



LDAC-AFRIFISH-NET joint advice on “Addressing role of women in fisheries – example of EU SFPAs”

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In light of the [Memorandum of Understanding](#) (MoU) signed between the LDAC and AFRIFISH-Net in May 2023, which underlines the importance of improving living and working conditions for African fishers¹, the LDAC wishes to update its previous advice on [“Addressing role of women in fisheries – example of EU SFPAs”](#) published in May 2020.

The MoU between AFRIFISH-Net and the LDAC insists that the role of women in African fisheries should be promoted through EU policies such as the EU's international partnership and development policy (INTPA), the Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreement (SFPAs) and in particular through sectoral support.

It also needs to be noted that both AFRIFISH-Net and LDAC supported the Artisanal Fishers Call to Action launched in 2022 at the International Year of Artisanal fisheries and Aquaculture ([IYAFA](#)) events². This call emphasizes the need to guarantee the participation of women in fisheries and support their role in innovation.

We must remember that women play a key role in fisheries³, particularly small-scale fisheries in all the countries with which the EU has signed an SFPAs; the Atlantic (Africa), Indian, and the Pacific Oceans. The EU therefore has a central role to play in improving women's living and working conditions in these countries.

¹ So *'men and women might find a sustainable livelihood from fishing'*, contributing to *'the resilience of coastal economies and preservation of local values and communities'*

² The [IYAFA Global Action Plan \(GAP\)](#) promotes inclusive value chains, gender equity and equality.

³ The sector employs an estimated 58.5 million people in primary production alone – approximately 21 percent women. (FAO. 2022. [The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture 2022](#). Towards Blue Transformation. Rome, FAO)

In 2012, the World Bank estimated that in certain segments of the processing sector worldwide, up to 85 percent of the employees were women. World Bank. 2012. [Hidden harvest: The global contribution of capture fisheries](#). Economic and Sector Work. Washington, DC

Vid. Monfort, M.C. 2015. [The role of women in the seafood industry](#). GLOBEFISH Research Programme, Vol. 119. Rome, FAO

To provide a coherent framework for EU action, there should be a clear reference in SFPAs of the EU's international partnership and development policy and the will of the parties to implement international commitments that benefit fishing communities, such as the [FAO Voluntary Guidelines on sustainable small-scale fisheries](#) (VG-SFF). The FAO VG-SFF give due recognition to the issue of gender in fisheries. These guidelines also suggest in Art. 5.7 that *“small-scale fisheries should be given due consideration before agreements on resource access are entered into with third countries and third parties”*.

Given the above, and building on its earlier advice, the LDAC suggests that the following actions should be adopted by the EU, through its SFPAs and EU's international partnership and development policy, to help improve the working and living conditions of women in fisheries, in particular in countries where there is an SFPA:

- **In order to improve access to raw fish material for processing and/or selling.**

Given the combined issue of over-exploitation of some species like small pelagics⁴, and the impact of climate change⁵ that alters the availability and distribution of these stocks, women have less fish to process and sell⁶. This not only affects their work and revenue, but also their communities' livelihoods and the food security of the population, particularly in countries where fish is a large part of the diet.

To address this, the EU should:

- increase its efforts to promote the sustainable regional management of small pelagics in North West Africa, including through a dialogue with SFPAs partner countries involved (Mauritania, Senegal, The Gambia, Guinea Bissau, Morocco)
- encourage the use of these resources for human consumption, rather than fishmeal and fish oil, therefore better protecting the access of women to raw material.
- ensure all vessels of EU origin do not contribute to the over-exploitation of these small pelagic resources.

⁴ Vid. [“Overexploitation of round sardinella may lead to the collapse of flat sardinella: What lessons can be drawn for shared stocks”](#) ScienceDirect, 2024

⁵ Vid. World Wildlife Fund (WWF, 2019) Study on [“Empowering Women in Marine Communities to Mitigate the Impacts of Climate Change”](#)

⁶ As a real example of 2021, in Côte d'Ivoire the agreement was working well. However, there was some pressure by the women's cooperative to gain access to catches of “faux poisson” (by-catches) of European purse seiners directly at the port of Abidjan without intermediaries, in order to process them more easily and at a lower cost.

- through SFPAs sectoral support and aid policy, the EU should also support investments in innovative processing and marketing techniques (improved smoking ovens, solar powered cold storage, etc.) and the development of small-scale fish farming to complement women's raw material supply.

- **Improve working and living conditions of women in fisheries⁷**

Many women who process the fish breathe smoke for more than 12 hours a day, have no access to toilets, to drinking water or electricity. Addressing those issues requires important means that go beyond the funds available through SFPAs. In its international partnership and development policy, the EU should therefore more highly consider fishing communities in investment programmes that support services such as access to drinking water, electricity, drainage and access to credit. In addition to support infrastructures that improve women's living conditions and those of their families, such as decent housing and day care centres near processing sites.

In its on-going efforts to promote regional trade, the EU should also work towards removing existing barriers to trade at national and regional levels, particularly stopping the harassment of women on markets, along trade routes and at border controls.

- **Lack of visibility and representation in decision making processes.**

Women's work in fisheries is still largely invisible⁸. They are also marginalised in decision making processes. Women's issues are therefore often not covered by agreements and conventions (e.g. ILO Convention 188 on work in the fishing sector).

Through its policies, including SFPAs sectoral support, the EU should back gender sensitive data collection and dissemination of information on artisanal fishing, so that their contributions to food security, livelihoods and sustainable use of the ocean are more visible.

⁷ "Millions of lives and livelihoods are supported by aquatic food systems. Yet, many small-scale producers, especially women, are vulnerable with precarious working conditions. Building their resilience is key to sustainability and equitable development" (FAO. 2022. [The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture 2022](#). Towards Blue Transformation. Rome, FAO)

⁸ Vid. The [Santiago de Compostela Declaration](#) for Equal Opportunities in the Fisheries and Aquaculture Sectors.

The EU should also support women's efforts to actively engage in decision-making processes, including for fisheries management decisions like the allocation of access to foreign fleets.

Due consideration should be given, in SFPAs evaluations, to any potential impact on women in fishing communities. Regarding resource access, since the 2013 CFP, the principle that EU fleets only access the surplus of fish resources that cannot be caught by local fishers is a positive development. This precept has been implemented not only through restricted access to a number of resources, but also through more restrictive zoning, better protection of resources on which coastal communities depend for their livelihoods.

These measures, if implemented to all fleets of foreign origin (as stipulated in the non-discrimination clause of the SFPAs) should contribute to better protect women's access to raw material for processing and trading.

In view of the above, the LDAC recommends that:

- 1. The EU should put more emphasis on the respect of the non-discrimination clause by the partner countries. Any measure agreed between the EU and the third country aiming to protect coastal resources for local fishing communities (thus protecting women's access to raw material) should be applied to all foreign vessels.**
- 2. Access to raw material for women can also be improved through EU fleet landings. The EU SFPAs should look at how these landings can be promoted, with a view of providing women in fisheries with access to landings, appropriate in quality, species and quantities.**
- 3. SFPAs can also contribute to better identify women in fisheries needs: periodic evaluations ex-ante and ex-post of EU fisheries agreements should systematically include women's groups in the stakeholders interviewed. The analysis of the impact of the SFPAs should highlight any specific impact on women in the local fisheries sector.**
- 4. Women's identified needs should be given due consideration in sectoral support, when part of the sectoral support affects the development of local fisheries.**



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