robust governmental laws, regulation and manpower. A key informant noted that guards are often bribed to allow others to fish when banned. This has led to the extinction of fish species, biodiversity loss and increased poverty, with artisanal fishing not brining in enough money for many fishers to make a living (Mozumder et al, 2023; Mongabay, 2024).

Due to depleting fish stocks, many men are migrating either out of Bangladesh or moving seasonally to chase the fast-moving Hilsha fish. Those that remain in their home will suffer significant economic strain. This has significant impacts on family life and has led to increase divorce rates and abandonment of wives, increasing the vulnerability of women (Key Informant; Ahmed et al. 2012; Jahan and Farnworth, 2014). When husbands leave their families, women have to search for economic opportunities. Where men remain in their homes, and the family is experiencing economic hardship this can lead to an increase in intimate partner violence. A key informant noted "*there is no scope for income generating activities as fishing is the main source of income. So, with the overfishing and declining fish stocks in the Bay of Bengal, there is a great impact on the income of those households. So, when there is no money in the households, the relationships become strained, and violence occurs."* More on the risks of gender-based violence is discussed in Section 3.4.

[4] The Marine Fisheries Act 2020 is a key legislation that is used for conservation ad sustainable management of marine fisheries. It addresses licensing, fishing operations, declaration of marine protected areas, and penalties for violations (FAOLEX Database, 2020).

Early warning systems are less accessible for women and people with disabilities. Women become disproportionately impacted from environmental degradation and outmigration of men because they often have less access to early warning systems or preparedness for extreme weather events such as floods and cyclones (Key Informant). Men are more likely to have access to these early warning systems due to their increased engagement in fishing and having better connections with different departments working on these early warning systems. Women are much less likely to have access these facilities (ibid). These systems are similarly inaccessible to people with disabilities in terms of information, lack of inclusive planning, inadequate resource mechanisms (such as accessing shelters, evacuation and inaccessible infrastructure) and limited resources and capacity within communities to respond (Jefford, 2025; Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2020).

Children and youth are disproportionately affected by the risks of environmental degradation. UNICEF (2016) developed a useful booklet on the impact of climate change on children in Bangladesh and represented a range of different impacts on the community and specific impacts on infants and children, girls and boys of primary school age, and adolescents. The figure below provides an infographic of the range of different implications climate change has on each age group, for example, increased undernutrition and greater risk of morbidity and death for infants and young children, decreased school attendance or dropout, injuries, and orphanhood for girls and boys of primary school age, and increased risk of child marriage, labour and sexual exploitation, along with inadequate sanitation for adolescents.



UNICEF (2016) The Impact of Climate Change on Children in Bangladesh

3.4. What are the key issues in terms of SEAH for OCPP to be aware of within the Bangladesh programme that are flagged through GEDSI analysis? (RQ3)

3.4.1. SEAH, GBV and VAC context in Bangladesh

SEAH happens within organisations and can be perpetrated by staff, consultants and contractors. Because it is primarily perpetrated by people, usually men, in positions of power it often goes unreported. SEAH is often a form of gender-based violence (GBV) and tends to be targeted at either women or children. Limited literature on safeguarding including SEAH has been found from the seafood sector in Bangladesh. This GEDSI analysis therefore also looks more broadly at GBV and violence against children (VAC) as key indicators of where SEAH and other forms of safeguarding related misconduct is likely to happen within OCPP in Bangladesh.

GBV Context

The rates of gender-based violence in Bangladesh are among the highest in the world. The VAW survey (2015) conducted by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) estimated that 72.6% of ever-married women experience one or more forms of violence by their husbands at least once in their lifetime, compared to a global average of 30% (UN Women 2024). 37.5% of adolescent girls aged 15-19 experience physical intimate partner violence whilst 84% of women with disabilities reported experiencing at least one act of emotional abuse or physical or sexual violence from their partner during their lifetime (UN Women 2024).

There is some evidence that participating in the seafood sector is leading to higher risks of gender-based violence. For example, the shift from rice cultivation to commercial aquaculture fishing and the accompanied sudden surge in household income has been found to increase social problems, including drug consumption and related social issues. (Gurung et al. 2016). Commercial aquaculture fishing has high entry costs, necessitating loans, which can also lead to financial difficulties exacerbating household stress, a strong risk factor for IPV (ibid.). Zarin (2015) also states that shrimp farming leads to harassment, drinking, gambling and domestic violence, although with no underlying analysis of the drivers or any specific evidence.

Economic strains can increase violence at the household level and can be exacerbated if families are displaced because of environmental degradation and natural disasters. After natural disasters, the rate of women being subjected to gender-based violence increases, as a consequence of financial insecurity and economic crisis (Hossain and Rahaman, 2022). Where displacement occurs, men often struggle to find work in new places and families experience impoverishment. These stressors have been found to lead to violence against women in their families, including violence in the form of dowry practices, psychological assault, and physical violence (ibid). The study by Hossain and Rahaman (2022) found that women often

to not resist or report these incidences, due to fear, shame and social norms that normalise violence. Child marriage is also a common phenomenon in disaster prone areas, which can adversely affect girls physical and mental health and risk of early pregnancy. The study found the main reasons for child marriage are adverse economic conditions and prevailing social norms of the family.

Violence against Children (VAC) and Child Labour

Violence against children is common in Bangladesh. 89% of children under the age of 14 experience physical and emotional violence monthly at home, affecting over 45 million children in Bangladesh (MICs 2019).

There are high risks of child labour in the seafood sector. Across Bangladesh, 11.3% of children (aged 5-17) are engaged in child labour, hazardous work, or both (UNICEF Bangladesh n.d.). In the seafood sector, child labour is common. According to the American government's Bureau of International Labor Affairs (ILAB), dried fish from Bangladesh is likely to be produced by child labour, forced labour and forced child labour, and shrimp is likely to be produced by child labour (U.S. Department of Labor 2024). Some of the factors which increase the risk of child labour in Bangladesh include unaffordable costs of education (e.g. stationary, uniforms) and the cultural acceptance of children supporting their family's economic activities (Seafood Watch 2023).

Economic violence

Men, women and children who are engaged in the seafood sector can face economic violence, especially women. A key informant noted that economic violence occurs frequently in the coastal region of Bangladesh, although it often goes unreported. In most cases, *"women who are selling their catches, let's say they are negotiated to be paid 100Tk, but if a man went to sell the same amount, then he is likely to get more, say 110Tk. You can see there is an economic violence because of gender, making our women and children oppressed by society on a daily basis."* This is likely to be the case for children who are also participating in the seafood sector, who "*may not even get paid anything" (*ibid).

