



## **Collective action, non-traditional roles and leadership: That's a story with challenges for women in Caribbean small-scale fisheries**

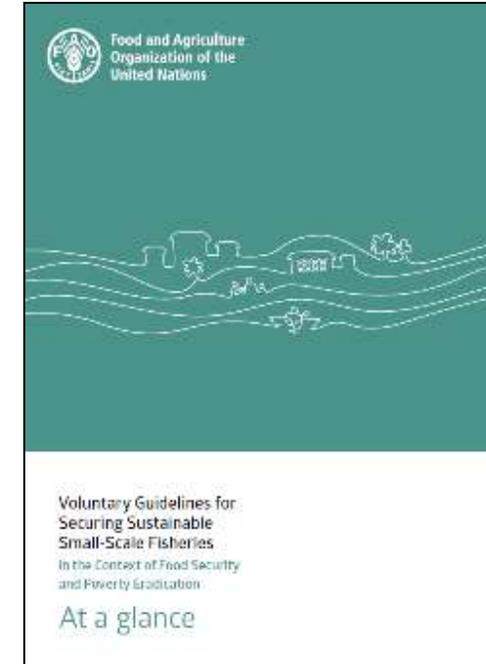
Women Leadership & the Environment: Powerful Stories of Women and Natural Resources  
Roasting Fish and Breadfruit webinar series #6, SAEDI Consulting Inc. (Barbados)

Maria Pena  
UWI-Cave Hill Campus, Barbados



# The Gender In Fisheries Team (GIFT)

- UWI-CERMES and partners want to better understand gender in SSF
- GIFT was formed in 2016
- A diverse partnership
- 17 countries of the Caribbean Community/CRFM/CNFO
- Now in its 2<sup>nd</sup> phase (2019-2021)
- Focus: Gender in the SSF Guidelines
- Scope: SSF fisheries VCs & governance arrangements
  - concentration on livelihoods and governance institutions
- Our work spans policy to practice:
  - Capacity building efforts
  - Understanding collective action for empowerment
  - Livelihoods analysis
  - Fisheries value chain research
  - Organisational strengthening



Within the SSF Guidelines our focus is on the section *Responsible fisheries and sustainable development*, sub-section 8 on *Gender equality*

GIFT partners – regional, national and local



Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

Sub-regional office for LAC

# Driven to mobilise to achieve change: The Central Fish Processors Association (CFPA)

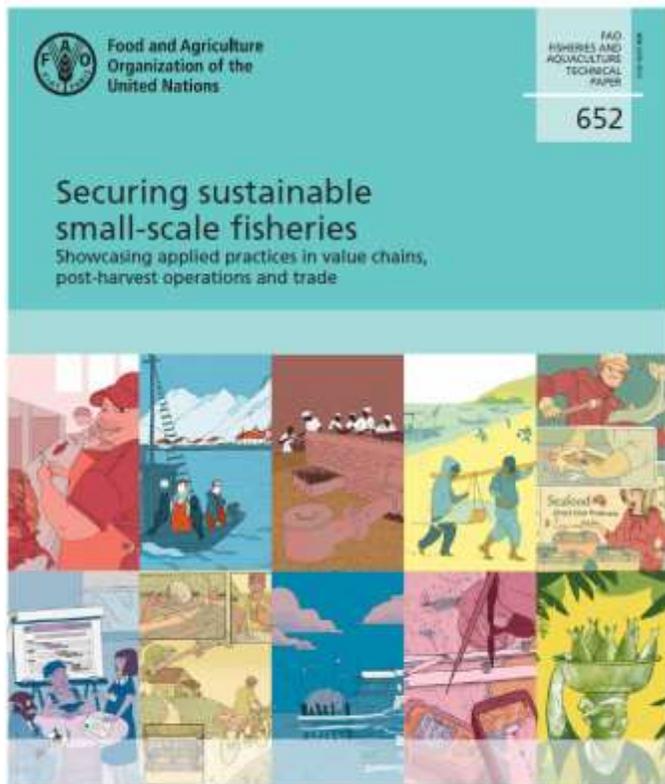
- 2 types of drivers for fisherfolk organising:
  - Reaction to specific phenomena
  - Efforts promoted by external entities
- Labour conditions and economic drivers prompted the mobilisation of women in the postharvest segment of the fisheries value chain
- The CFPA was established in 2005
- The only fisheries postharvest association in Barbados
- Predominantly female, with female-led since inception





