



The Role of Women in Small-Scale Fisheries: A Comprehensive Review

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ABSTRACT: When it comes to small-scale fisheries (SSF), women are essential. They process fish, market it, and run household economies, among other activities that add substantially to the SSF value chain. However, historically, their contributions have gone unappreciated and unreported, which has resulted in their marginalisation in the governance and policies surrounding fisheries. This assessment looks at the various responsibilities that women play in SSF, ranging from managing household finances to post-harvest tasks, and it also looks at the gender-specific obstacles that women encounter, such as having less access to platforms for decision-making and resources and training. The study also emphasises the importance of women contributing to food security and community livelihoods, highlighting their role in maintaining home nutrition and economic stability. Women continue to be under-represented in fishery governance systems despite their crucial engagement. According to the study, policies should be gender-responsive to recognise the contributions made by women, improve their access to resources, and guarantee their participation in decision-making. These gaps must be filled to improve overall fisheries management, empower women, and maintain the sustainability of SSF. Policy recommendations for advancing gender-inclusive fisheries development, supporting sustainable livelihoods, and enhancing food security are included in the review's conclusion.

Keywords: Small-scale fisheries, women empowerment, policy, food security, livelihood.

INTRODUCTION

Around the world, small-scale fisheries (SSF), especially in developing nations, are an essential source of employment, revenue, and food security (Rashid *et al.*, 2020; March and Failler 2022). Women have contributed substantially to this business world, but historically, their participation has been marginalised in academic study and policy formation (Koralagama *et al.*, 2017; Harper *et al.*, 2017; Lawless *et al.*, 2021). Women engage in pre-harvest and post-harvest activities at many points in the fisheries value chain, but their contributions are frequently underappreciated (Kimani *et al.*, 2022; Sariga *et al.*, 2023). With an emphasis on their contributions, difficulties, and the requirement for gender-inclusive policy, this article seeks to examine the complex role that women play in small-scale fisheries (Mangubhai and Lawless, 2021; Lawless *et al.*, 2021).

Women's Involvement in Small-Scale Fisheries.

Women's involvement in small-scale fishing varies by country and culture, but they usually involve multiple important tasks (Kleiber *et al.*, 2015; Frangoudes and Gerrard 2018). These include managing family economies related to fisheries, processing and marketing fish, and participating in the distribution and preservation of fish products (Frocklin *et al.*, 2013). In coastal villages, women are typically responsible for

washing, drying, and salting fish. They also tend to handle the tools and supplies needed for these tasks (Vunisea, 2016; Khan *et al.*, 2018)

The post-harvest role of women is crucial in areas like Southeast Asia and Africa (Lentisco and Lee 2015; Lelea *et al.*, 2022). Because of their commercial dominance, fish products are guaranteed to reach domestic and even foreign markets (Harper *et al.*, 2017; Akintola and Fakoya 2017). Women are employed in aquaculture production and post-harvest processing in nations like Bangladesh and India. Their participation in these activities boosts the local and household economies but is frequently disregarded in official statistics that primarily highlight the fishing or harvest stages (Ahmed *et al.*, 2012; Biswas and Rao 2014; Kusakabe and Thongprasert 2022).

Gender-specific challenges. Despite playing a crucial role, women in small-scale fishing encounter numerous difficulties. The lack of financial assistance, decision-making platforms, and resource accessibility are examples of structural hurdles that keep women from reaping the full benefits of their contributions to the fishing industry (Alonso and Siar 2018; Kusakabe and Thongprasert 2022). Societal norms and cultural constraints frequently force them to work in low-paying, labour-intensive jobs like processing and marketing, while men usually run the more profitable

harvesting and fishing businesses (Gandhi and Shah 2002; Shyam *et al.*, 2011).

In addition, women frequently lack formal education and training in innovation, technology, and fisheries management, which makes it difficult for them to grow their businesses or enhance their standard of living (Weeratunge *et al.*, 2010; Harper *et al.*, 2013; Biswas *et al.*, 2014). The lack of visibility of women's labour in the fisheries value chain diminishes their access to fisheries governance structures and bargaining power, exacerbating the gender disparity in knowledge and resource access (Frangoudes and Gerrard 2019; Kusakabe and Thongprasert 2022).

Contribution to food security and livelihoods.

Women's involvement in small-scale fishing is vital to community well-being, food security, and economic activity (Weeratunge *et al.*, 2014; March and Failler 2022). Women ensure that fish, an essential protein source, gets into everyone's households, enhancing nutrition (Roy and Sen 2024). For example, research conducted in West Africa demonstrates that women fish sellers and processors are essential to maintaining fish supply in rural and urban marketplaces (Moreau and Garaway 2021; Overa *et al.*, 2022). In addition, women in small-scale fishing typically oversee household finances, distribute resources, and ensure that fishing activities meet family requirements like health and education and directly generate income (Bene, 2006; Lentisco and Lee 2015). As a result, their labour has a positive knock-on effect on the general well-being of their communities, underscoring the significance of valuing and promoting women's responsibilities.

Women in fisheries governance and management.

Even though women are heavily involved in the fishing industry, their engagement in fisheries governance is low (Galappathth *et al.*, 2022). They seldom participate in community-based committees for fisheries management or other decision-making organisations (Mutimukuru *et al.*, 2017). Their lack of representation limits their influence over laws that directly impact their livelihoods, such as those governing fishing rules, resource management, and access to fishing areas (Galappathth *et al.*, 2022). Gender perspectives have been incorporated into fisheries governance through recent initiatives. Community-based management systems have started to acknowledge the contributions of women and include them in decision-making processes in nations like Senegal and the Philippines (Sutz *et al.*, 2019; Cohen *et al.*, 2021). These initiatives are significant advances in the direction of making sure that women's opinions are heard when managing the resources of small-scale fisheries.

Policy recommendations for gender-inclusive fisheries development. Policy interventions must be inclusive and gender-responsive to realise women's potential in small-scale fishing fully. To advance women's empowerment in SSF, the following suggestions are crucial:

1. Acknowledging women's contributions: The whole spectrum of tasks carried out by women in the fishing industry must be considered by official data gathering

and reporting systems. Increased visibility and more equal policy will result from this.

2. Capacity building and training: Women may contribute more successfully to the fisheries value chain if they can access financial resources, education, and skill development programs. It covers instruction in market accessibility, fisheries management, and sustainable fishing methods.

3. Improved access to resources: It's critical to guarantee that women have access to land rights, technology, credit, and fishing licenses. They can grow their business and get better financial results with these resources.

4. Inclusive governance: Women must be involved in all facets of fisheries governance. More fair and efficient resource management will result from their representation on committees and in decision-making bodies related to fisheries management.

5. Social protection: Developing programs and social safety nets specifically for women in SSF can assist lessen the risks they encounter, particularly during periods of economic or environmental shocks.

CONCLUSIONS

Though they play a crucial role in small-scale fishing, women's contributions to policy and governance are frequently underestimated and ignored. A comprehensive strategy that incorporates gender-responsive policies, enhanced resource accessibility, and more representation in decision-making is needed to address the issues that women in SSF confront. Women's empowerment in the fishing industry can improve small-scale fisheries sustainability and advance the more general objectives of food security and economic resilience. To better understand the roles played by women in SSF in different regions and to create interventions that are specifically suited to meet their needs, more research is required.

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