Small-scale fisheries contribute about half of all fish catches in developing countries, making a major contribution to food security and nutrition. They employ 90 per cent of the world’s capture fishers and fishworkers, and women represent half of them! Women engage along the whole fisheries value chain, including fishing and mending nets, shellfish collection and diving for abalone and pearls. Often they are also responsible for post-harvest activities, including trade and labour-intensive value addition, such as drying, smoking and salting, besides being the caretakers of the family and communities.

Yet, there are still many inequalities in small-scale fisheries, and women’s contributions are not always adequately recognised and paid. Strong power imbalances exist. Middlemen often dictate the prices of fish that women sell. Women have limited access to credit and often work in insanitary, poorly ventilated and hazardous conditions, and are at risk of violence and discrimination. It is crucial therefore to address gender issues in fisheries value chains, and ensure women’s equal participation in decision-making processes and organisations.

In 2014, the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines) were endorsed. These Guidelines represent the first internationally negotiated instrument that specifically addresses small-scale fisheries, and, significantly emphasise gender equality and equity.

In this context, FAO produced a short animated video, to raise gender awareness and generate discussion about the relevance of gender equality in small-scale fisheries. Available on YouTube, the video is aimed to reach a broad audience, including the general public, and in particular policymakers, small-scale fisheries organisations and their support organisations. To develop the video, partners with expertise in small-scale fisheries and gender issues were contacted. Many had been involved in the development of the SSF Guidelines themselves and continue to support their implementation, including members of the IPC Fisheries Working Group, IFAD, the Too Big To Ignore network, genderaquafish.org, and ICSF, which had also prepared a Towards gender-equitable small-scale fisheries governance and development: A handbook.

The exchange with these experts showed the complexity of gender issues in small-scale fisheries—the vulnerability of indigenous women in the sector, the occupational and health hazards women in small-scale fisheries often face, the need to not only address gender issues within small-scale fishing communities, but also in the context of fisheries administrations and support organisations. The capacity of women, especially when organised, to innovate and participate in a constructive and dynamic way in small-scale fisheries development and governance was also emphasised.

The video represents a compromise around all these points, and tries to strike a balance between keeping it short and capturing the main issues related to gender equality in small-scale fisheries. The Spanish and French versions of the video are under preparation and will be released shortly.

The video may be viewed at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BolcVAAYEow&featu re=youtu.be