



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations



The contribution of women in small-scale fisheries to healthy food systems and sustainable livelihoods in Uganda

Second edition

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Required citation: FAO. 2023. *The contribution of women in small-scale fisheries to healthy food systems and sustainable livelihoods in Uganda*. Second edition. Rome. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cc7597en>

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Abbreviations and acronyms

CEDAW

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

FAO

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

IGA

Income-generating activities

NDP

National Development Plan

SDG

Sustainable Development Goal

SSF Guidelines

Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication

UBOS

Uganda Bureau of Statistics

Acknowledgements

This work was undertaken as part of the FAO sub-programme titled “Implementing the Small-Scale Fisheries Guidelines for gender equitable and climate resilient food systems and livelihoods”, financed under the Flexible Voluntary Contributions (FVC) Mechanism, and utilizes results from the Illuminating Hidden Harvests initiative. This brief is part of a series of Small-Scale Fisheries and Gender Briefs that has been developed to shed light on the contribution of small-scale fisheries, and particularly the women working in them, to healthy food systems and sustainable livelihoods. This brief was developed by FAO NFI colleagues Jennifer Gee, Matteo Luzzi, Rachel Matheson, Roxane Misk, Molly Ahern, Lena Westlund, Nicole Franz and Fiona Armstrong Simmance, as well as by Jacob Olwo (FAO Uganda). The brief benefitted from contributions and validation from technical experts at the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries (MAAIF) of the Republic of Uganda, Local Governments and local small-scale fisheries organizations. The authors would also like to thank FAO NFI colleague Manoela Militão de Siqueira for her editing support, as well as Sarah Pasetto for proofreading and Joanne Morgante for design and layout.

1

Introduction

The small-scale fisheries sector plays an essential role in transforming Uganda's food system. It contributes to ending poverty and hunger through healthy and sustainable diets and equitable livelihoods, and to leaving no one behind in the fight against hunger and poverty.

Gender equality is key in the context of Uganda, as over 300 000 women in the country are estimated to depend on small-scale fisheries

for their livelihoods (FAO, Duke University and WorldFish, 2023). Although women are not the main actors in the harvesting phase of the value chain, they have a crucial role within their households in the small-scale fisheries sector, where they largely engage in post-harvest activities such as processing and trading.

Women play an essential role in food and nutrition security through their responsibilities

FIGURE 1
Uganda



THE MAJORITY OF CAPTURE FISHERIES IN UGANDA
COMES FROM **SMALL-SCALE FISHERIES**

10.2 MILLION PEOPLE IN THE COUNTRY
NOURISHED

2.8 MILLION SUPPORTED THROUGH THE
PROVISION OF LIVELIHOODS

INLAND CAPTURE FISHERIES
81% OF TOTAL DOMESTIC
FISH SUPPLY

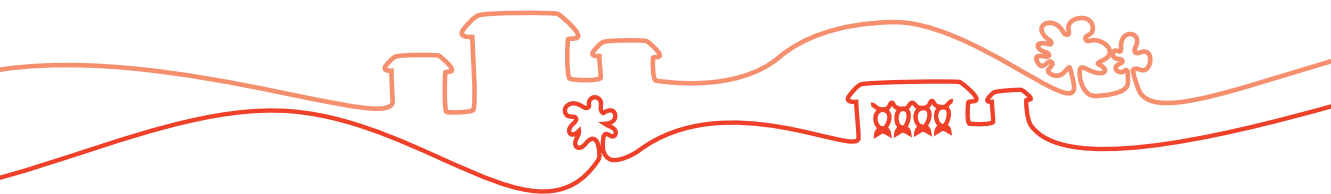
AQUACULTURE
19% OF TOTAL DOMESTIC
FISH SUPPLY

Sources: FAO. 2020. FAO yearbook. *Fishery and Aquaculture Statistics 2018/FAO annuaire. Statistiques des pêches et de l'aquaculture 2018/FAO anuario. Estadísticas de pesca y acuicultura 2018*. Rome; Republic of Uganda. 2018. *National State of the Environment Report 2018-2019*. Kampala. FAO. 2023. *Illuminating Hidden Harvests: Country profile. The contribution of small-scale fisheries to healthy food systems in Uganda*. Rome, FAO.

in provision and preparation of food consumed in the home. However, research indicates that compared to men, they often bear a disproportionate work burden (Grassi *et al.*, 2015). The responsibility of unpaid domestic and care work is usually assigned to women due to gendered social norms. Combined with work within the community, this results in a triple work burden for women, whose levels of income, livelihoods and food security are therefore impacted. This also limits women's opportunities for formal, full-time paid employment, training and career advancement (UN Women, 2020).

The Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines) set out guidelines for action and policy to secure sustainable small-scale fisheries. In particular, Chapter 8 of the Guidelines highlights the crucial need to integrate gender mainstreaming into small-scale fisheries development strategies, as a way to challenge practices that are detrimental to women (FAO, 2015). Indeed, this brief targets social and cultural constraints as crucial aspects to be tackled in the Ugandan context through tailored interventions at the national level, specifically in small-scale fisheries.

Furthermore, the SSF Guidelines call for compliance with international instruments such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). This brief will further examine these instruments in connection with national policies aimed at realizing gender equality. Based on the SSF Guidelines, in 2017, FAO elaborated and published an in-depth handbook, *Towards Gender-Equitable Small-Scale Fisheries – A handbook in support of the implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication*. The handbook was developed to support gender-equitable small-scale fisheries by enhancing understanding of their gender dimensions, with a focus on the specific role and conditions of women in the small-scale fisheries sector (Biswas, 2017). Strengthening commitment and implementation of the SSF Guidelines, particularly in relation to addressing gender equality – but also food loss and waste, and promoting equitable trade, governance and utilization of fish – can help safeguard and enhance the benefits of small-scale fisheries for sustainable development in Uganda.