Underreporting

There is very likely to be underreporting of gender-based violence and harassment or exploitation. Survivors of domestic violence, child marriage, and gender-based violence face a lack of protection, limited access to justice, and insufficient services in Bangladesh (UNGA 2023). There are also significant barriers to reporting or seeking legal recourse, and public prosecutors are poorly trained and, at times, corrupt (UNGA 2023).

Legislation

Bangladesh has several legal and policy instruments addressing gender-based violence, VAC and SEAH. The Prevention of Repression against Women and Children Act 2000 is a vital law to deal with various sexual offences against women and girls. The positive aspects of this law include; prohibiting disclosure of the identity of rape survivors (section 14), camera trial/closed door examination of rape survivors in court (section 20) and immediate medical examination of rape survivors (section 32) (RSH South Asia Hub 2022). The High Court of Bangladesh, in a landmark verdict on 14 May 2009, issued guidelines to prevent sexual harassment at all workplaces and educational institutions which was followed up by instructions from the central government to implement the High Court guidelines (ibid.). This has led to the development of internal policy and procedures on broad issues of safeguarding in some formal organisations, such as anti-harassment policy, committee on anti-harassment, child protection policy, and the introduction of complaints boxes in the workplace (ibid.).

However, various gaps and limitations in the existing laws make it difficult for survivors to secure justice. There are inconsistencies and contradictions between different laws, a lack of coherence between relevant legal and policy instruments, and above all, gender discriminatory provisions of laws (RSH South Asia Hub 2022). There are also major implementation issues in the existing laws, which include an inadequate discussion of the issue at the community level, lack of independent and impartial investigations, lack of confidentiality within the procedures, underreporting due to fear of reprisal and a lack of trust in the available mechanisms (ibid.).

Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment (SEAH)

It was clear that asking questions around SEAH during the KIIs was sensitive and often participants were unable to provide any information about SEAH. This section is therefore primarily focused on findings from the literature review.

There is some evidence of SEAH against women working in the seafood sector (Terry 2014; Zarin 2015; Ahmed et al. 2012), but this evidence is unlikely to be a full picture of the issue. Female migrants working in shrimp processing factories have been found to face harsh conditions, are not aware of their employment rights and are afraid to speak out against abuses (Terry 2014). Women working on shrimp farms face harassment and abuse from male managers and co-workers (Halim, 2004, in Terry 2014). Female fry fishers are at risk of being coerced into accepting low prices by threats of sexual violence (Verite n.d. in Terry 2014).

Women face a higher risk of SEAH when selling fish at the markets. Fisherwomen sometimes face harassment from male vendors and buyers, and it is particularly unsafe at dawn and dusk (Deb et al. 2014). A study by Haque et al. (2020) found some evidence that the market has become safer for women over the past 10 years, with less harassment.

There are seasonal changes to the risks of SEAH in the seafood sector. The government bans hilsa fishing for around 2 months of the year, in order to support breeding and prevent overfishing. Some evidence has found that women may face higher rates of gender-based violence during the ban period, including physical and mental abuse, and economic violence being coerced into handing over their income to male household members (Islam, 2024). In the Jaladash (fisher) community, a sub-set of low caste Hindus, men go to sea for about 5 to 6 months, leaving women behind who become acutely vulnerable to physical and sexual harassment from outsiders who know that no males are present in the community (Jahan and Farnworth 2014).

No evidence was found about SEAH cases in the seafood sector being investigated and brought to justice. Within the aid sector in Bangladesh, the primary challenges for investigating cases of SEAH in Bangladesh have been found to be PSEAH incidents being hidden, a lack of evidence, fear of losing your job, power imbalances, lack of gender sensitivity among the development/NGO workers and the community, and a lack of remedial measures (RSH South Asia Hub 2022). Many of these challenges are likely to also be prevalent in the seafood sector.

3.4.2. Other safeguarding risks

In Bangladesh, it is difficult for workers to realise their rights. The 2025 International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) Global Rights Index places Bangladesh as one of the 10 worst countries in the world for working people (ITUC 2025), related to regressive laws, obstacles to forming unions, and brutal repression of worker strikes (Seafood Watch 2023). There are barriers to enforcing labour laws and protecting victims, such as insufficient resources for inspections and trafficking-related corruption (Seafood Watch 2023).

Within the Bangladeshi seafood sector there is strong evidence of human trafficking and forced labour. Interviews with workers across the shrimp supply chain in 2014 found substandard or exploitative working conditions across the supply chain, as well as examples of forced labour, including hazardous working conditions, child labour, bonded labour, withholding of pay, excessively low wages, health and safety violations, restricted union activities, verbal abuse and excessive hours (EJF 2014). The rapid development of the shrimp industry since the 1980s was not accompanied by the development of appropriate regulation and oversight (Seafood Watch 2023). During 1980-2000 the expansion of shrimp ponds led to tensions, violence, community displacement and deadly conflicts (ibid.). Significant regulatory and legal gaps remain, with most of the shrimp sector being unregistered and informal, with a long, complex and primarily informal supply chain, making product traceability complex (Seafood Watch 2023; EJF 2014; Popi and Mahfuz 2024).

Factors that increase the risk of forced labour and human trafficking for individuals working in the seafood sector include poverty, gender

discrimination and climate-induced displacement (Seafood Watch 2023). Additionally, most wild fry collection and shrimp production takes place in rural areas where there are limited alternative options for livelihood diversification, and the seasonality of shrimp production drives the risk of debt bondage and the presence of contract labour arrangements (ibid.). Most shrimp processing workers, who are predominantly women, do not have permanent contracts offering worker protection(ibid.).

3.4.3. Safeguarding implications for OCPP Bangladesh

This GEDSI review has identified the following safeguarding considerations for OCPP:

Unclear safeguarding arrangements across partner organisations

The programme works with a large number of partners including Government agencies, universities, consultancy companies and CSOs. As discussed with the OCPP Bangladesh team, OCPP is currently not aware of the safeguarding policies and procedures of these partners. Unless there are clear arrangements in place it is unlikely that OCPP will become aware of any safeguarding related misconduct reported within partners organisations and have an agreed process of response.

