



**BERGEN SUMMER RESEARCH SCHOOL POLICY BRIEF** | JUNE 2021

## Sustaining the invisible contributions of women in small-scale fisheries



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▶ ▶ ▶ This policy brief aims to improve gender equality in small-scale fisheries by fostering quality educational initiatives, identifying barriers to gender equality and equity, and improving networking and policy implementations.

### 3 key points

- The sustainable development goals: Life Below Water (14), Gender Equality (5), and Quality Education (4) are crucial for sustainable small-scale fisheries.
- Women support both subsistence and livelihood sectors of small-scale fisheries but are not recognized for their contributions.
- Promoting gender equality and equity in small-scale fisheries can help reach global sustainability targets in developing nations.

### Introduction

Small-scale fisheries (SSF) within marine and fresh water ecosystems have been neglected by fisheries science and policy despite their importance to the local economy and food security. Emerging attention to SSF is demonstrated by not only greater scientific publications, but also the recent development of global policy tools, handbooks, and guidelines devoted to the small-scale sector<sup>1</sup>. Current estimates suggest that 98% of all fishers and fish farmers live in developing countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, which collectively produce more than 50% of the world’s annual marine fish and supply most of the fish consumed in the developing world<sup>2</sup>.

There are multiple ways women support the production, processing, marketing and management of is hand other living aquatic resources of SSF but such contributions are often invisible and unrecognized. Women’s average

participation rate in SSF activities is estimated to be nearly 50% which account to roughly 56 million jobs<sup>2</sup> (Figure 1)<sup>3</sup>. Yet, this group is marginalized from fisheries decision-making roles because of traditional or societal barriers (Figure 2)<sup>2</sup>. This policy brief showcases policy opportunities to improve gender equality and equity for women in SSF as a pathway to more sustainable fisheries in developing nations.

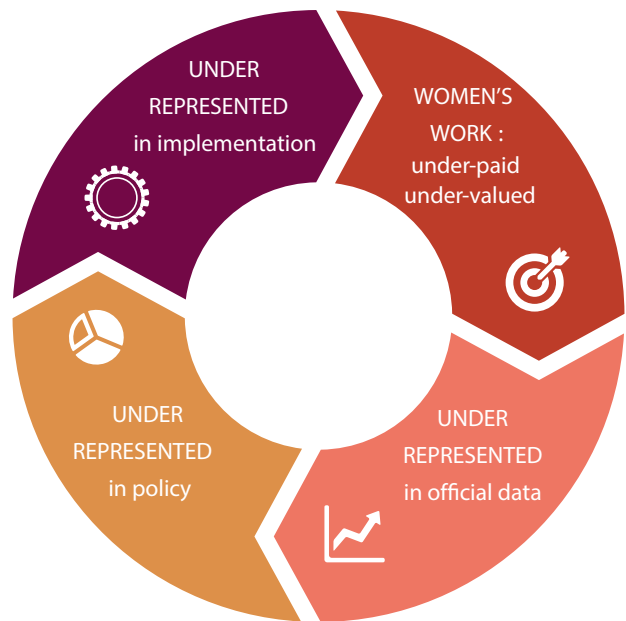


Figure 2. Barriers to gender equality and equity in small-scale fisheries<sup>2</sup>.

