

WTO Public Forum 2023

Empowering waves: An ocean of opportunities for women in the blue economy

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The FAO has developed Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication. What strategies do the FAO Guidelines provide to support small scale fishing communities, including through a gender lens? How do you see the FAO Guidelines being implemented and integrated into national policies and practices globally?

FAO Remarks:

Thank you very much Ambassador and Good Afternoon everyone.

It is a pleasure for me to be here today and join the conversation by sharing FAO's perspective and work on this important topic.

I would like to start by briefly mentioning what the [Small Scale Fisheries Guidelines](#) are.

The Guidelines were endorsed by the FAO Committee on Fisheries in 2014. They are actually the first international instrument dedicated entirely to the small scale fisheries sector.

- They are voluntary;
- They focus on the needs of developing countries; and
- They include men and women working in the full range of activities along the value chain.

The recommendations in the Guidelines address policies, strategies and legal frameworks concerning small scale fisheries but also other matters affecting lives and livelihoods in fishing communities.

While complementing various instruments, key issues include allocating tenure rights equitably, managing resources sustainably, supporting social development and decent work, empowering fish workers along the entire value chain, addressing climate change and disaster risks and promoting gender equality.

Small scale fisheries play a key role in ensuring food security and eradicating poverty: they are small in scale, but big in value. I would like to provide some figures on that: Small-scale fisheries account for at least 40 percent of the global fisheries catch, 90 percent of the people employed along capture fisheries value chains operate in small-scale fisheries, 45 million women participate in small-scale fisheries and 492 million people depend at least partially on small scale fisheries for livelihoods.

However, the sector faces increased pressure from other sectors. Small scale fishers, particularly the vulnerable groups, face various challenges, including unequal power relations, lack of access to services, limited participation in decision making processes among others.

Within this context, the Guidelines provide an important guidance tool to address the needs of the sector, including those of women and empower stakeholders to secure sustainable small scale fisheries.

I would like to underline that the FAO guidelines have a section on gender equality. That section particularly, calls for equal participation of women in decision making processes and organizations, appropriate

technologies and supportive policies and legislation. Indeed, the guidelines set a precedent as the first fisheries instrument to directly address gender.

Let me provide some figures about women in small scale fisheries sector. An estimated 45 million women worldwide participate in small-scale fisheries value chains. In other words, 4 out of 10 people in small scale fisheries sector are women mostly in employed in post harvest sector.

FAO, in collaboration with partners at global, regional and national level, encourages the uptake of the Guidelines. Now I would like to give some concrete examples including at national level which aim to support the implementation.

FAO has an [Umbrella Programme](#) for the promotion and application of the Guidelines. One of the two main projects currently nested under this programme is the [project on empowering women in small scale fisheries for sustainable food systems](#).

The project helps stakeholders build and improve skills and capacity in their work, with a particular focus on meeting women's needs. It maps where women's groups work, their roles and positions in fish value chains and in the end utilizes this information to identify entry points for meeting women's needs. Currently, the project supports small scale fisheries and the implementation of the Guidelines with a particular focus on gender issues among others in selected countries in sub-Saharan Africa and in Asia.

Concerning the efforts in relation to the integration of the Guidelines into national policies, I can give [National Plan of Action for Small-Scale Fisheries](#) as a relevant and good example. Those action plans support the implementation at the country level, by identifying challenges and agreeing on strategic interventions to address the challenges.

FAO, upon request, provides technical expertise and support to countries in the development of those action plans.

For instance, FAO supported the creation of National Plan of Action in the United Republic of Tanzania. [Tanzania](#) is indeed a frontrunner in the implementation of the Guidelines at country level.

[Namibia](#) is another example. The Government adopted the Guidelines in 2020 and developed an action plan for the period 2022-2026. This is a significant milestone for small-scale fisheries in the country since it provides specific considerations and actions to recognize the rights of small scale fisher women and men and the significance of their contribution.

Besides those 2 cases, FAO is currently supporting similar efforts in Madagascar, Malawi, Uganda, the Philippines and Indonesia.