# Acting collectively brings gains

- CFPA is recognized as a driving force at the Bridgetown Fisheries Complex
  - CFPA members are told, *“they listen to wunna [you all] down there”*
- Any member can approach management about issues without the president’s presence
- *“We are stronger as an association to interface with management”*
- *“...better equipped to take on or lobby management”*
- Working conditions in the processing hall were improved as a result of the persistence of this group of women.
  - Provision of satisfactory amenities and facilities for the pursuit of their livelihoods



# 1. The Central Fish Processors Association: Collective action by women in the Barbados flyingfish fishery

Maria Pena  
Janice Cumberbatch  
Patrick McConney  
Neetha Selliah  
*Centre for Resource Management and Environmental Studies (CERMES), Barbados*

Bertha Simmons  
*Independent consultant*

### ABSTRACT

Women are prominent in the post-harvest segment of the flyingfish value chain in Barbados, but this is not reflected in their participation in fisherfolk organizations. The Central Fish Processors Association (CFPA) offers a unique example of an organization that currently comprises only women and has been woman-led from its inception. Unable to individually voice their concerns about working spaces at the fish market, the women formed the only fisheries post-harvest association in Barbados. This case study analyses the process of formation of the CFPA, its development and the benefits it has provided to its members in terms of their livelihoods and domestic lives, as well as to the flyingfish fishery more generally. Although challenges persist, it illustrates existing and emerging good practices consistent with the principles of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication.

**Keywords:** Collective action, fisherfolk organization, value chain, post-harvest, flyingfish, SSF Guidelines.

### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

The implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines) with support from FAO has resulted in increasing global and local attention being given to fisherfolk organizations: in particular, their strengthening and governance, as well as women's participation as both members and leaders (see for example Alonso-Población and Siar, 2018; Frangoules, Pascual-Fernández and Marguán-Pintos, 2014; McConney, 2007; McConney *et al.*, 2017a). Women in small-scale fisheries organizations can play a critical and useful role in bringing new perspectives to fisheries value chains (Frangoules, 2013). In this context, the collective action of women actively engaged in the post-harvest sector in the Barbados flyingfish fishery may facilitate and support the implementation of the SSF Guidelines provisions on value chains and gender equality. To illustrate this, this case study examines how women are leading by example

### RESEARCH ARTICLE



## How has organization benefited women in the Barbados flyingfish fishery? A look from within

Maria Pena<sup>a</sup>, Patrick McConney<sup>a</sup>, Bertha Simmons<sup>b</sup> and Neetha Selliah<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Centre for Resource Management and Environmental Studies (CERMES), The University of the West Indies, St. Michael, Barbados; <sup>b</sup>Consultant Researcher, Christ Church, Barbados

### ABSTRACT

Collective action and the diversity of forms it may take in fisherfolk organizing is complex. Efforts to implement the 2014 Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines) have resulted in increasing global to local attention on fisherfolk organizations, their strengthening and governance. These include women's roles and participation in them, both as members and as leaders. There is limited literature on women in fisherfolk organizations in Barbados. Women in the flyingfish postharvest sector are conspicuous, but how some work through their fisherfolk organization is undocumented. The Central Fish Processors Association (CFPA) formed to address challenges small fish processors were experiencing in their livelihoods. Through group interviews and document analysis, benefits to the women from participation in this all-woman organization, and the challenges they face, were explored by examining the links between collective action, organization and gender. We document the collective action of these women in preparing to make practical interventions for improvements to their working and domestic lives. It is the first research focused on organized women in the Barbados flyingfish fishery, deviating from the typical focus on men in its harvest sector.

### ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 1 July 2019  
Accepted 11 February 2020

### KEYWORDS

Fisherfolk organization;  
small-scale fisheries;  
Caribbean; flying-  
fish; women

### Introduction

Working together in small-scale fisheries, whether through formal organization or informal collective action, has been posited as essential for addressing marginalization, empowering disadvantaged groups and eradicating poverty (Jentoft *et al.*, 2018). These authors note that achieving the agency to accomplish these changes is challenging in weak organizations and in groups characterized by conflict. The power asymmetries and inequities that accompany gender relations in Caribbean fisheries, and the means women, in particular, use to overcome these obstacles, provide gendered insight into the dynamics of organization-building and collective action.