2

National context

2.1 Legal framework, policies and regulations on gender equality and women's empowerment in Uganda

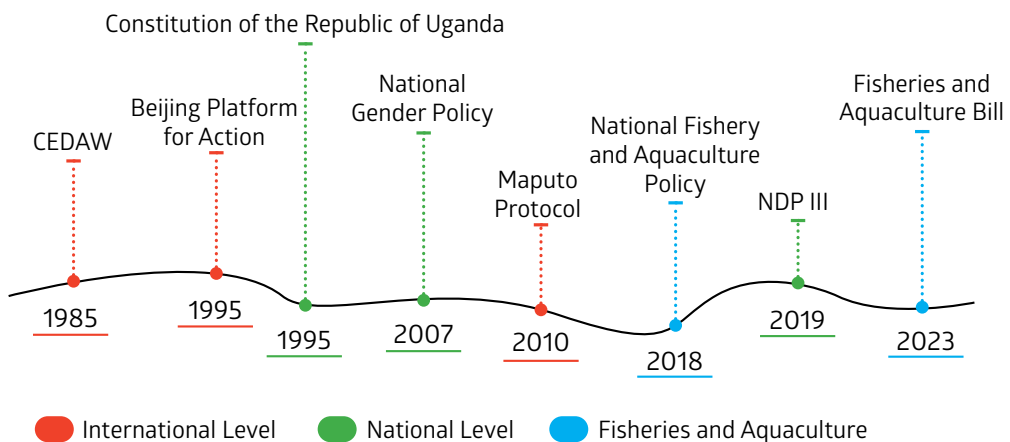
At the international level, Uganda has ratified all of the major conventions on gender equality, including that is, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1985 and the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action (BPfA) in 1995. In 2010, Uganda also ratified the Maputo

Protocol, requiring states to combat all forms of discrimination against women. Building on the norms and commitments contained in the CEDAW and the BPfA, gender equality and women's empowerment is prominent throughout the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), both in the form of a stand-alone goal (SDG 5) and as a cross-cutting theme, with more than 30 gender-related targets across the other SDGs (FAO, 2020b).



FIGURE 2

A timeline for gender in Uganda's legal framework and policies



Sources: MGLSD. 2021. *The National Action Plan for Business and Human Rights*. Kampala, Uganda; MGLSD. 2014. *National Report on Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (1995) and the Outcome of the Twenty-Third Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly (2000) in the Context of the 20th Anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women and the Adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action 2015*. Kampala, Uganda; MAAIF. 2021. Hon Adoa rallies MPs to fast-track Fisheries law. In: *Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries (MAAIF)*. Kampala. Cited 23 March 2022; MAAIF. 2017. *National Fisheries and Aquaculture Policy. Optimising benefits from Fisheries and Aquaculture Resources for Socio- Economic Transformation*. Kampala.

At the national level, the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda of 1995 ensured the national advancement of gender equality by recognizing equality among women and men under the law (Article 21) and enabling the outlawing of customary norms that undermine women's welfare (Article 33). The Constitution represented a framework for the formulation of the National Gender Policy in 2007. The latter was considered a primary legal framework for gender equality and women's empowerment (IsDB, 2019) ensuring the nested governmental objective of achieving gender equality. However, weak implementation capabilities have rendered the policy ineffective. The National Development Plan of 2015/16–2019/20 (NDP II) has been considered to successfully align with the SDGs, including SDG5 on the achievement of gender equality (NPA, 2015). Nonetheless, the advancements made by NDP II have not been further expanded by the more recent National Development Plan for 2019/20-2024/25 (NDP III). The latter document contains no consideration of gender as a key component of sustainable development, and scarcely mentions the concept of gender equality, with no clear and envisioned pathway for change (NPA, 2020). In conclusion, despite acting in accordance with international goals for gender equality, Uganda's commitment to ending women's discrimination still seems to present legislative fallacies (UWONET, 2015) and to lack full endorsement by local institutions (Acosta *et al.*, 2019).

Stemming from the NDP II and SDGs 2 and 14, the recent National Fishery and Aquaculture Policy (2018) aimed to increase Uganda's economic benefit from the sustainable management of fisheries and aquaculture resources (MAAIF, 2017). Equity and fairness are considered among the policy's sustaining principles, stating that development should not be disentangled from the "active participation of women, youth, orphans, [people with disabilities] and any other vulnerable groups". (MAAIF, 2017). Nonetheless, the Fisheries and

Aquaculture Bill, aimed at the implementation and enforcement of the National Fishery and Aquaculture Policy itself (Republic of Uganda, 2020), has only recently been signed into law after being returned to parliament for reconsideration (MAAIF, 2021). The long delays in finalizing this legislation thereby protracting the adoption of systematic gender mainstreaming in fishery and aquaculture from the national to the district level. With the passage of this Bill, more specific policies and plans should be put in place to translate the national strategy into targeted actions to support women's rights and gender equality in the fisheries sector.

2.2 Sociocultural and economic context

Although Uganda's statutory laws grant men



Socioeconomic statistics

UGANDA ranked **131st** out of 170 countries of the **GENDER INEQUALITY INDEX** (UNDP, n.d.)

In 2021, only **29.3 percent** of the female population held a **SECONDARY EDUCATION DEGREE** at the age of 25 or older compared to 36.3% of the male population (UNDP, n.d.)

