



## **International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF) & Technical Services for Community Development (TESCOD) Women in Fisheries African Regional Action Plan**

During the *IYafa Africa Workshop: Celebrating Sustainable and Equitable Small-Scale Fisheries*, which took place in Accra, Ghana from 15-18 February 2023, one full day was devoted to participatory exchanges on women and gender in small-scale fisheries. The aims of the exchange were to reflect on the challenges women face in both harvest and post-harvest work; share inspiring examples of women's organizations and mobilization; amplify women's voices; and develop an Action Plan for the African region.

Participants in the workshop included representatives of small-scale fisher and fishworker associations, cooperatives, trade unions, community-based organizations, and non-governmental organizations from 16 African countries – namely Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Djibouti, The Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Mauritania, Nigeria, Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Tanzania, Togo, Tunisia, and Uganda. Half of the workshop's 51 participants were women, with a wealth of experience in organizing and mobilizing other women in their communities to raise their voices and collectively tackle the challenges they are facing in fisheries.

Despite different local and national contexts, women across the African region face similar challenges and obstacles, including lack of access to: fisheries resources; safe and clean spaces to process and sell fish; participation in decision-making processes; support for organizing and setting up cooperatives and associations; finance; education and training opportunities. However, the women participating in the Africa workshop also shared their experiences of agency and innovativeness, illustrating their capacities for resilience which can be emulated and shared. They highlighted the importance of uniting their struggles and working together to find creative solutions to tackle the challenges they are facing. Through collective discussions, they pinpointed several concrete actions that need to be taken in the African region:

- 1) **Capacity-development, education and training opportunities** for women must be established, with facilitation and support from governments and local organizations. These opportunities should be centred upon strengthening women's voices and knowledge of their rights; educational support enabling girls to stay in school longer; capacity-development for women leaders (particularly youth) in small-scale fishing communities; and fish processing techniques that allow women to work more safely and hygienically. Financial, logistical and institutional support is crucial during such trainings and to follow-up on training outcomes.
- 2) **Women's participation in fisheries decision-making spaces** must be strengthened in order for women to be able to actively contribute to processes that directly affect them. Structures in fisheries must begin at the grassroots level to ensure decision-making is actually taking concrete community issues into account. There must be more deliberate action taken to achieve gender transformation, including creating spaces and platforms for women to voice the issues they are facing.
- 3) **Preferential access must be provided for women to access financial support**, such as grants, credit and loans, that support their activities in fisheries. This includes support for

setting up their own harvesting, processing or selling businesses; investing in new harvesting gear or processing tools (including new technologies); paying membership fees to cooperatives or associations; or for enrolling in skills training programmes.

- 4) **The establishment of cooperatives, associations and other organizations** should be prioritized by women working in fisheries, with technical and financial support from governments and allied organizations. These organizations should remain independent from external influences and be properly registered according to national regulations. Existing organizations must also be supported in order to strengthen and expand capacities. Women's organizations should focus on providing spaces to discuss and develop strategies for addressing common challenges, while opportunities are created for organizations to network, share experiences and collaborate in order to facilitate unity and collective action.
- 5) **Mechanisms must be put in place to support grassroots women's organizations directly**, allowing them to access financial and other support independently, and to determine programmes and activities based on their community needs. External organizations should not determine what interventions and outcomes are needed without first taking community voices into account. Women's organizations should also receive leadership and skills training in order to strengthen their capacities in resource mobilization; democratic governance; conflict management; and advocacy.
- 6) **Awareness must be raised about the challenges women in fisheries are facing and their innovativeness**, highlighting the importance of their roles in addressing issues like climate change, pollution and declining resources in their communities. Women are often the first to take responsibility for working toward sustainable fisheries and resource use, and yet their crucial contributions are too often unrecognized. Scaling up advocacy work and information sharing on women's roles, and emulating innovative and collaborative efforts being made that support women-led fish processing and trading activities should be prioritized.
- 7) **Action must be taken all along the fisheries value chain to prevent waste and food loss**, which have direct impacts on women's livelihoods. This includes investment in landing sites and infrastructure, smoking and processing facilities, storage and refrigeration, adequate packaging, hygiene and food safety training. Women's organizations should also be provided with financial support or insurance policies for their members to recoup losses when they lose a significant amount of their fisheries products due to adverse weather or breakdown of storage facilities.
- 8) **Governments should scale-up their support for women in fisheries**, including through the development of gender-sensitive policies and the establishment of gender departments or committees which are directly responsible for addressing gender-based challenges and obstacles in fishing communities. Such departments or committees should also be carefully trained on the crosscutting gender dimension of the *Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries* (SSF Guidelines), and contribute to the development of national plan of action for implementing the SSF Guidelines.