# Women in fisheries value chains

## VALUE CHAIN

Women's roles are diverse along the fisheries value chain, are critical for food support & socioeconomic mobility



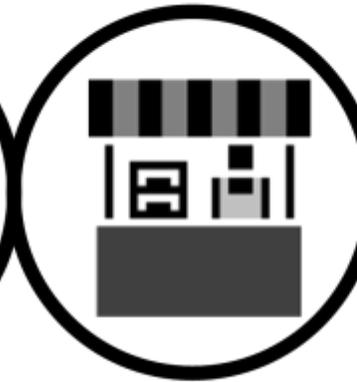
**Support**

Boat owners  
Fishing gear sales



**Harvest**

Mariculture  
Fish harvesting



**Processing  
&  
distribution**

Fish/seafood scaling,  
cleaning & boning  
Processors  
Work in factories



**Marketing  
& sales**

Trade  
Retail trade



**Consumers**

Households  
Restaurants



alamy

Image ID: BPWRKT  
www.alamy.com



Credit: P. Burke



Credit: P. McConney



Credit: M. Pena



Credit: P. Burke

# Towards non-traditional roles for women in fisheries

- Occupations within the support and harvest segments are predominantly male-dominated
- Processing occupations are dominated by women
- Women's and men's work in the marketing and consumer portions of the value chain is perceived as less gendered
- Trends in gendered divisions of labour are changing
- Women are now more interested in entering non-traditional roles within the sector
  - a "new mindset"
- Women want to be less dependent on men for economic security.
- Motivation from parents for their (girl) children to try new roles



Encouraging, yes? But...

# Social punishment for taking on non-traditional roles

“As mothers we are expected to be the caretakers of our children. If anything happens to them or they get in some sort of problem while the mother is out fishing, we get accused/blamed for what happens to them...This is not the same for men.”

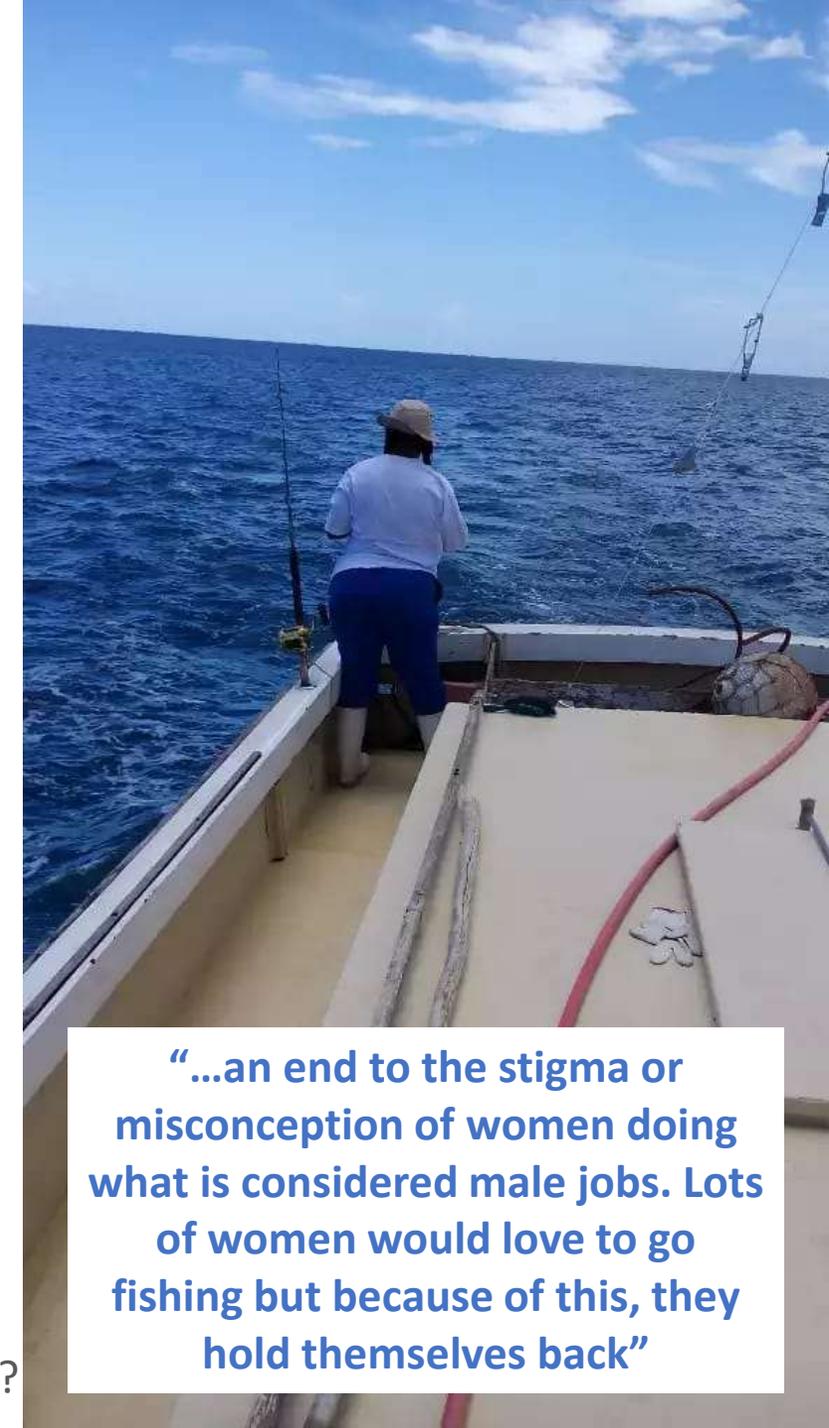
“There is also a lot of stigma attached as a female out on a fishing boat sharing space with males. There is a thought – **coming mostly from females** – that as a fisherwoman she must be sexually involved with one of the fishermen.”