38 percent of the female employed population over 15 years old **LIVES BELOW THE INTERNATIONAL POVERTY LINE** (UN Women n.d.)

Women in Uganda spend **14.6 percent** of their time on **UNPAID DOMESTIC CHORES AND WORK** (UN Women n.d.)



BOX 1

Gender-based discrimination and violence against women

- In the **small-scale fisheries sector**, women face **gender-based discrimination and gender-based violence (GBV)** within the fish value chain.
- In Uganda, the HIV epidemic is prevalent in some hotspots, including fishing communities along Lake Victoria. **HIV affects women more than men**, as almost half of women living in the Ugandan region of Rakai are HIV positive.*
- The spread of HIV is also linked to **intimate partner violence** and other forms of violence experienced within fishing communities.**



IMPLICATIONS FOR HEALTH

In Uganda, women reported that during auctions of fish, sometimes it is necessary for them to go into water as they fight to access fish. In this case, water causes vaginal infections due to its poor quality.***

Notes: *Chang, L. W., Grabowski, M. K., Ssekubugu, R., Nalugoda, F., Kigozi, G., Nantume, B., Lessler, J. *et al.* 2016. Heterogeneity of the HIV epidemic in agrarian, trading, and fishing communities in Rakai, Uganda: An observational epidemiological study. *Lancet HIV*, 3(8): e388–e396. doi.org/10.1016/s2352-3018(16)30034-0; **Miller, A.P., Ddaaki, W.G., Bloom, B.E., Wirtz, A.L., Nakyanjo, N., Kigozi, G. & Wagman, J.A. 2022. Perspectives of women living with HIV on addressing violence and use of alcohol during HIV services: qualitative findings from fishing communities in Uganda. *Violence against women*, 28(6-7): 1483–1504; ***FAO. 2023. *Empowering Women in Small-Scale Fisheries for Sustainable Food Systems - Consolidated Baseline Report: Ghana, Malawi, Sierra Leone, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania*. Rome, FAO.

and women equal rights, several factors have hindered implementation of these laws. Legal pluralism, lack of knowledge and weak institutional capacity have all complicated the enforcement of statutory law, thereby hampering the achievement of gender equality, particularly in rural areas (UWONET, 2015). Indeed, customary norms and practices are often enacted and observed across communities and household relations, ultimately influencing the extent of women's rights implementation at the local level (UWONET, 2015).

Uganda's fisheries are crucial to livelihoods and to local-to-global economies, while constituting a major source of proteins (FAO, 2019) and other nutrients such as zinc and calcium (FAO, 2023b). It is estimated that between 1 and 1.5 million Ugandans work directly in capture fisheries, with another 5 000 people engaged in the industrial processing fisheries sector (UNEP, 2020). As highlighted by the

Illuminating Hidden Harvests initiative (FAO, 2023b), approximately 500 000 Ugandans are engaged in livelihoods associated with small-scale fisheries, with an additional 2.7 million household members being supported through these activities. Many women and youth depend on the post-harvest subsector for their livelihoods, food security and nutrition (FAO, 2020b) and contribute particularly to fish trading and processing activities as major sources of income across the value chain.

2.3 Sex-disaggregated data – Employment

According to the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS), almost 11 million people (68 percent) in Uganda work in agriculture, forestry and fishing, including a higher proportion of women (73 percent) than men (63 percent). In Uganda, more than 80 percent of the working population without formal education works in the agricultural sector. According to 2019/2020



FIGURE 3
Sex-disaggregated data



Data estimates. Source: Adapted from FAO, Duke University & WorldFish. 2023. *Illuminating Hidden Harvests - The contributions of small-scale fisheries to sustainable development*. Rome, FAO.

household data, more women (62 percent) are in vulnerable employment than men (45 percent) (UBOS, 2021).

Sex-disaggregated data are key in building up gender-responsive and transformative interventions and providing institutions with the tools to make informed decisions. Unfortunately, data collection and disaggregation face several issues at different levels. As raised by the national assessment

on gender statistics conducted in 2016, issues include: lack of financial and technical support for gender data; limitations in availability of gender data; lack of data disaggregation of national surveys (even at district level); and limited capacity to process and disseminate statistics, due to lack of institutional, technical and financial resources that are key to validate and share data (UN Women, 2022).

UN Women reports having supported general improvements in Uganda's national ability to produce consistent statistical data on gender. In fact, coordination among UBOS and other ministries, departments and agencies has been institutionalized to mainstream gender across different stakeholders, thus ensuring that the integration of gender aspects and statistics is a prerequisite for the approval and allocation of resources in institutional plans, finally pushing for an increased allocation of national budget towards gender equality (UN Women, 2022). Additionally, certain efforts have increased the availability of gender data, such as: strengthening national commitments to produce gender data; increasing the technical capabilities of UBOS through specific trainings; and initializing new surveys filling data gaps about time use and violence against women and girls (UN Women, 2022). Finally, improved data accessibility was also possible through the creation of partnerships with academia and civil society, which has facilitated the dissemination of data, as well as with the establishment of a new Gender Statistics Portal. This portal enables users to swiftly access gender statistics, publications and evidence (UN Women, 2022).

Besides these improvements, it is difficult to measure if and how statistics specifically targeting fisheries and aquaculture figures have benefited from the shift proposed at national level in terms of gender data, including sex-disaggregated data.



