



Empowering Women in Marine Water Small-Scale Fisheries in Kenya



IMPORTANCE OF MARINE WATERS SMALL-SCALE FISHERIES

Fishing in Kenya's marine waters is dominated by small-scale fishers. Globally, large numbers of people are involved in small-scale fisheries encompassing all activities along the value chain from resource harvesting and production, processing, to trade and marketing. Small-scale fisheries are increasingly being recognized for its contribution to sustainable food supplies and the opportunities it presents for sustainable development and poverty eradication (World Bank, 2022). Small-scale fisheries play an important role in meeting food security, nutrition, health, employment and poverty eradication contributing to economic growth and development of many coastal countries and island states. In Kenya, many coastal people and households depend on small-scale fisheries for their livelihood.

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN SMALL-SCALE FISHERIES AND BARRIERS

Women in fishing communities around the world play great role in small-scale fisheries. About half of those working in small-scale fisheries value chain are women, mostly engaged in post-harvest activities especially processing, trade and marketing (Zelasney, J; et al (eds). 2020, "Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries: Showcasing Applied Practices in Value Chains, Post-harvest Operations and trade" FAO Technical Paper No. 652.). Very few women are involved in capture harvesting or actual fishing Women role as fisherwomen is limited to harvesting depend on inter-tidal marine resources such as oysters, crabs, octopus, seaweed and shrimps.

Despite their significant role and contribution, small-scale fishing communities continue to be



Figure 2: Women participating in a mangrove restoration exercise at kibokoni in kilifi county
(Photo: Richard Bemaronda, 2018)



Figure 3: Knowledge and skill training workshop for fisherwomen and women in fish trade in Kwale county
(Photo credit: Richard Bemaronda, 2017)

poor and marginalized and deprived of their human rights for socio-economic and cultural development. They are often overlooked, and their actors, including women tend not to be involved in decision-making processes that influence their lives and future (FAO, 2018). The role of women in fisheries is undervalued and often remain invisible particularly in leadership, governance and management policy as well as country statistics. Gender inequalities prevents women from realising their full potential and recognition in marine water fisheries. In addition, in developing countries like Kenya some of the discriminatory barriers can be attributed to traditional culture and belief systems, laws and practices.

INSTRUMENTS ADDRESSING THE BARRIERS

To address gender inequalities in small-scale fisheries and provide women with increasing opportunities, a number of international and national frameworks and instruments have been developed. At global level the instruments

include, among others, the FAO Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries in the context of food security and poverty eradication (FAO VG-SSF), and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. At regional level we have the Africa Vision 2063 while at national level one can use policy instruments such as the Constitution of Kenya 2012 and the Fisheries Management and development Act, 2016.

The FAO VG-SSF is an international instrument dedicated entirely to small-scale fisheries and their development. It was developed to support the visibility, recognition and enhancement of small-scale fisheries. The guideline has thirteen guiding principles based on international human rights standards, responsible fisheries standards and sustainable development practices. Gender equality and equity is one of the principles. On gender equality, the guidelines urge states to adapt and take specific measures to address discrimination against women, improve women status and achieving gender equality as well



as develop better technologies appropriate to women's work. On value chain, post-harvest and trade, the guidelines urge all states and partners to recognize that women play a central role in post-harvest and trade subsectors of the fisheries value chain. As such ways must be sought to promote equitable and non-discriminatory trade of fisheries products in local, regional and international markets.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its goals and targets promotes the empowerment of women. The SDG 5 - '*Achieve gender equality and empowerment of women*' has targets to:

- End all forms of discrimination against women and girls everywhere
- Give women equal rights to economic and natural resources through reforms
- Ensure women's full and effective

participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life

- Develop sound policy and enforceable legislation for promotion of gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls at all levels.

One of the targets of SDG 14 – “Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas, and marine resources for sustainable development” is that of providing access for small-scale artisanal fishers to marine resources and markets, while SDG 8 encourages parties to “promote sustained inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all”.

The Constitution of Kenya 2010 provides for equity, social justice, equality and protection of



Figure 5: Exchange visits between Kenyan and Tanzanian fisherwomen at Chongoleani village in Tanga-Tanzania
(Photo credit: Nuru Hassan 2017)

marginalized. Article 27 (3) states that “women and men have the right to equal treatment, including the right to equal opportunities in political, economic, social and cultural spheres”. The bill of rights provides for the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms of individuals. these include, among other, environmental, economic and social rights. The Fisheries Management and Development Act 2016 of the laws of Kenya promotes the protection of vulnerable groups especially women and youth. It ensures that not more than two-thirds of Beach Management Units are of the same gender and encourages women in leadership.