She also has to contend with male buyers who want to intimidate her, and some who want to ‘touch you up’ (sexual harassment).

The **cost** is real to being **powerful**

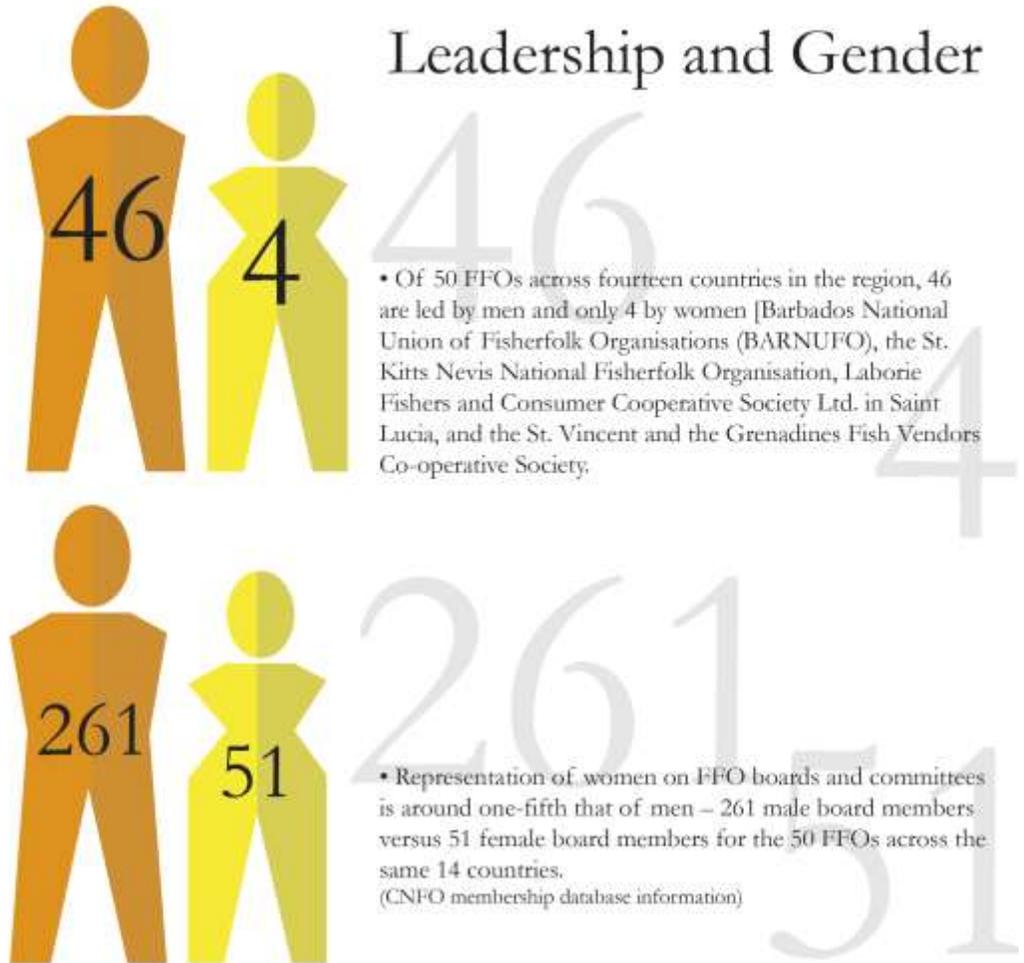
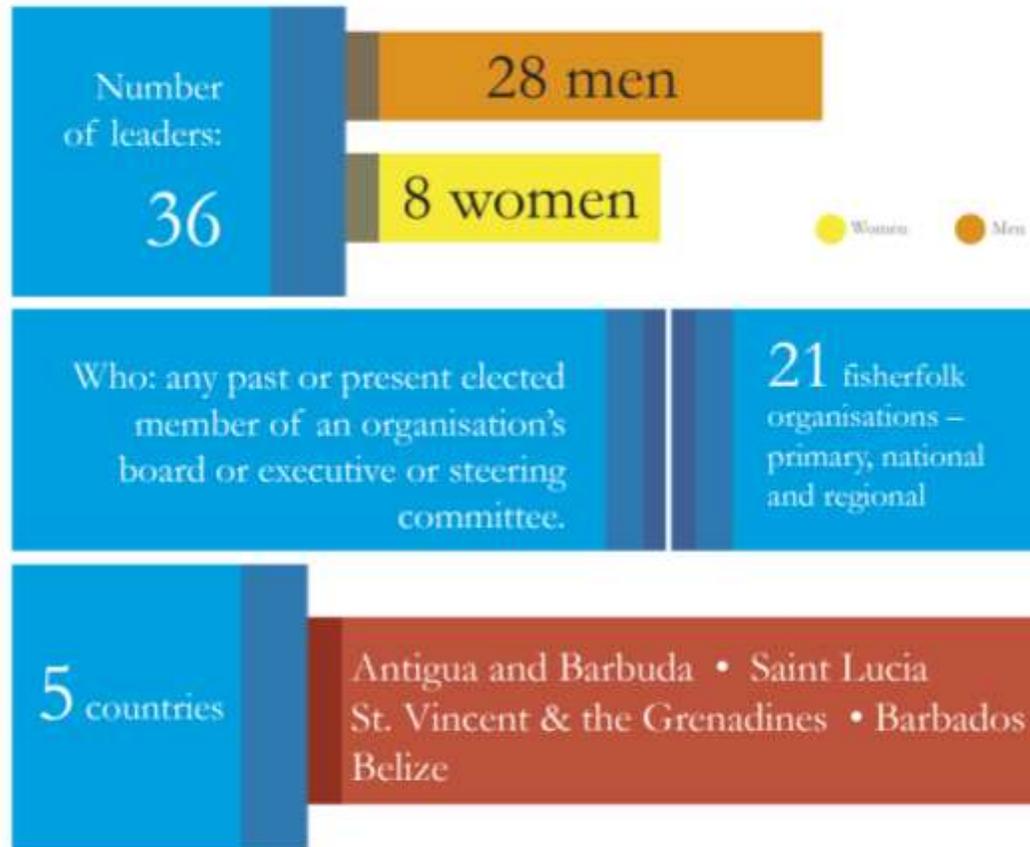
Fundamental and illogical problems exist and need to be addressed

**But what is the fix?** How do women breakthrough and challenge this challenge?



“...an end to the stigma or misconception of women doing what is considered male jobs. Lots of women would love to go fishing but because of this, they hold themselves back”