3

Methodology

The information for this brief comes from a review of the available literature, as well as from primary data collected through gender-sensitive surveys conducted as part of a FAO small-scale fisheries project.¹ Primary data were collected in Uganda between 29 September 2020 and 28 October 2020. The data collection methods included individual questionnaires (n=300), focus group discussions (n=10) and key informant interviews (n=10). Respondents to the individual questionnaires were women only, while men were included among the participants of the focus group discussions. The study took place in two regions and four districts in Uganda: the Central region (in

particular, the Buikwe, Mukono and Masaka Districts), along Lake Victoria, and the Western region (in particular, Bulisa District), along Lake Albert.

The literature review involved using electronic databases to identify journal articles as well as grey literature, national and international statistics reports, and national and international policies and regulations. The literature review was used to validate data from the small-scale fisheries surveys as well as to provide additional context to clarify gender dynamics in Ugandan fisheries.

¹ The data for this brief were collected as part of a FAO small-scale fisheries study conducted under the Empowering women in small-scale fisheries for sustainable food systems (FGCP/GLO/645/NOR) project funded by the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation, as well as through the continuation of this work under the project titled Implementing the Small-Scale Fisheries Guidelines for gender-equitable and climate-resilient food systems and livelihoods (FMM/GLO/155/MUL), funded by the Flexible Multi-Partner Mechanism, now Flexible Volunteer Contributions (FVC) (FAO, 2023a).

4

The gender in the small-scale fisheries value chains

4.1 Understanding gender and the role of women in small-scale fisheries in Uganda

The cultural belief that views men as linked to the waterscape and women mostly belonging to land can explain the gendered division of roles found in many fishery sectors worldwide (Alonso-Poblacion and Niehof, 2019). Uganda is no exception, with harvesting being primarily a male-dominated activity. Women in Uganda are mostly engaged in post-harvest activities like fish handling (i.e. refrigeration and storage), fish processing and fish trade, with 95.3 percent of women in the FAO small-scale fisheries study conducted in Uganda engaged in fish marketing and retail (FAO, 2023a). Both men and women also own bars and restaurants at the landing sites, although these establishments are mostly run by women (Pearson *et al.*, 2013; Timmers, 2013).

At the household level, men are often considered responsible for earning income, while women are tasked with domestic and care work, including household chores, cooking, and child and elder care (Timmers, 2013; Geheb *et al.*, 2008). These responsibilities also impact women's mobility, as they take on economic tasks that are conducive to their household work: for example, processing or gear rental are

activities that do not require them to travel far from their homes (Timmers, 2013). Social norms about "light" and "heavy" work also affected this duality of household and productive work – men are responsible for heavy work such as fishing, due to unpredictable weather and late nights, while women perform "light" work such as household duties, as they are perceived to lack sufficient physical strength (Timmers, 2013).

Often, both men and women themselves maintain the discriminatory societal beliefs responsible for structuring gendered roles and spaces across the fishery value chain. The Ugandan women in the FAO small-scale fisheries study seem to agree with the belief that fishing is a man's responsibility and that it is up to women to prepare meals (including fish) within the household (FAO, 2023a). On the other hand, they have strong positions on their ownership rights, especially in terms of fishing tools and assets: 94 percent of women stressed their right to own canoes, fishing nets and other means to fish. Furthermore, 83 percent of those women are aware that they were as entitled to control the income obtained from fish sale as men, as well as that they should be entitled to be part of fisheries clubs, organizations or associations (FAO, 2023a).

4.2 (Equal) voice and decision-making power

When it comes to decision-making power in small-scale fisheries, it is essential to understand and assess the various degrees of female empowerment that women can benefit from to ensure that their voice is heard.

At the household level, FAO (2023a) shows that Ugandan women in the small-scale fisheries study have a strong influence on the decisions regarding fish buying, processing, storage, and marketing and trading. On the other hand, they seem to have no input in decisions concerning fishing, fish transportation and other income-generating activities (IGAs). This aligns with findings from another study conducted near Lake Wamala, Uganda, which found that while women participated in some fishing and other IGAs, men controlled these activities and the income generated from them (Musinguzi *et al.*, 2018). These findings suggest that there has been minimal progress in this realm, as a study from 2008 showed similar results when they found that while women may have had some input in decisions about the use of income, the final decision rested with men (Geheb, 2008). Women's inability to meaningfully influence and control IGAs and the associated income limits their economic empowerment.

Women's leadership can have a key role in influencing institutions affecting livelihoods. For this reason, it is important to assess the level of women's empowerment and how women's voices are heard on issues related to fish processing, marketing and livelihoods. For instance, most women in the small-scale fisheries study conducted in Uganda felt comfortable with public speaking for decision-making processes, as well as with protesting about fish processing and marketing-related activities (FAO, 2023a). Participation in local government meetings enables women to express their voices about the challenges

they face in the small-scale fisheries sector. In the small-scale fisheries study, 67 percent of women reported attending local government meetings, the highest rate of attendance among the five countries surveyed (FAO, 2023a). The topmost concerns raised by women in these fora included lack of access to capital, lack of supporting mechanisms for women entrepreneurship and poor or absent infrastructures, together with the inability to participate in capacity-development initiatives, the practice of illegal fishing and the challenges associated with the operationalization of women's groups and associations. Despite the many requests advanced by women and their high participation rate in local government meetings, women's concerns are still not being prioritized (FAO, 2023a).

A possible reason for the low rate of response to women's concerns in local government meetings despite their high participation rate may be their minimal representation in leadership positions. A study conducted near Lake Wamala, Central Uganda, found that almost all leadership positions in the fishery were held by men (Timmers, 2013). Similarly, in a study of three countries around Lake Victoria including Kenya, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania, Nunan and Cepic (2019) found that even with quotas for women's participation on beach management unit committees, mixed perceptions prevailed about the effectiveness of these strategies, as men still maintained control of fisheries management and decision making.