I will stop here and would be happy to further reflect on any comments and questions in the Q&A section.

The FAO has a long and strong tradition of looking at the agriculture, forestry and fisheries sectors through a gender lens. What are the best practices that FAO has identified to enable a higher level of women's empowerment, participation and benefits in the fisheries and aquaculture value chains? In your view, which are the fields where interventions may be particularly fruitful to support the creation of more equal and inclusive value chains?

FAO Remarks:

Thank you very much Ambassador.

Concerning this question, I would like to start by listing some of FAO's gender mainstreaming efforts in the fisheries and aquaculture sectors in addition to the small scale fisheries guidelines.

The [FAO Policy on Gender Equality 2020-2030](#) sets a clear goal for achieving equality between women and men in sustainable agriculture and rural development for the elimination of hunger and poverty.

[FAO Committee on Fisheries Declaration for Sustainable Fisheries and Aquaculture](#) released in 2021 recognizes the critical role of women as key agents in the fisheries and aquaculture sector for achieving the SDGs.

Blue Transformation Initiative, which is also one of the program priority areas under FAO Strategic Framework and the [relevant road map](#) sets gender equality and equity as one of the guiding principles.

At the last session of the Sub-committee on Aquaculture, which was held in May 2023, FAO members reached consensus on the [new guidelines for sustainable aquaculture](#), which includes gender equality and women's empowerment both as a thematic module and as a cross-cutting issue.

In addition to those efforts, FAO has been developing a Guidance on Social Responsibility in the Fisheries and Aquaculture Value Chains. This will encompass the entire value chains and will take into consideration cross-cutting aspects including women among others.

I believe all these put forth concrete cases on how FAO looks at the sector through a gender lens.

Today we have heard about various constraints and challenges faced by women.

While of course, there is no one single or one right entry point to unlock the potential of women participation and empowerment, I would like to refer to a study conducted by FAO on '[Women and men in small-scale fisheries and aquaculture in Asia](#)' and published in 2022.

This publication provides recommendations in relation to raising awareness on women's contribution as well as promoting gender equality in fisheries and aquaculture. Considering that the sector contributes to food security and livelihoods of millions of people in Asia, I believe this study could provide some guidance in addressing the existing gender gaps in fisheries and aquaculture sector.

Let me share some of the entry points recommended in that study:

- collecting more gender-disaggregated data: this point has been already elaborated by Simonetta. However I would like to underline once more that gender-disaggregated data are the basis of any understanding and have a crucial role in supporting evidence-based decision and policy-making.
- addressing women's time and other resource constraints: Livelihood of fishers is not only composed of fishing activities. It also involves other productive work both related and not related to fishing as well as household work and care work. As a result of structural gender inequalities and cultural norms, such work is mostly carried out by women. and in the end this limits their time available for fisheries and aquaculture. In that regard, The study refers to the introduction of time-saving technologies, introduction of public support for childcare and other reproductive work to address Women's time constraints.
- women's participation in developing technologies: The study notes that A bottom-up approach ensuring women's participation in technology development will ensure technology that would meet the needs of women and facilitate their participation in the sector.
- mainstreaming gender in fisheries budgets and policy: On this point the study indicates that a clearly dedicated budget for gender-equality activities is essential in order to ensure that gender equality initiatives are put into place. The study refers to the designation of Gender focal points in government offices at all levels, and the development of sector specific policies.
- Last but not least, organizing women's group: The study underlines that this will support women to gain their voices and visibility as well as facilitate their access to resources.

While concluding, I would also like to mention gender transformative approaches, which are also considered in FAO's work on gender mainstreaming in fisheries and aquaculture. Those approaches involve going beyond stand-alone interventions targeting single areas of constraint such as women's limited access to resources and services towards removing the underlying structural constraints; building positive and equal non-discriminatory gender norms and roles; and designing and implementing solutions that could change the system in a lasting manner.

This concludes my remarks on this question.

Additional Information:

[Illuminating Hidden Harvests | Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries | Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations \(fao.org\)](#)
[The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture 2022 \(fao.org\)](#)