It will be important for OCPP to take a different approach to safeguarding for the different partners and work with them to understand what arrangements they should have in place. For CSOs and small private sector initiatives, often due diligence can be used as an entry point to offer technical assistance on safeguarding as needed. For universities and Government institutions, OCPP will need to use a different approach. This may include understanding the existing safeguarding procedures within Universities and Government departments and taking a collaborative and 'positive influencing' approach to mitigate risk.

There is a risk that SEAH and safeguarding related misconduct may occur within OCPP funded activities

It is important for OCPP to understand that OCPP-funded personnel (including delivery partners such as university staff) may regularly come into contact with marginalised individuals due to their work in communities, for example, through data collection and site visits to shrimp farms. This increases the risk of safeguarding-related misconduct, including SEAH, targeted at the most marginalised community members. It is thus important that safeguarding procedures (including mechanisms for community members to raise concerns) are in place to mitigate the risk of SEAH and other forms of harm.

OCPP should work with partners to build understanding of sexual harassment as in many organisations this often goes unreported. Efforts should be made to ensure OCPP-funded staff are provided appropriate support if they have experienced sexual

harassment and staff are trained to understand what constitutes sexual harassment and how to report any concerns.

OCPP is working in the seafood sector, where the risk of GBV, forced labour and child labour is high

OCPP is working in the seafood sector, including with shrimp farms, where there is evidence of high levels of child labour, forced labour and GBV. This increases the risk of safeguarding related misconduct amongst partners that the OCPP is working with including both in relation to women and children.

3.4.4. Safeguarding risk areas for OCPP Bangladesh by activity area

CEFAS has a 'Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Harassment (SEAH) Policy within International Development' which details the expectations for CEFAS and their partners related to the prevention of SEAH. It is mandatory that all CEFAS staff working overseas have completed the 1-hour online 'Safeguarding Essentials' training, and many staff have also attended a 1 day in-person course on SEAH. CEFAS safeguarding arrangements include an email address to raise incidents.

Alongside this training there is still a need to review and identify safeguarding concerns and risks that might arise through interventions. A number of safeguarding risk areas have been identified through this review, many of which are more general risks to be reflected upon by OCPP. These are not exhaustive and do not form concrete recommendations for action within the programme, but rather can be used for informing programme design and considerations for future interventions. They have been developed based on a review of programme activities and a 1-hour call with the OCPP team to discuss these in detail, and have been amended based on written feedback from OCPP on a draft version of this report.

Activity area	Risk areas
Soldier fly farming training Disseminate knowledge on, and techniques for, the use of Black Soldier Fly and beetle larvae as alternative aquaculture feeds, a means of reducing costs by recycling waste material, and an alternative source of employment for farmers. A report on engagement activities, training, and uptake will be generated.	- Face-to-face training is being delivered by staff from the Bangladesh Agriculture University to farmers, which may put some respondents and data collectors at risk if inadequate risk assessment is undertaken and appropriate safeguarding training is not provided. - Women farmers were around 40% of participants in a previous training. It is unclear whether the training staff were male or female. Women face higher SEAH risks than men. Unclear if personal data (e.g. gender) is being held confidentially. - University staff are travelling to rural areas to give the training. Training locations are unknown but are likely to be in a community building / area in each village. Unclear if training locations and times have been risk assessed and are accessible to women, people with disabilities and other marginalised groups. - Unclear safeguarding arrangements with the Bangladesh Agriculture University – unclear

	whether they have a code of conduct, safeguarding policy or undertake any safeguarding-related training before giving training to farmers. Unclear whether any community feedback mechanism is in place, which would be important to ensure accountability and reporting channels for community members.
Improve understanding of shrimp health and disease across the production cycle Improve understanding of shrimp health and disease across the production cycle in intensive and extensive farms. A report will be generated and a manuscript drafted for publication. The presence of pathogens throughout the cycle will be assessed with an emphasis on the role of co-infections and their relation to environmental parameters. This year active and passive sampling will be undertaken. Active sampling will include sampling of 7 farms in 3 different locations every 2 months. Passive sampling will include interaction with farmers reporting disease outbreaks. The presence of diseases will be determined via molecular and histology methods.	- Face-to-face data collection is taking place, collected by staff from the Bangladesh Agriculture University from shrimp farmers, which may put some respondents and data collectors at risk if inadequate safeguarding training is provided, meaning safeguarding incidents are more likely to occur. - Data is also being collected about the farmers themselves (occupation, education level), including some personal data (gender), which may be sensitive if not held confidentially. - Data not yet shared with OCPP on farmer characteristics (e.g. how many of the participating farmers are women) which would be useful for the programme to know. - Unclear whether agreed data management guidelines are in place between CEFAS and partners. UK GDPR is not always being followed. - Unclear safeguarding arrangements with the Bangladesh Agriculture University – unclear whether they have a code of conduct, safeguarding policy or undertake any safeguarding-related training before collecting data from farmers. Unclear whether any community feedback mechanism is in place, which would be important to ensure accountability and reporting channels for community members.
Generation of greenhouse gases produced by shrimp farms Generate data and a report or publication on the generation of greenhouse gases produced by shrimp farms during the farming cycle (in relation to climate change). Two different culture systems (integrated and polyculture systems) will be compared. In a total of 12 ponds, Greenhouse Gas emissions will be analysed at 15-day intervals (both day and nighttime). The	- Face-to-face data collection is taking place, collected by staff from the Bangladesh Agriculture University from shrimp farmers, which may put some respondents and data collectors at risk if inadequate training is provided. - Data is also being collected about the farmers themselves (occupation, education level), including some personal data (gender), which may be sensitive if not held confidentially. - 34 farmers are engaged, including 8 women farmers, across a variety of ages and education levels. Women and girls face higher SEAH risks than men. - Unclear whether agreed data management guidelines are in place between CEFAS and