4.3 (Equal) rights, access and control over resources

The ability to access and own productive assets is clearly linked with decision-making power within the household, as to own assets means to be responsible for decisions about their acquisition, use and disposal.

The recent study on small-scale communities

carried out in Uganda found that women generally own assets such as cell phones and equipment for fish storage, transportation and processing. However, women tend to own less fishing equipment, either locally produced or imported (FAO, 2023a). Even when women do own fishing equipment, some evidence suggests that the gear they own is less varied, limiting their ability to diversify the fish they can access (Musinguzi *et al.*, 2018). Conversely, women in the small-scale fisheries study tended to own most of the transportation, fish storage, tools, communication and fish processing assets, compared to their husbands and other household members (FAO, 2023a). This conflicts with a study conducted in Lake Wamala in 2012, which found that men incurred lower transportation costs as they owned those assets themselves (Musinguzi *et al.*, 2018). The difference in these findings suggest that gender relations are not homogenous between places and over time. The gendered pattern of ownership of assets in these studies may reflect the division of labour in the country, as the ownership of fishing equipment aligns with men's harvesting roles while the ownership of processing and communication assets reflects women's contribution to the post-harvest activities.

4.4 (Equal) rights and access to services, markets and decent work

Women's involvement in markets is crucial to ensure the social and economic sustainability of the small-scale fisheries sector. To ensure access to markets, it is especially necessary to ensure the availability of fisheries extensions, trainings, transportation and facilities.

Among Uganda's communities targeted by the FAO small-scale fisheries study, women's access to fish tends to decrease from July to September, due to high prices, fish scarcity and poor fish quality (FAO, 2023a). Access to fisheries extension services represents yet

another struggle, with only half of women reporting to have met an extension officer in the last year, while access to training also remains limited. Of those participating in trainings, a vast majority of women in the FAO small-scale fisheries study expressed satisfaction in the skills learned, among which quality improvement of processed fish, fish handling and storage, entrepreneurship and business networks' creation (FAO, 2023a). These barriers hamper women's capacity to increase their revenue by improving fish handling and fish processing, as they remain tied to inefficient post-harvest practices. However, as the evidence from women who have been trained suggests, women are eager to learn and benefit from these opportunities when they are available.

Facilities' availability also affects women's ability to access markets. In Uganda, access to cold and dry rooms, water, childcare centres and bathrooms appears to be difficult, thus posing an obstacle to women's activities. Given they tend to lack ownership of means of transportation, women in Uganda mainly rely on taxis or walking to access markets, which increases their costs (Musinguzi *et al.*, 2018). Coupled with a lack of capacity development and training, these aspects have direct implications on food loss and waste, as highlighted in Box 2.

Most fish (74 percent) sold by women in Uganda is processed, with 51 percent of women processing all the fish before sale (FAO, 2023a). Nonetheless, the market for processed fish remains less lucrative than the men-dominated one for fresh fish. When buying in markets, up to 77 percent of women claimed to use less than one-quarter of fish for household purposes, showing the extent of female contribution to the marketing business (FAO, 2023a). However, the data also show a high number of people engaged in subsistence fishing (FAO, Duke



BOX 2

Gender food loss and waste methodology: reducing food loss and waste in small-scale fisheries value chains

Reducing food losses remains a “multidimensional and complex challenge”.* In fact, overlooking the “underlying socio-cultural, institutional and economic structures in which value chain actors operate” can also be relevant factors to be considered, just as inadequate equipment and lack of infrastructures. **Losses constitute lost income to fishers, processors and traders but they also contribute to food insecurity** because a loss of any fish means **less fish available for the consumer**.***

Post-harvest loss of fish has a **major economic impact** on the incomes of the women participating in fisheries value chains. Focus on post-harvest fishery practices is therefore key to support women in the **improvement of management** of fish processing and trading. To date, sustained rain events and poor handling practices are to be considered the major causes of lower fish quality and increased fish loss. The resulting low quality of fish leads to a reduced fish price: in Uganda, 86 percent of women have **sold (or not sold) fish at a lower price**.***

The connection between seasons and food loss also has a **strong linkage with climate change**: for example, “this can be particularly devastating for mukene drying, which is done at ground-level”. Furthermore, “It is important to note that **climate-related post-harvest losses disproportionately affect women** who are chiefly responsible for this node of the value chain”.****

Notes: *FAO. 2018. *Gender and food loss in sustainable food value chains – A guiding note*. Rome; **Randrianantoandro, A., Ward, A. & Safa Barraza, A. 2022. *Gender and food loss in sustainable fish value chains in Africa*. Sustainable Fish Value Chain Development Series No. 1. Rome, FAO. ***FAO. 2023a. *Empowering Women in Small-Scale Fisheries for Sustainable Food Systems - Consolidated Baseline Report: Ghana, Malawi, Sierra Leone, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania*. Rome, FAO; ****Timmers, B. 2012. *Impacts of climate change and variability on fish value chains in Uganda*. Project Report 2012-18. Penang, Malaysia, WorldFish.

University and WorldFish, 2023) in Uganda. Although fish is generally bought from markets and only small portions of fish are used for subsistence in the household, this small proportion of fish kept for home consumption can be crucial for household food security in contexts of high malnutrition (Fiorella *et al*, 2014).

