

Long Distance Advisory Board

Addressing role of women in fisheries – example of EU SFPAs

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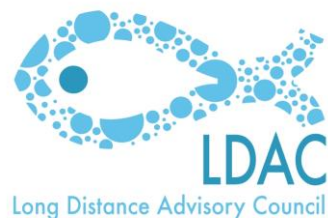
Women play a key role in fisheries, particularly small scale fisheries, in all the countries with which the EU has signed an SFPAs, in the Atlantic (Africa), Indian, and the Pacific Oceans. Women are present along the whole fisheries value chain from preparation of the fishing trip (including, in some cases, pre-financing) to catching, landing, processing, and selling of the fish. Their work also makes an essential contribution to food security, by providing nutritious and affordable processed products to local and regional markets.

Women's work is still underestimated mainly due to the lack of registered data on their actual tasks and their relative weight in terms of economic and social contribution to the sector. Consequently, they are only rarely publicly recognized and still too little supported. The vulnerability and lack of visibility of women from fishing communities does not allow them to fully assume their role in contributing to food security through their work. This situation is well admitted now, but it is not yet the subject of adequate political corrective measures.

It is important to consider that supporting the participation of women in this sector strengthens the weight of the community as a whole. Focusing on gender issues thus makes it possible to integrate the equity and equality dimensions into fisheries management policies. Without equity, there cannot be good governance of fisheries.

The EU has therefore a central role to play to that end and should do so by contributing to the implementation of the FAO Voluntary Guidelines on sustainable small scale fisheries (VG-SFF) and notably the handbook in support of the implementation of the VG-SFF "*Towards gender-equitable small-scale fisheries governance and development*"¹. This can take place both at multilateral level (within RFMOs for example) and at bilateral level, when planning and managing SFPAs with partner countries.

¹ <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i7419e.pdf>



Currently, the main issues facing these women include:

- **Lack of access to raw fish material for processing and/or selling.**
Most of the fish processed and sold on local/regional markets are pelagics, particularly small pelagics. Given the dependency on a limited number of species, when these get over-exploited, not only the women's work and their communities' livelihoods are at stake, but food security is also negatively affected, particularly in developing countries where fish is a large part of their diets.
- **Unhealthy and hazardous working conditions.** Many women fish processors breathe smoke for more than 12 hours a day, have no access to toilets, to potable water or electricity. Improved equipment have been tested (like FAO improved smoking kilns²) and could be disseminated in partnership with women cooperative organisations.
- **Lack of visibility and representation in decision making processes.**
Women's work is still largely invisible; despite their key role, few data are available or registered in official statistics about women's role in fisheries. They are also largely excluded from decision making processes, and women issues are therefore often not covered by agreements and conventions (e.g. ILO Convention 188 on work in the fishing sector).

The FAO Voluntary Guidelines on sustainable small scale fisheries give due recognition to the issue of gender in fisheries³. These guidelines also suggest on its 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*". The handbook on gender equity and equality in fisheries should also serve as a reference when considering women in fisheries policies.

As women are the pillars of African small scale fishing communities, due consideration should be given, in SFPAs, to any potential impact on women in fishing communities.

² FAO-Thiaroye processing technique Towards adopting improved fish smoking systems in the context of benefits, trade-offs and policy implications in selected developing countries

<http://www.fao.org/3/ca4667en/CA4667EN.pdf>

³ Towards gender-equitable small-scale fisheries governance and development <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i7419e.pdf>



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 protecting resources on which coastal communities depend on 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 protecting 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 fleets 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 identified needs should be given due consideration in sectoral support, when part of the sectoral support is affected to local fisheries development.**

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