widely used static floating chamber method will be applied to measure CH4, N2O, and CO2 emissions from prawn farms.	partners. UK GDPR does not always appear to be followed. - Unclear safeguarding arrangements with the Bangladesh Agriculture University – unclear whether they have a code of conduct, safeguarding policy or undertake any safeguarding-related training before collecting data from farmers. Unclear whether any community feedback mechanism is in place, which would be important to ensure accountability and reporting channels for community members.
Bivalve work It includes capacity building in the 3x competent authority labs (QC labs: Dhaka, Khulna and Chattogram) to help set up methods of analysis for the implementation of Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) controls along with risk profiling work to risk assess potential growing areas.	- Face-to-face capacity building and knowledge exchange is taking place between Cefas (the FAO Reference Centre for Bivalve Sanitation) and the Department of Fisheries, mostly within laboratories / office environments. Unclear if training locations and times have been risk assessed and are accessible to women, people with disabilities and other marginalised groups. - The work includes supporting the competent authority labs to undertake risk assessments for bivalve mollusc production sites in Bangladesh. The risk assessment template is focused on scientific risk and does not include any social risks. - Data collection is taking place at potential field sites in order to fill out the risk assessments, including speaking with local harvesters, which may put some respondents and data collectors at risk if inadequate training is provided. - Unclear safeguarding arrangements with the Department of Fisheries and the FAO Reference Centre for Bivalve Sanitation – unclear whether they have a code of conduct, safeguarding policy or undertake any safeguarding-related training before interacting with communities. Unclear whether any community feedback mechanism is in place, which would be important to ensure accountability and reporting channels for community members.
Implementation of the Aquaculture Network The primary goal of establishing the Aquaculture Network is to unite experts in Bangladesh's aquaculture sector from various organisations, including universities, private enterprises, and non-governmental	- Working with a mix of seven different organisations (including private sector, universities and NGOs) who all may have different safeguarding arrangements and capabilities in place which could lead to inconsistency and poor-quality provision. - Activities include scoping of planned technical interventions, training to small-scale shrimp farmers, external communications, GESI-sensitive training and the establishment of a GESI-focused working group. Unclear whether these activities

organisations. This collaboration aims to apply for grants and enhance the aquaculture industry within the country. A significant element in structuring the activities to be executed by the Network was the integration of GESI initiatives both within the Network and the broader aquaculture sector.	have been risk assessed. Face-to-face activities where there are power dynamics, such as training to small-scale shrimp farmers, present SEAH risks. - The Network Coordinator organisation does have a Safeguarding policy, but the safeguarding arrangements across the seven organisations are unclear – unclear whether they have a code of conduct, safeguarding policy or undertake any safeguarding-related training before interacting with communities. Unclear whether any community feedback mechanism is in place.

It is important to note that most of these activities are due to close within the next 12 months, however the range of risks identified will be relevant for similar programmes being designed in future. It is also critical to consider the range of safeguarding implications for ethical and safe close out of programmes, especially where there has been significant engagement with communities.

There are various publicly available resources which will be useful for OCPP as they consider how to mitigate these risks, for example:

- How to design and deliver safe and ethical monitoring, evaluation and research | Safeguarding Resource and Support Hub
- How-to note: Informed consent for research and data collection | Safeguarding Resource and Support Hub
- How to keep data and individuals safe for any registration, research or monitoring and evaluation activity | Safeguarding Resource and Support Hub
- Safe programme closure | Safeguarding Resource and Support Hub
- RSH safeguarding organisation capacity self-assessment | Safeguarding Resource and Support Hub

3.5. Who are the key stakeholders to engage on GEDSI and why? What work is already going on to address poverty and vulnerability and empower groups across OCPP areas (those interacting or dealing with seafood)? What lessons can be learned from this? (RQ5)

3.5.1. Stakeholder mapping

The table below highlights some key organisations engaged on GEDSI issues in the seafood sector in Bangladesh. However, it is important to note that this list is not comprehensive as there is minimal work being done in this area.

Stakeholder group	Vulnerable and marginalised groups they work with (or not)	Examples of work they do
WorldFish	Pregnant women, lactating mothers, young children, women, Rohingya communities	WorldFish has been working with partners in Bangladesh since 1987 to enhance fisheries and aquaculture, supporting rural livelihoods and food security through research. Current efforts include developing a Bangladesh Strategy for 2025–2041, aligned with WorldFish Global Strategy and national goals, and revising the 1998 National Fisheries Policy. The strategy focuses on technology, climate resilience, nutrition, and gender equity to promote sustainable aquatic food production. Key initiatives include promoting small-scale fisheries and aquaculture through small scale fisheries and sustainable aquaculture. For the first, The Small Fish and Nutrition Project boosted fish production in Sunamganj District, enhancing nutrition for pregnant women, lactating mothers, and young children. The ECOFISH II project, using ecosystem-based fisheries management, increased hilsa production and strengthened the resilience of coastal fishing communities, benefiting over 13,000 households and improving more than 300,000 hectares of fisheries. For sustainable aquaculture, The Feed the Future Bangladesh Aquaculture and Nutrition Activity (BANA) improved aquaculture productivity, market systems, and nutrition behaviours, reaching nearly 385,000 people.
Consultative Group on International Agriculture Research (CGIAR)	Women, youth and social inclusion	CGIAR have funded a range of different programmes that have focused on gender equality advancement within the fisheries sector in Bangladesh, including the research programme Fish Agri-Food Systems (FISH), funded by WorldFish, CGIAR and Gennovate, the GENDER Impact Platform which puts equality and inclusion at the heart of the food systems research. A presentation recently held by CGIAR was at the CGIAR GENDER Conference on the Fisheries Sector and Women in Bangladesh. CGIAR have a vast collection of research that has been conducted on gender equality, youth and social

		inclusion in Bangladesh, looking at topics on food security to social assistance and Gender Equality Annual Technical Report.
Seafood and Gender Equality (SAGE)	Women, LGBTQI+, ethnic minorities,	SAGE focuses on uplifting and integrating diverse voices in the seafood industry, promoting a more equitable and resilient sector globally. In Bangladesh, initiatives focused on gender equality can lead to increased fish production, improved livelihoods, and greater participation of women in decision-making. Please note, SAGE work globally and it is unclear to what extent they work in Bangladesh.
Helen Keller	Mothers, children	Since 1988, Helen Keller Intl has partnered with the government of Bangladesh and other organisations to improve nutrition and healthcare. Over the past three decades, we have worked to enhance food and nutrition security, control neglected tropical diseases and protect vision. Our efforts include helping families grow nutritious foods despite extreme weather, protecting mothers and young children from malnutrition, and training healthcare workers to prevent blindness caused by diabetes. Key Informant B noted that Helen Keller work in the Cox Bazar region and focus on GEDSI.
Department of Fisheries		Key Informants noted that DoF provide both food and money during times of fishing bans and food insecurity. Additionally, they have supplied a range of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and lifesaving equipment to fishers, including fiberglass boats which last much longer than wooden boats. This has also been supported by the Food and Agriculture Organisation, with further education on how to operate and maintain the boats and use the lifesaving and weather-related systems.
Citizen Fisher Safety Network	Fishers	Providing training on collecting data about fishery specific information, such as where to fish, alongside data on safety parameters for fishers, such as physical and chemical environmental information to support wildlife conservation. There are approximately 22 landing sites along the coastal belt where data is collected, and the group comprises of