4.5 Reduction of women's work burden and gender-based constraints

To reduce the disproportionately large work burden women bear and to create opportunities that were formerly inaccessible to them, it is important to enhance their access to technologies, information on improved

practices and infrastructure. Indeed, capacity development and technology can be key drivers for women's empowerment, by making their contribution to the value chain more effective. Gender transformative approaches (GTAs) can be a powerful tool in tackling these and other relevant issues in the small-scale fisheries value chain, by addressing the root causes of discrimination affecting women (Box 3).

In terms of capacity development, women involved in the FAO small-scale fisheries study have reported that the activities of fish sourcing, fish processing and storage are often learned through family ties, whereas they are only seldom learned individually or through project activities. To date, women's access to trainings remains scarce. Nonetheless,



BOX 3

Gender transformative approaches: addressing the root causes of gender inequalities and discrimination

The influence of **patriarchal customs** on Ugandan society weakens institutional capability to implement and enforce gender-responsive legislation, ultimately hindering the achievement of gender equality. To tackle the latter issue, **gender transformative approaches** (GTAs) can be adopted and implemented. In particular, GTAs aim to address the **root causes of gender discrimination** with methodologies targeted at both household and community level. Through the uprooting of longstanding societal gendered structures, GTAs deliver improved development outcomes, gains in the private sector, and improved project performance and sustainability. This is often possible given the propensity of GTAs to reach beyond the mere individual empowerment of women by **tackling systemic constraints to gender equality**, that is, by ensuring every individual owns the instruments to become an active agent of change for the advancement of gender equality.

Source: FAO, IFAD (International Fund for Agricultural Development) & WFP (World Food Programme). 2020. *Gender transformative approaches for food security, improved nutrition and sustainable agriculture – A compendium of fifteen good practices*. Rome, FAO, IFAD & WFP.

women's demand for trainings is high, on topics ranging from fish buying, processing and handling to entrepreneurship and business management, but also packaging, marketing and financial literacy. When present, trainings enrich women's knowledge on fish processing, handling and the use of technology at individual level and as part of women's organizations. It is crucial to stress that capacity development opportunities are vital for women to reduce their work burden and to be more time-efficient when carrying out their duties in the value chain.

The same applies to the use of technologies. However, in this case, apart from what they can learn from family members, women tend to gain technology-related knowledge from projects rather than from individual self-teaching. Training and capacity development have a key role in enhancing product safety, reducing food loss and waste, and enhancing time and cost savings; the same applies to the uptake of improved technologies (Kimani *et al.*, 2022). For example, women may rely on more cost-efficient and sustainable technology to

tackle the inefficiencies of cold chains, aiming to obtain long-lasting and transportable fish products. In Uganda, the example of drying racks used for processing *Mukene* shows how improved technological assets can drastically reduce the processing time burden and food loss, as well as improve hygiene and reduce the physical effort required during drying (Kimani *et al.*, 2022). Finally, buyers also acknowledge the increase in fish quality, thus translating into higher revenue for women processors and paving the way for the introduction of other innovations related to packaging and product diversification (Kimani *et al.*, 2022).

However, technological innovation in itself does not enable the achievement of gender equality in small-scale fisheries. Weak planning and limitations related to costs, maintenance, available space and resources, in addition to social biases related to the practices used or fish products' quality can be detrimental to a successful integration of new technologies into the existing value chain activities (Kimani *et al.*, 2022). If addressed in a gender transformative way, these issues can be

overcome by making technologies affordable to women, but also by integrating participatory approaches involving both women and men for fostering the development and adoption of these technologies with tailored capacity development programmes and awareness raising campaigns that are targeting gender-based constraints and striving for gender equality.

4.6 Gendered effects of climate

change and other shocks and disasters in small-scale fisheries

The environment is constantly changing and continues to pose new challenges to communities depending on small-scale fisheries for survival.

Women are particularly vulnerable to the impact of climate change, as they strongly depend on livelihoods that are affected by this phenomenon and have a limited adaptive

BOX 4

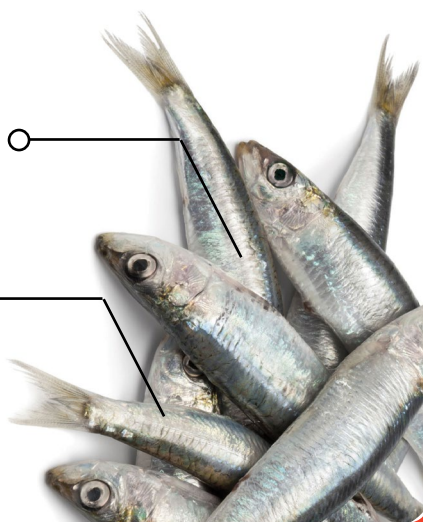
Effects of climate change

In Uganda, the mortality rate attributed to **air pollution** is 117 per 100 000 population. Furthermore, the proportion of people using **safe drinking water services** is only 17 percent, with less than the 5 percent of population relying primarily on **clean fuels and technology**.*

The **status of the fish stocks, overfishing, destructive fishing methods and illegal fishing** have also reduced stock status. Another significant impact is caused by the fishing methods used in Lake Victoria, which target juvenile fish before reproduction. These fishing pressures, combined with water pollution and invasive species, have **direct impacts on food security, health and livelihoods at a national level**.**

The fish species mainly consumed by participants in the FAO small-scale fisheries study in Uganda is **silver fish, or mukene (*Rastrineobola argentea*)*****. Mukene fisheries are **dominated by women's participation** – any climate-related shift affecting this species **disproportionately affects the livelihoods of women**.