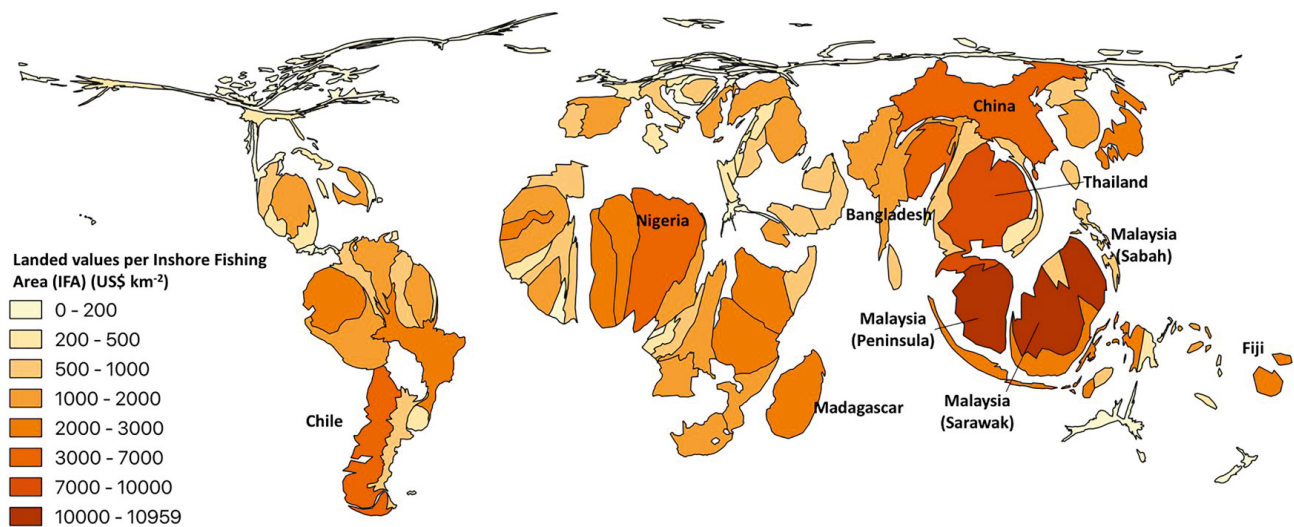


Figure 1. Landed value of catches by women scaled to inshore fishing area at a global level<sup>3</sup>. [HTTPS://DOI.ORG/10.1371/JOURNAL.PONE.0228912.G002](https://doi.org/10.1371/JOURNAL.PONE.0228912.G002)



## Analysis

The 'triple role' played by women due to their reproductive (childrearing), productive (labor) and community roles (producing for collective consumption) places a heavy demand on their time. In many societies this is not considered as 'real' or paid work, yet remains time consuming and tedious. This gender-based division of labor confines women to household activities and inhibits them from making 'recognized' and 'visible' contributions to SSF. Further, the interplay of socio-cultural factors limiting women's participation in SSF tend to be overlooked while highlighting their inequitable access to marine resources, markets and entrepreneurial opportunities. This adds to the complexity of addressing 'who' accounts for 'what' and 'where'. There is an urgent need to reevaluate gender roles to expand women's participation as both laborers and decision-makers in SSF.

There are multiple policy opportunities that can raise awareness of gender issues in SSF as well as ensure educational equality amongst women. By building the capacity of women through local sustainability education programs, peer-to-peer networking sessions and mentoring, SSF can become both sustainable and equitable. Additionally, equal employment opportunities at different levels of organization in SSF for men and women need to be formalized in both policy and practice. Necessary policy interventions in SSF are required to strengthen women's professional organizations and co-develop processing equipment/small scale infrastructure<sup>4</sup>. Through quality education, awareness campaigns, educational seminars (workshops and extensive marketing to promote fishing by women), the sustainability of fisheries can be improved, simultaneously ensuring food and livelihood security.

## Conclusions

Women contribute in multiple ways to SSF<sup>5</sup> but are often invisible, marginalized, under represented, overlooked and/or are facing gender-based violence<sup>2</sup>. Perceptions of gender, their roles in society, and the power associated with specific genders has implications for every society, culture, or industry; and SSF are no exception<sup>2</sup>. In many contexts, women participate predominantly in the post-harvest sector<sup>2</sup> and globally contribute to food and livelihood security<sup>3</sup>. The combined role of women in fishing communities and sustainable resource management is critical (due to traditional and ecological knowledge) to sustain SSF<sup>2</sup>. Opportunities to acquire appropriate technologies, education, networks and organization will enable women to contribute effectively as laborers and decision-makers in SSF.

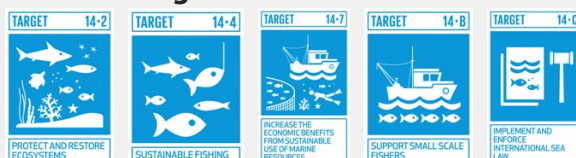
## Recommendations

- Local participation in policy design must be gender-equitable by providing gender specific support (e.g., care for household members, time and location accessible meetings, safe environments for participation)
- Target and increase awareness of gender-sensitive improvements at specific fisheries food-supply chain stakeholders capable of initiating lasting changes (e.g., cultural leaders in artisanal fisheries or consumers in market-driven fisheries or policy makers in centrally governed fisheries)
- Create and empower networking activities among fisheries organizations in both; small-scale fisheries and industrial fisheries to promote successful gender inclusive policies

## Further relevant SDGs



## Relevant targets



## IMPRINT

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## Relevance to the 2030 Agenda

SDG14-B is one of the 10 targets within SDG14 Life Below Water, building towards the 2030 agenda; Gender equality and quality education are crucial for sustainable development.

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