		around 22 people and officials. Data is also being populated by a mix of individuals, including fishers and fish traders.
COAST Trust, Bangladesh	Women, poorer people	The Social Justice (SJ) division of COAST Foundation aims to empower the poor at the local level to mediate demands, organise issue-based movements, and challenge neo-liberal activities. SJ operates various activities at both staff and group levels, acting as a catalyst for mediation between public agencies and people, strengthening local government institutions (LGI), empowering people to secure their legal rights, building LGI capacity, raising awareness on human rights issues, supporting the protection against violence towards women and acid attacks, advocating for political reform, and enhancing democratic institutions. This section oversees all governance and advocacy-related activities, including education programs, social justice initiatives, local governance projects, coastal rural knowledge centres, acid survivors' projects, and outreach programmes for out-of-school children.
International Collective in Support of Fishworkers		The International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF) is an international non-governmental organisation that works towards the establishment of equitable, gender-just, self-reliant and sustainable fisheries, particularly in the small-scale, artisanal sector. ICSF have strengthened women's roles in fisheries and within organisations as a priority since 1986. For this it has undertaken research, training, advocacy and publication of the Gender in Fisheries Newsletter Yemaya. ICSF played a pioneering role in this. Its 'Women in Fisheries' work has been highlighting the patriarchal practices in fisheries and how these directly relate to the unsustainable exploitation of nature, to poverty and to food insecurity. It has questioned the nature of fisheries development itself, highlighting a 'feminist perspective' for an alternative that is in harmony with the ecosystem and respects life and livelihoods and the human rights of all people. ICSF work in Bangladesh

3.5.2. Lessons

The research findings, drawn from KIIs and secondary research of key literature have revealed valuable perspectives on gender dynamics, social inclusion and social structures in Bangladesh's seafood sector and lessons from stakeholders. While women are active in the seafood sector, this involvement has not translated into greater economic progress or representation in decision-making. Deeply rooted cultural norms, evolving household roles and impacts from environmental degradation shape these dynamics further. Understanding these complexities will be crucial for OCPP to design effective and context-sensitive interventions that promote inclusive economic empowerment and social resilience for women and other marginalised groups.

Understanding exclusion and community perceptions on gender and social inclusion.

The concept of exclusion and marginalisation of certain social groups (e.g. people with disabilities) is not widely recognised in the seafood sector, where gender mainly is at the forefront of any discussions on equality. The mindset can inadvertently reinforce social exclusion, as these marginalised groups may be reluctant to seek support or challenge existing inequalities if there are not channels for them already to do so. Understanding this perception is essential when designing inclusive interventions that respect and align with community norms and values.

Engaging community and religious leaders in any future activity undertaken at the community level.

Certain groups are prevented from meaningfully participating in the seafood sector, especially women, which is often driven by religion and social norms. A key Informant noted that these norms are a *"large burden on the community so future activities undertaken should bring the Imam of Mosques or local priests, and others who are engaged in religion at a leadership level."* This could be done through educating community and religious leaders on rights and opportunities for gender equality, and equality for people with disabilities and other marginalised groups. These activities could support buy-in from leaders and address the current community-level knowledge gap. It is recommended that OCPP consider how they can work at the community level to ensure that advancements can be made towards equality.

Ensuring that programmes are designed through a co-creation process and are locally-led to ensure sustainability of programme outcomes.

One of the main challenges identified by the research is around communities' buy-in and commitment to the projects being implemented. Too often, projects are not designed with the community and therefore are not always appropriately meeting their needs. To ensure the success and sustainability of a project, it is crucial to

create a system where the community is deeply and meaningfully involved and can take ownership of the process. This involves co-creation at every stage of the project.

Amongst external seafood programmes in Bangladesh, there is weak implementation of programmatic policies or targets that focus on gender and equalities.

This research highlighted that while some programmes implemented by other stakeholders (non-OCPP specific) do have policies and targets on gender equality and social inclusion in place, they are not always implemented consistently or at all. For example, a key informant noted "*we have targets and policies such as targeting 30% of women in that area, but then the project has a duration of say three years, which may not be long enough to properly create change. We often see that women are also engaged or thought about only towards the end of the projects, so these targets are even more difficult to meet."* This highlights that while there may be policies and targets in place, these may not be implemented appropriately or mainstreamed through into each activity or output throughout the programme lifetime. In future programming, OCPP should ensure that programmes have a robust workplan that clearly mainstreams gender and equality within each activity throughout the whole programme, from the design stage.

GEDSI scans can be used to support programme ambitions to be GEDSI transformative or sensitive.

The GEDSI Scan[5] is a useful tool designed by SDDirect to support programmes with their ambitions to be GEDSI transformative. The three cross-cutting GESI objectives look both internally and externally. They are: i)mainstream GEDSI within the programme's organisations and institutions (looking internally); ii)mainstream GEDSI across programme delivery to achieve transformative change (looking externally); and iii) use evidence to support collective action to facilitate GESI transformative outcomes and a positive enabling environment for women and girls and other marginalised groups. The objectives of the scan are to demonstrate that partners and staff have a commitment to GEDSI, to consider whether internal practices and related support systems for GEDSI mainstreaming are effective and reinforce each other, and to promote action in areas requiring more GEDSI responsive action and practice. OCPP could consider undertaking a GEDSI scan at the organisational and programme level to fully understand how knowledge, attitudes, behaviours and skills are affecting GEDSI at these different levels.

[5] More information can be found from the GEDSI Scan Concept Note from the Evidence and Collaboration for Inclusive Development (ECID) programme.

3.6. What data is available in-country that can be used for GEDSI analysis and what are the data gaps? (RQ6)

Prioritising the collection, analysis, and sharing of disaggregated data is crucial for highlighting the challenges, priorities, and perspectives of women and girls, indigenous people, migrant groups, youth and people with disabilities participating in the seafood sector.