Storms and high winds have dangerous effects for fishers when fishing in lakes, in terms of **input, infrastructure and gear destruction**. Any increase in the frequency or intensity of these weather phenomena would be **detrimental to the fishing community**, especially for women.****



Notes: *UN Women. *Uganda*. In: *UN Women Data Hub*. New York City, USA, UN Women. Cited ___. data.UNWomen.org/country/uganda; **United Nations Environment Programme. 2020. *Understanding Fisheries in Uganda*. <https://www.unep-wcmc.org/en/news/understanding-fisheries-in-uganda>; ***FAO. 2023a. *Empowering Women in Small-Scale Fisheries for Sustainable Food Systems - Consolidated Baseline Report: Ghana, Malawi, Sierra Leone, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania*. Rome, FAO; ****Timmers, B. 2012. *Impacts of climate change and variability on fish value chains in Uganda. Project Report 2012-18*. Penang, Malaysia, WorldFish.

capacity. This, in turn, is due to a high poverty and household burden, as well as to a lack of mobility and limited access to credit and decision making (Musinguzi *et al.*, 2018).

A case study from Lake Wamala, Uganda, has highlighted how environmental change has deeply affected fish catches, forcing riparian communities to adopt different response strategies to limit the loss of livelihoods (Musinguzi *et al.*, 2018). The gendered diversification of fishing activities, with different access to fish species, employment and fishing experience, provided men with more pronounced skills that would translate to greater advantage in terms of adaptation to climate change. Furthermore, men's greater involvement in both harvest and post-harvest activities gave them the tools to better adapt to shortages of fish stocks, as men-controlled income and all other IGAs alternative to fishing (Musinguzi *et al.*, 2018). These social conditions, coupled with lack of financial resources and access to credit, and compounded by time constraints, put women in a vulnerable position when the effects of climate change disrupt the usual operations of the fisheries value chain.

Similar circumstances have also been seen elsewhere in Uganda. Women in the FAO small-scale fisheries study indicated that there

have been changes in the environment that have affected women's business. In particular, they have pushed women to buy more fish to avoid shortages, to increase their prices, and to preserve more fish through enhanced processing techniques, when available (FAO, 2023a). These results show that women are already adapting to a changing climate. Therefore, financial, technical, social and political support should be in place to ensure that women's adaptation strategies are sustainable and equitable.

Climate change adaptation plans and strategies should be a tool to tackle gender inequalities by designing interventions that take into account women and men's different needs, skills and perspectives. Such initiatives should also push for providing women's access to credit and capacity development efforts implemented through participatory processes (Musinguzi *et al.*, 2018). In addition, national strategies targeting climate change should consider women's vulnerability and allocate proper resources to stimulate livelihood diversification and women's broader participation in the value chain.

5

Gender and small-scale fisheries stakeholders

5.1 Women in small-scale fisheries organizations

Women's small-scale fisheries organizations in Uganda are active throughout the small-scale fisheries value chain, with group members often engaged in a combination of harvesting, processing and trade of a variety of fish and fish products (FAO, 2022).

In addition, women's participation in local fisheries organization is a key driver of empowerment, leading to tangible benefits in terms of economic and social development for women in small-scale fisheries. In Uganda, only 34 percent of women consulted in the FAO small-scale fisheries study are part of local fisheries organizations; this contrasts with data about the respondents' beliefs that these associations should not be exclusive to men, thus demonstrating the complicated relationship between beliefs and practices. Of the study participants, many reported joining women's fishery organizations mainly in 2015 and 2016, with declining numbers of new memberships in 2018, 2019 and 2020. In general, women felt that women's groups offer a supportive environment where they can nurture one another in a positive and honest space (FAO, 2023a). More specifically, Ugandan women claim that the benefits of belonging to local fisheries organizations are mostly economic and social. Another relevant advantage is that such membership enables better representation of women involved in fisheries. Nonetheless,

fisheries organizations still lack positive recognition from Ugandan women. This is due to the inability of such organizations to act as leverage points for women's empowerment. Often, this results in women's unwillingness to pay memberships fees (FAO, 2023a).

Another study conducted among communities on the shores of Lake Victoria and Lake Albert (FAO, 2022) has highlighted the perspectives of women's small-scale fisheries organizations. In Uganda, women usually form these groups autonomously, using different organizational forms such as savings groups, associations or community-based organizations (CBOs) (FAO, 2022). The main objectives of these groups often concern providing social support, financial opportunities and capacity development initiatives for their members. The members of these groups engage in a combination of activities ranging from harvesting, to processing and trade; groups active in harvesting generally also have access to fishing equipment or boats. The groups are structured in a democratic way and rely on active membership, in terms of participation in meetings and performance of collective action (FAO, 2022). However, the barriers highlighted in the FAO small-scale fisheries study are to some extent confirmed, as only a few groups have received financial assistance and continue to lack access to technical training to gain improved skills in processing, and to technologies that would help the establishment stronger market linkages and reduce post-harvest losses (FAO, 2022).

6

Conclusions and recommendations: gender needs and priorities

Certain targeted actions should be undertaken to achieve gender equality, ensure that women are able to fully participate in and benefit from the Ugandan fishery sector, and create an enabling environment for women at local and national levels.

Policy and legal framework

- **Specific action points on gender should be integrated into existing legislation** and support should be provided to gender mainstreaming strategies and tailored monitoring processes in the Ugandan small-scale fisheries sector. National development plans and strategies should grant more space to gender concepts and issues and the achievement of gender equality should also be at the centre of upcoming programmes. These programmes should target fisheries and aquaculture especially, in order to promote further integration of legal frameworks and of the national budget with gender mainstreaming components relevant to the sector.