CANCOs SUPPORT TO WOMEN IN SMALL-SCALE FISHERIES IN COASTAL KENYA

Since 2012, Community Action for Nature Conservation – CANCO has been working with small-scale fishing communities along

the Kenya coast through their collective action groups, particularly, Beach Management Units and community-based environmental organizations and self-help groups. More importantly, using human rights-based approach and gender perspective, CANCO has fostered special support for women in small-scale fisheries development. Small-scale fisheries sub-sector will only be improved when the small-scale fisher women and men and women in trade of fish and fishery products know, understand and claim their human rights. These women are the beneficiaries of CANCO’s current project “*Promoting Local Stewardship and Social Accountability for Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries and Sound Management of Marine Resources in Coastal Kenya - the Counties of Kwale, Kilifi and Mombasa, 2017-2020*”. This project is supported by the people of Sweden through the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation.



Figure 6. Women fish traders buying dagaa from small-scale fishers at Jasini fish landing site, Kwale County
(Photo credit: Mwichambi Kai, 2018)

Through local stewardship and social accountability interventions, CANCO provided these women support and opportunity to develop their own organization with a legal foundation. The collective action institution is called “*Coastal Women in Fisheries Enterprise – CWIFE*) which shall have chapters in all the five counties bordering the Indian Ocean. The organization has provided women a platform to network and ability to express their concerns, needs, ideas and aspiration as regard to the sector. It has increased the women’s visibility and recognition by both the national and county governments as well as other fisheries value chain actors, supporters and influencers. CWIFE is progressively delivering the voices of the women in marine small-scale fisheries and agitating for the protection of their rights. The project has continued to build the capacity of the coastal fisher women and women in trade

of fish and fishery products through awareness, knowledge and skills training. The women have increased understanding of the country’s fisheries management and development law and regulation as well as the FAO Voluntary Guidelines on Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries. They have increased knowledge and technical ability in resource conservation and fish quality assurance and value addition. In resource conservation the focus has been on sustainable fishing, mangrove rehabilitation and sea turtle conservation. The women have rehabilitated degraded sites through mangrove planting in the villages of Jimbo, Bonje and Tsunza (Kwale County), Mkupe, Ngare and Jomvu Kuu (Mombasa county), and Kibokoni village (Kilifi County). The women in Funzi Island are involved sea turtle conservation. In fish quality assurance safety and value addition the focus has been promoting responsible fish



handling, hygiene, as well as encouraging value addition that minimizes post-harvest loss. Members of CWIFE have taken measures to maintain fish quality assurance and fish safety. In addition, women in Jimbo village undertake value addition of sardine (*dagaa*).

The project has enhanced the women's participation skills and willingness to play new developmental roles and adapt to new and emerging situations. For instance, more and more women are breaking traditional and cultural barriers by coming out openly to do actual fishing contributing to increased household income. There is a significant increase in the number of women in elective positions in BMU leadership. The women are increasingly participating in government-led processes and initiatives such as the Blue Economy and annual county sectors and

budget planning. In addition, these women are represented in civil society networks such as Tuna Fisheries Alliance of Kenya and the South West Indian Ocean Tuna Forum, among others. Through CANCO, the women have participated in regional and international meetings. In 2018, between 26th-28th November, the women participated in the Sustainable Blue Economy conference in Nairobi and had an exhibition stand where they showcased their activities and products as well as a side event on small-scale fisheries where two of them were part of the speakers. Experiential learning tours enable the women to interact with their counterparts in Tanzania. The women representatives from Tanzania visited Kenya and a reciprocal visit to Tanga region was done by a group of about twenty women from Kenya.

Furthermore, some of the women representatives participated in the following events:

- The 3rd World Small-Scale Fisheries Congress in Chiang-Mai, Thailand; 22nd – 26th October 2018
- World Fisheries Day and International Women Day celebrations, both in The Gambia, West Africa 21st November 2018 and 8th March 2017 respectively.
- Women in Fisheries Business Conferences in Uganda and Senegal respectively

CONCLUSION

Women play an important role in Kenya's marine waters small scale fisheries, particularly, in the post-harvest and trade value chain sub-sectors. Despite government reforms and devolution, women are still marginalized, vulnerable and poor with low standard of living. Concerted efforts by all actors in government (national and county and non-state actors) provide and foster special support for women in small-scale fisheries development to improve the women status and ensure they are heard. The actors should invest and improve capacity



Figure 4: Sustainable Blue Economy Conference in Nairobi (Photo credit: Naima Twahir, 2018)

development of women across the fisheries value chains. The women should be helped develop collective action institutions with legal foundations that will sustainably engage and maximize on emerging opportunities that can transform their social and economic status and well-being. CANCO through the support of SSNC is investing towards this end.

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