In the context of the seafood sector, gathering socio-economic data broken down by gender, age and disability can help identify, monitor, evaluate, and address the impacts—both positive and negative—that policies, projects, and initiatives may have on different groups of people. Additionally, a comprehensive understanding of the seafood sector, including the number of people involved at every stage of the value chain, helps maximise available human resources by recognising that everyone plays a role in creating innovative solutions. For instance, collecting data on fishers and fisherfolk beyond just harvesters and including all stages of the value chain in fisheries surveys or censuses provides a more complete picture of the sector. This should include data on those who supply inputs, process, and market catches. It can also reveal the multiple roles one person may have in the value chain—for example, a boat owner or worker may also engage in processing and selling the "catch", but they are often only listed as owners, leading to inaccurate data about their other roles.

Whilst the government Department of Fisheries does publish data, statistics and resources on the fishing sector in Bangladesh, socio-economic data is more limited. For example, there is a data portal map available online,[6] which includes some gender-related indicators such as Full Time Employment by gender, it is very difficult to understand the meaning of the data.

The lack of data has a negative impact on marginalised people participating the seafood sector. For example, surveys and censuses which exclude processors and vendors as fishers will affect the ability of fisherfolk (especially women) to access services like finances, resources, and other general support available to registered fishers. The omission of processors and vendors in data collection, or the lack of updated information, reinforces the marginalisation of their work—often performed by women and other disadvantaged groups—in sector assessments and evaluations. Furthermore, not collecting socio-economic data on registered fishers (harvesters) limits understanding of the broader factors influencing their work within households, coastal communities, and the industry.

[6] See: Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Fish Southwest Bangladesh Aquaculture Data Portal

Along with collecting disaggregated socio-economic data in fisheries, factories and other workplaces, it is important to understand how social and cultural norms affect the opportunities, resources, and services available to the marginalised groups in the sector. This knowledge helps design policies, projects, and initiatives that address the specific needs and priorities of people working in the seafood sector in Bangladesh while ensuring that practices are culturally relevant and sensitive enough to address social issues that could serve as barriers to equitable outcomes. Without data on how and why both women and men across different ages, races, religions, ethnicities, and abilities use or benefit from resources related to the seafood sector, efforts to mitigate the negative effects of restricted access may unintentionally have a disproportionate impact on specific marginalised groups.

The table below sets out several relevant data sources on GEDSI that may be of help to OCPP.

Source	Available data	Data gaps
Demographic and Health Survey-2022 (World Bank, 2022)	Prevalence of domestic violence by an intimate partner Type and frequency of domestic violence Women's participation in household decision-making Maternal and child health, fertility levels, and unmet need for family planning	No analysis based on sector (e.g., fisheries) or coastal regions
Data Center | Human Development Reports (UNDP, 2024)	Human Development Index (HDI) value for 2023 (0.685) Gender Development Index (GDI) value for 2023 (0.918) Gender Inequality Index (GII) value for 2022 (0.487)	No data relevant to Gender Social Norms Index, Multidimensional Poverty Index, and Planetary pressures-adjusted HDI
Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities | OHCHR (OHCHR, 2025)	The Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities' consideration of the initial report of Bangladesh on its implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Infanticide of children with disabilities, stigmatisation and exploitation of children with disabilities, discrimination of women and girls with disabilities, public sector recruitment policies.	Data on involvement on persons with disabilities in policy making Number of allegations of discrimination based on disability Data specific to coastal regions and fisheries sector
Country Profiles (Gender and climate tracker, 2025)	Gender considerations in adaptation of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)	Participatory process for NDCs

Country Rankings (ND-GAIN Country Index rankings | ND-GAIN Index, n.d.)	ND-GAIN Country Index rank 178, score 32.9 Vulnerability: 0.568 Readiness: 0.226 Projected change of marine biodiversity: 0.304 Social inequality: 0.5664	Data on the vulnerability of the seafood sector / blue economy
Criminalisation of LGBTQI+ people (Human Dignity Trust, 2025)	Criminalises LGBTQI+ people Criminalises sexual activities between males	
Equaldex progress of LGBTQI+ rights across the world (Equaldex, 2025)	Equality Index: 23 Legal Index: 13 Public Opinion Index: 33	
Climate Risk Country Profiles (Climate Change Knowledge Portal, 2024)	Key factors that account for the differences between women's and men's vulnerability to climate change risks National adaptation policies, strategies, and plans Vulnerability to impacts of sea-level rise Average number of people experiencing flooding per year in the coastal zone under different emission pathways and adaptation scenarios Potential decline in fish catch due to climate change	Data on climate change impact in the seafood sector Vulnerability to climate change risks among people with disabilities and other marginalised groups
Global database on Violence against Women (UN Women, n.d.)	Lifetime physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence Lifetime non-partner sexual violence	

	Physical and/or Sexual Intimate Partner Violence in the last 12 months Gender Inequality Index Rank: 125/172 Global Gender Gap Index Rank: 71/146	

3.7. What are the entry points for GEDSI in OCPP's activities in Bangladesh?

Example of entry points to integrate a GEDSI lens in activities of OCPP on seafood in Bangladesh are provided in the table below. It is important to highlight that it is not always appropriate, necessary or safe to seek to be GEDSI transformative in all activities and there may be very good reasons to limit the ambition to GEDSI strategic or empowering, or even sensitive in some cases. There is, however, never a justification to remain GEDSI unaware.

Activity area	Unaware	Sensitive	Strategic 'empower'	Transformative 'addresses root causes'
Soldier fly farming training Disseminate knowledge on, and techniques for, the use of Black Soldier Fly and beetle larvae as alternative aquaculture feeds, a means of reducing costs by recycling waste material, and an alternative source of employment for farmers. A report on engagement activities, training, and uptake will be generated.	Risk that mostly men participate in this capacity building activity because of social (women engaged in caretaking activities at times of meetings) or cultural barriers (women not participating in public meetings related to purdah and social mobility constraints, young women and boys being excluded). Risk that venue or means of communication (including	Ensure that data on participants is disaggregated by sex and include gender parity target. Encourage equal representation and participation of people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups in communication about the training.	Include training on equity issues, rights and gender equality values within the aquaculture farming value chain.	N/A

	about the event) exclude people living with disabilities.	Liaise with local women and youth organizations and Organisations of People Living with Disabilities (OPDs) to find out best way of reducing barriers for their constituency. Adapt length and time of trainings and provide transport reimbursement to ensure vulnerable community members can attend. Consider separate meetings for youth/adults or men/women if appropriate.		
Improve understanding of shrimp health and disease across the production cycle Improve understanding of shrimp health and disease across the production cycle in intensive and extensive farms. A report will be	SEAH risks as above, related to face-to-face data collection from farmers, with unclear safeguarding arrangements.	Engage and train marginalised groups to take part in the assessments, especially through the sampling.	N/A	N/A