Knowledge generation and data collection systems

- Building on existing improvements on coordination systems targeting UBOS, **fisheries-related agencies, ministries and departments should be provided the tools to produce consistent gender data**, including sex-disaggregated data specifically targeting the fisheries sector. The integration of gender

aspects and statistics should be a standard prerequisite for the approval and allocation of resources in institutional plans related to the fisheries sector.

- **Local and national data collection systems** to gather gender statistics and sex-disaggregated data should be enhanced: **financial and technical support** for the data processing and dissemination of national statistics should be provided to mitigate the scarcity of gender-related data and the lack of efficient data validation systems. **Data availability and accessibility regarding fisheries should be granted** through trainings and capacity development. Public and easily accessible **platforms**, managed by the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries, should also be created **for the dissemination of gender statistics**.

Behavioural change and gender transformative approaches

- Women, men and youth within the communities should be engaged through **awareness-raising campaigns** aimed at **deconstructing predefined gender roles and gender norms** and addressing the **gendered division of labour** in Uganda's small-scale fisheries, in order to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment. These efforts should include funding the development and implementation of **GTAs** in small-scale fisheries value chains to redress gender

discriminations and constraints at different nodes of the value chain; an example of these is **gender-based violence** affecting women in fishery communities, which increases their level of economic vulnerability and exposure to health criticalities. **Social protection systems** should be strengthened to eradicate violence and to create the conditions for women to reach their full empowerment in a safe environment within and outside the household.

Targeted interventions for women's empowerment

- **Equal ownership rights and control over income** should be granted to women, especially through **recognition of their work** in the fisheries value chain and by ensuring they enjoy the **same opportunities and social security rights** as their male counterparts. This also includes supporting women's **gender-responsive financing mechanisms, including credits and loans**, to **purchase assets and expand their business and entrepreneurship models**. The equal participation of women in **fishery organizations, literacy programmes and tailored information access programmes** should be supported; fishery organizations should be granted further financing to ensure the benefits for women are consistent throughout time, providing them with capacity development opportunities as well as support mechanisms to face issues and constraints harming their participation in the value chain. Membership requirements for fisheries organizations should be revised in a gender-sensitive way to make organizations more accessible to women, especially in economic terms and considering women's unequal work burden.
- **Women's work burden** should be reduced, and their productivity increased, through the **integration of gender-responsive accessible technologies and improved facilities and infrastructures** in the value chain. It is key to provide women with access to knowledge, training and education by **strengthening their access to fishery extension services and taking into account their unpaid domestic and care work**. Fishery extension officers and government officials in the fisheries sector shall be consistently trained and aware **about gender-related concepts and approaches to ensure interventions are tailored to the needs of women and men in a specific context**, and that they are not exposed to violence and constraints when carrying out daily work activities.
- Women's access to markets and facilities for reducing food loss and improving value addition should be supported: direct **support and investments** should be granted to **increase the services and infrastructure in these spaces and to develop policies and strategies** ensuring they are **free from sexual violence, harassment and discrimination**. Specific services such as **affordable public transport and sanitary facilities** should be provided for women to **perform post-harvest activities independently and safely**, as well as to foster **conditions for equal access to markets - examples of such services are childcare centres and improved processing assets**.
- **Effective and comprehensive measures** should be developed to compensate for women's poverty and loss of livelihoods as a result of **climate change and disasters**. Examples of such measures are gender transformative **strategies for the mitigation of risks or rehabilitation policy measures** specifically targeting women and considering their social and economic vulnerabilities, while taking into account the knowledge differences and inequalities between women and men that are generated by the gendered division of labour in the fisheries sector.



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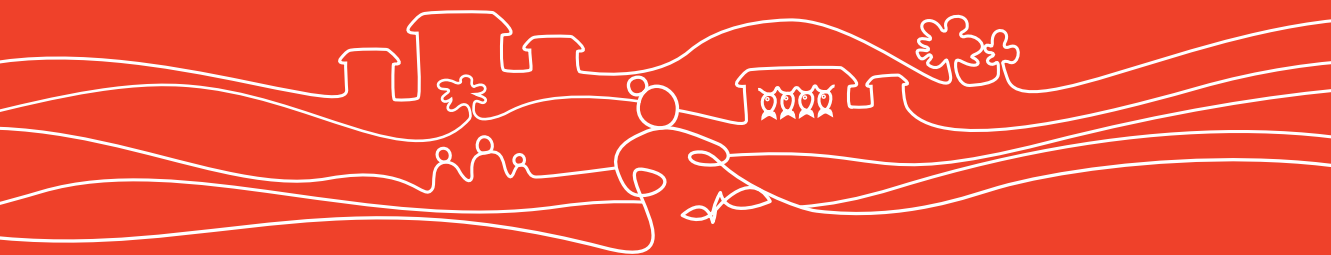
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This Gender brief is tailored to provide insight into the contribution of women in small-scale fisheries to healthy food systems and sustainable livelihoods in Uganda.

Over 300 000 women in Uganda, mostly in the post-harvest sector, depend on small-scale fisheries for their livelihoods. Pervasive gender beliefs in Uganda further limit women's opportunities and decision-making power at household and community levels, as they face many gender-based constraints in the fisheries value chains and they are more vulnerable to intersecting factors such as poverty and gender-based violence.

Targeted actions should be undertaken to address gender inequalities and support women's empowerment in the Ugandan fisheries sector, including gender-responsive national action plans and budgets, collecting and sharing sex-disaggregated data, and awareness-raising campaigns deconstructing gender norms.



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