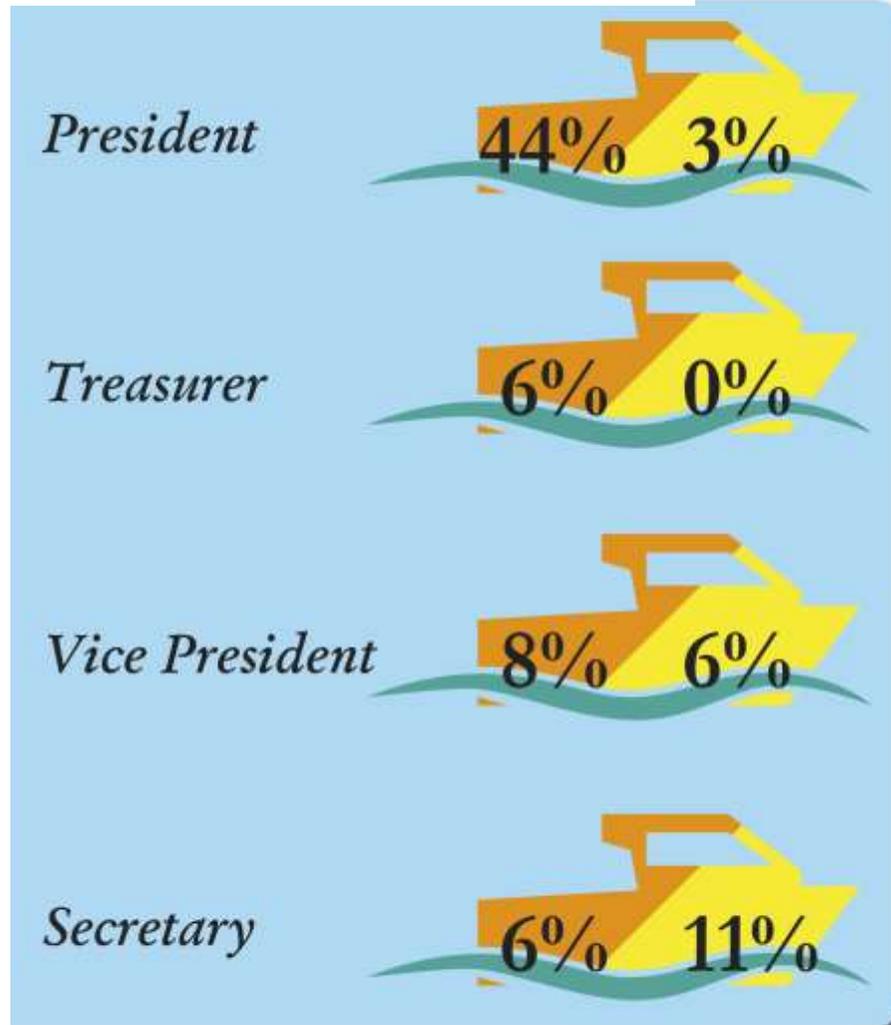
# Women & FFO leadership



**Some women from the fishing industry in the region, holding (held) influential positions regionally and internationally**