generated and a manuscript drafted for publication. The presence of pathogens throughout the cycle will be assessed with an emphasis on the role of co-infections and their relation to environmental parameters. This year active and passive sampling will be undertaken. Active sampling will include sampling of 7 farms in 3 different locations every 2 months. Passive sampling will include interaction with farmers reporting disease outbreaks. The presence of diseases will be determined via molecular and histology methods.				
Generation of greenhouse gases produced by shrimp farms Generate data and a report or publication on the generation of greenhouse gases produced by shrimp farms during the farming cycle (in relation to climate change). Two different culture systems (integrated and polyculture systems) will be compared. In a total of 12 ponds, Greenhouse Gas emissions will be analysed at 15-day intervals (both day and nighttime). The widely used static floating chamber method will be applied to measure CH4,	SEAH risks as above, related to face-to-face data collection from farmers, with unclear safeguarding arrangements.	Ensure that the staff engaged on this study are gender-balanced. Potential line of enquiry could look into how women and marginalised groups are engaging in shrimp farms and how they could be brought into adaptations for reducing greenhouse gases.	N/A	N/A

N2O, and CO2 emissions from prawn farms.				
Bivalve work It includes capacity building in the 3x competent authority labs (QC labs: Dhaka, Khulna and Chattogram) to help set up methods of analysis for the implementation of Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) controls along with risk profiling work to risk assess potential growing areas.		Assess social risks (e.g. physical safety, ethical concerns) when assessing whether sites are suitable for a growing area. This could be integrated into the risk assessments being undertaken on potential field sites or undertaken through a separate process. Encourage partners to improve gender diversity within their laboratory teams.	N/A	N/A
Implementation of the Aquaculture Network Bangladesh The primary goal of establishing the Aquaculture Network is to unite experts in Bangladesh's aquaculture sector from various organisations, including universities, private enterprises, and non-governmental organisations. This collaboration	Risk that mostly men participate in the network because of social (women engaged in caretaking activities at times of meetings, women in more junior roles) or cultural barriers (women not participating in public meetings related to purdah and social mobility	Encourage women / minority members to become active network participants, removing barriers to their active participation (e.g. related to meeting times, locations etc.)	Engage a wider audience on GESI issues within Bangladesh's aquaculture sector, through technical interventions such as capacity building and communications (e.g. showcasing women leaders in the seafood sector)	Provide targeted programme of transformative awareness raising and behavioural change interventions with network leaders on gender equality and social inclusion issues, exploring their values

aims to apply for grants and enhance the aquaculture industry within the country. A significant element in structuring the activities to be executed by the Network was the integration of GESI initiatives both within the Network and the broader aquaculture sector.	constraints, young women and boys being excluded). Risk that venue or means of communication (including about the network) exclude people living with disabilities.			and attitudes, and gender and social norms that act as a barrier to women's meaningful participation in these spaces.

4. Conclusion

The evidence base for this report was limited, illustrating the general invisibility of marginalised groups from the seafood sector. Both the GEDSI-focused literature and our primary data placed an emphasis on women, with only occasional reference to other marginalised groups such as indigenous groups, people with disabilities, and the LGBTQI+ community. Little work has been done to understand how marginalised people are being affected by environmental degradation in coastal communities, and our (relatively light touch) primary data collection suggests there may be little in the way of programming or interventions that explicitly aim to involve the voices of these groups – and indeed those of women - in consultation, design, delivery or monitoring.

People interacting with the seafood sector face widespread economic and environmental challenges, but women experience compounded barriers that heighten their risks and limit their rights, while other marginalised groups receive less focus in research and data. Our research found that workers in the seafood sector in general are facing challenges around insecure livelihoods, poverty, lack of access to funding/ credit, and environmental degradation, amongst other issues. However, within this overarching context of marginalisation, women face multiple barriers that expose them to greater risks and preclude them from accessing their rights. Without explicit and intentional efforts to promote inclusive consultation and engagement, the institutional barriers facing these groups – both social norms and behaviours as well as access to finance and policy making spaces – will perpetuate exclusion.

Fisher communities are most reliant on marine and coastal resources, whose degradation affects both men and women. However, what the research did find was that Bangladesh faces severe environmental degradation driven by deforestation, rapid urbanisation, poverty, unplanned industrialisation, and low public awareness. This degradation manifests through air and water pollution, soil erosion, and increased natural disasters, with further consequences including rising sea levels, extreme weather, displacement, biodiversity loss, and threats to agriculture and livelihoods. Pollution from brick kilns, vehicles, and industrial waste, as well as saltwater intrusion, harms human health and ecosystems. Marine biodiversity (species type and quantity) is declining due to overfishing, weak enforcement of fishing laws, and illegal practices, causing economic hardship for fishers and pushing many into poverty, migration, and even illegal activity. These pressures have led to increased gender-based violence and vulnerability among women, particularly as men migrate or remain jobless. Women and people with disabilities face barriers accessing early warning systems, while children suffer from undernutrition, school dropout, exploitation, and health risks linked to climate change, showing that environmental degradation in Bangladesh has wide-reaching socio-economic and gendered impacts.

There is some evidence on SEAH in the seafood sector in Bangladesh, but this is likely to only be part of the picture. Broader abuses such as human trafficking, forced labour and child labour are better documented. There are significant regulatory and legal gaps related to exploitative working conditions, with most of the shrimp sector being unregistered and informal. Coupled with a context of very high rates of GBV in Bangladesh, SEAH risks in the seafood sector are high, particularly for more marginalised groups such as Rohingya women.

There are very few stakeholders are already working in the GEDSI and Seafood Sector space, presenting challenges for future partnerships. Stakeholders that are engaged are often focused on the global level and while they do have programmes based in Bangladesh, such as WorldFish, their scope may be very specific and not encompass GEDSI as a whole, mainly focusing on gender and women.