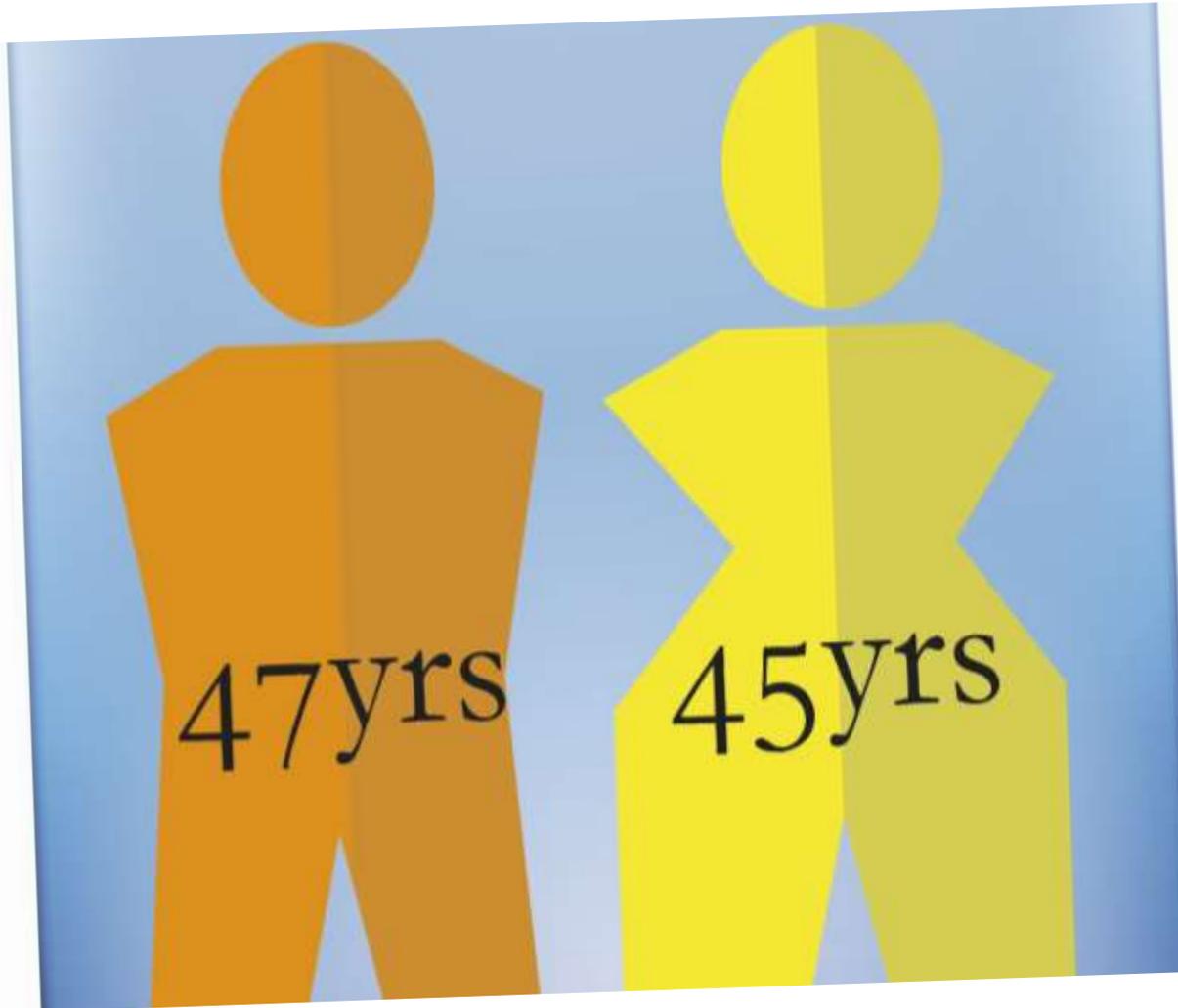
Differences in the types of posts held by men and women in FFOs is clear.

Except for the post of Secretary, more FFO executive positions are held by men, especially the post of President



**Directed engagement and succession planning could enable women to secure a greater share of leadership in the fishing industry in the future, contributing more to decision-making in the sector at local, national and regional levels**

Taking on leadership roles may be related to years and experience in the fishing industry



# Leadership and age

● Women ● Men

# Challenges to women (and youth) participating as members or leaders of fisherfolk organisations:

Some structural barriers (pre-conditions or pre-requisites) to membership,

- e.g. boat ownership

Stigma associated with, and male dominance of, the fishing industry,

Cultural norms

- e.g. in some parts of Guyana men prefer women not to be involved in leadership

General distrust of FFOs

**While there appear, on the surface, to be no or few systemic barriers to FFO leadership by women, and men say that they would support it, we have to dig deeper for root causes.**

***“We are feeding our nation;  
this is why we matter”***

- Vernel Nicholls

President Barbados National Union of Fisherfolk Organizations (BARNUFO) and  
Central Fish Processors Association (CFPA),  
Chairperson, Caribbean Network of Fisherfolk Organizations (CNFO)  
WIF 2019 Forum participant





# Centre for Resource Management and Environmental Studies

Home

About Us

Courses and Study

Research and Outreach

Publications

Contact Us

Overview

About Us

Activities and Outputs

Useful Links

Contact Us

## Gender In Fisheries Team (GIFT)

### Overview



# Thank you

Visit the GIFT webpage at:  
[www.cavehill.uwi.edu/cermes](http://www.cavehill.uwi.edu/cermes)

### Background

- Compared to other areas of the world, the gender characteristics of Caribbean small-scale fisheries (SSF) are poorly documented and gender is not mainstreamed in policy or practice.



Type here to search