The inadequacy of available data to provide a disaggregated picture of the seafood sector in Bangladesh is a barrier to inclusive programming. Gender inequality has been considered in some studies, but not in a way that is holistic and intersectional, nor across the different areas of OCPP interest. As the Blue Economy continues to change it is also influenced by factors such as demographic shifts, changing gender roles, technological advancements, and ecosystem changes—including climate change and the recent shocks of COVID-19 pandemic—understanding the socio-economic factors driving or impacted by these changes is vital, which will require an investment in both quantitative and qualitative data collection. Such an investment would help programming options to enhance effectiveness and accessibility in the short term, as well as support the sustainable and inclusive management of marine and coastal resources in the longer term.

5. Recommendations

This section sets out recommendations for OCPP to consider within both its current and future programming to ensure a robust embedded GEDSI approach. These are draft recommendations to be discussed during a validation workshop with OCPP staff. Note that the lessons presented in section 3.5.2 (lessons from stakeholders), with associated policy implications, may also be considered as part of the Bangladesh-specific programming *considerations.* We note that, without knowing what OCPP partners have planned for the next phase of programming in Bangladesh, it is not possible to provide very tailored recommendations.

Recommendation 1: Demonstrate a strong commitment to GEDSI within the OCPP

- **Consider including representation of CSOs including associations, WROs, OPDs and GBV providers within the Aquaculture Network GESI Working Group**. The research has shown that there must be a concerted

effort to ensure representation of women and marginalised groups within the seafood sector. Engaging larger formal organisations alone does not assure adequate representation of women, an internal process where systemic barriers are removed is required to support meaningful participation of women. It is crucial to ensure that men are engaged in GEDSI discussions to strengthen their role as allies and mitigate any potential backlash that may result.

- Consider contracting national GEDSI and SEAH experts to assist in the design and implementation of any new programmes. Local expertise should be used to ensure that GEDSI-related programme activities are aligned with local cultural contexts and that SEAH-related issues are addressed in culturally sensitive ways.

- For any new projects, **ensure GEDSI is integrated at project design stage** and sufficient budget is included to resource GEDSI activities across the programme life cycle.

- For any new projects, **identify key GEDSI objectives and integrate these into the programme's next Theory of Change**. Ensure that gender/ age/ disability disaggregated data is consistently collected, monitored, and embedded in the evaluation framework, as per minimum collection requirements.

- **Engage with leaders from local communities and ensure buy-in on equality measures.** Ensure that any new programmes engage local leaders, including religious leaders, to support them work with communities to be more inclusive.

- **Advocate for inclusion of women and disadvantaged groups in other fora where OCPP is present**. Going beyond OCPP's own programmes or interventions, OCPP members have significant power to influence other stakeholders that may not adhere to the principles of gender equality and social inclusion, or may be unaware of what those are and how they would benefit their programmes.

- **Support and share research that focuses more deeply on specific marginalised groups** about whom there is very little research (e.g. the Dalit community). With all research it is important to consider research fatigue among participants and ensure the research is linked to programming or interventions so that participants can see the benefit of their involvement (i.e. applied research). Final research products should always be shared back with the community.

- **Review the various entry points in Section 3.7 to understand how activity areas can adapt to be more GEDSI Sensitive to Transformative.** Examples include examples provided were including training on equity issues, rights and gender equality values within the aquaculture farming value chain; ensuring that data on participants is disaggregated by sex and include gender parity as a target; encouraging equal representation of people

with disabilities and other vulnerable groups in communication about activities;, liaising with local women and youth organisations, engage and train marginalised groups to take part in the project activities such as sampling, and ensuring all staff engaged on studies are gender-balanced. An example provided to ensure activity areas could be GEDSI Transformative was to provide targeted programme of transformative awareness raising and behavioural change interventions with network leaders on gender equality and social inclusion issues, exploring their values and attitudes, and gender and social norms that act as a barrier to women's meaningful participation in these spaces.

Recommendation 2: Address safeguarding and SEAH risks within the programme.

OCPP is currently working with multiple partners. It is imperative that all partners have adequate safeguarding policies and procedures in order to prevent and respond to SEAH and other safeguarding related misconduct and to ensure that programme activities have been suitably risk assessed. To do this OCPP should:

- **Review what safeguarding procedures are in place** across all partners, and whether partners are aware of the CEFAS SEAH Policy within International Development, to safeguard both OCPP funded staff and individuals coming into contact with programme staff for each partner, recognising that the approach will need to be different depending on the type of partner that is assessed.

- **Review or conduct risk assessments of high-risk activities when designing new programmes**. OCPP should identify and conduct a full risk assessment for all new activities that are more likely to lead to SEAH and other forms of safeguarding related misconduct. These should include all activities that involve children and young adults, women and other vulnerable community members. The risk assessment process will ensure that OCPP is aware of activities where SEAH could occur to ensure risk is mitigated and these activities are carried out safely. There should also be a clear plan for ongoing regular monitoring and oversight. This is in addition to ensuring these risks are added to the programme risk register as appropriate.

- **Review the impact of sexual harassment across all programme activities and staff and take appropriate action to address these**. OCPP should consider working with a safeguarding specialist to consult with women staff at all levels about their experiences of sexual harassment related to the programme and identify strategies to mitigate and address these. This should include volunteers, contractors, both paid and unpaid.

- **Endorse the CAPSEAH commitment and work towards compliance**. In 2024, The UK Government launched the Common Approach to Sexual Exploitation, Sexual Abuse and Sexual Harassment (CAPSEAH, 2024) which aims to bring consistency of approach and promote shared values across the international aid sector to end SEAH. Other sectors are highly encouraged to adopt the principles this document endorses. CAPSEAH stresses the

importance of zero tolerance to inaction toward SEAH, survivor support and strong preventative efforts reduce the prevalence of SEAH. OCPP should consider the principles contained within CAPSEAH and consider steps towards becoming compliant over the duration of the programme. This document is a useful reference point to consider best practice standards toward SEAH that should inform and future programming and project activities.

- **When feeding into the design of new programme activities, take a broad approach to understanding safety for those linked to OCPP initiatives and apply a holistic understanding of risk throughout the value chain**. For example, the GBV risks identified by fisher women could be an important consideration for any investment in the fisheries sector; SEAH risks identified would be important for any investment linked to the tourist industry.

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The Ocean Country Partnership Programme (OCPP) is a bilateral technical assistance and capacity building programme that provides tailored support to countries to manage the marine environment more sustainably, including by strengthening marine science expertise, developing science-based policy and management tools and creating educational resources for coastal communities. The OCPP delivers work under three thematic areas: biodiversity, marine pollution, and sustainable seafood. Funding is provided through the overarching Blue Planet Fund (BPF) by the UK Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra).

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