

# Beyond Business as Usual

The Illuminating Hidden Harvests report showcases the contributions of small-scale fisheries to sustainable development

One of the final events marking the International Year of Artisanal Fisheries and Aquaculture (IYAFA), 2022 was the hybrid launch of the report *Illuminating Hidden Harvests: the contributions of small-scale fisheries to sustainable development* (the IHH report) on March 16, 2023. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), Duke University and World Fish joined forces to mobilize over 800 contributors for this global study to generate and disseminate new evidence about the importance of small-scale fisheries (SSF) to inform policy and practice.

The study uncovers the contributions and impacts of SSF through a multidisciplinary approach to data and analysis. It is grounded in a tapestry of methods, including data and information from 58 country/territory case studies, an *ad hoc* questionnaire, global databases and thematic studies. The IHH report provides a snapshot of the environmental, economic, gender, food security and nutritional, and governance dimensions of SSF globally.

The IHH report is directed not only to policymakers and small-scale fisheries advocates, but also to research and development partners and others with an interest in understanding the sector. Its information quantifies and improves our understanding of the crucial role of SSF in the areas of food security and nutrition, sustainable livelihoods, poverty eradication and healthy ecosystems. It also examines gender equality as well as the nature and scope of governance in SSF. The report ends with suggestions for the way forward.

The IHH report starts with a rationale, followed by a description of its methodological approach, expanded on in the two annexures. The third chapter looks at how we

define SSF, systematically applying a characterization matrix approach that allows assessing the various dimensions of small-scale fisheries in a way that aligns better with the high degree of diversity of this sub-sector, both at the global and national levels. Capturing and valuing the diversity and complexity of SSF is an important input to making informed management and policy decisions.

The subsequent chapters report on the outcomes of the study's investigation into five key dimensions: the environment, economics, gender, food security and nutrition, and governance. Chapter four deals with

**Capturing and valuing the diversity and complexity of SSF is an important input to making informed management and policy decisions**

the production and environmental interactions of SSF, providing answers to a number of questions, including the contributions of the sector to the global catch. The fifth chapter focuses on SSF's contributions to economic value and livelihoods. A key element here is the re-estimation of how many people depend on SSF for their livelihoods. The sixth chapter explores gender inclusivity and equality in small-scale fisheries, investigating how women contribute to and benefit from SSF.

## **Food security**

The contributions of SSF to food security and nutrition are dealt with in details in the subsequent chapter, the seventh, pushing the boundary to understand the importance of its catch to nutrition. Chapter eight illustrates global patterns of management and governance of small-scale fisheries;

*This article is by Nicole Franz (Nicole.Franz@fao.org), Fishery Planning Officer, Fisheries and Aquaculture Division, UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Rome, Italy*

LUIS TATO / © FAO



Women interested in buying fresh fish gather, waiting for boats that pull over with fresh products at the shore of the Lake Tanganyika in Kigoma, Tanzania. An estimated 44.7 million women worldwide participate in SSF value chains or engage in related subsistence activities

36

the section on contributions towards the implementation of the SSF Guidelines looks deeper into how the sector is governed. The ninth and concluding chapter looks at the way forward: turning challenges into opportunities for securing SSF's role in sustainable development. It builds on cross-cutting issues in relation to data, analysis, capacity development and the importance of the SSF Guidelines as a policy framework, summarizing the findings and making policy suggestions.

**Volume of the catch:** At least 40 percent of the global fish catch comes from SSF, almost 37 million tonnes. Of the total SSF catch, 68 percent comes from marine fisheries and 32 percent from inland fisheries. It is important to note, however, that SSF's share in catch is highly variable across regions. It accounts for 66 percent in Africa, 47 percent in Asia, and 5 percent in Europe, respectively.

**The people behind this catch:** Globally, 60 million people are employed along the SSF value chain, either part-time or full-time. This comprises almost 90 percent of global fisheries employment. Additionally, an estimated 52.8 million are engaged in

SSF harvesting or processing activities for subsistence. These people are estimated to support about 379 million additional household members. That means almost 500 million people depend at least partially upon SSF for their livelihood. Almost 7 per cent of the world population in 2016! In terms of economic value, the average annual total revenues of SSF were estimated in the range of US \$77 billion - US \$58 billion from marine sources and US \$19 billion from inland fisheries.

**Women's contribution:** An estimated 44.7 million women worldwide participate in SSF value chains or engage in related subsistence activities. This means out of every 10 people engaged in the sector, four are women—40 percent—who either work for pay or for household consumption. Broken down by segments of the value chain or sub-sectors, women represent over 15 percent of pre-harvest labour such as gear fabrication and repair, bait and ice provisioning, boat-building. Women also comprise 19 percent of commercial harvest labour, including vessel- and non-vessel-based activities. In the post-harvest sector, women represent half of all those engaged in

activities like processing, transporting, trading and selling. Up to 45 percent of those engaged in subsistence fisheries (harvesting and/or processing) activities are women. Despite substantial participation in SSF, women's access to decision-making forums of the sector is often limited. Gender-disaggregated data on women's participation in SSF governance, however, is not routinely collected.

**Importance to nutrition:** By leveraging new data and information, the IHH study was able to illuminate global, regional and national contributions of SSF to nutrition. While all fish provide a good diversity of macro- and micro-nutrients, when looking at the relative nutritional value of various fish groups, the most nutritious fish, with the best diversity of nutrients, were small fish, constituting the bulk of SSF catch globally. Not only are small fish the most available and affordable for vulnerable populations, the fish from SSF have a considerable potential for nutrition—even at the scale of entire national or regional populations. The omega-3 fatty acids in SSF landings could provide 50 per cent of the recommended daily intake to 987 million women across Asia and Africa. The total nutrient yield from SSF landings could provide 20 per cent of the recommended daily intake across the four most abundant nutrients (calcium, selenium, zinc and O<sub>3</sub>) to 477 million women.

**Governance:** Management rights are formally granted to fishers in nearly 75 percent of countries included in the IHH study. Yet co-management is implemented only for 20 percent of the catch. More than 400 of the producer fishing organizations analyzed expressed having goals related to harvesting and sustainable fisheries management. More than 60 per cent also expressed goals related to human well-being. These findings suggest fishers are themselves active contributors to the implementation of the SSF Guidelines.

The IHH report proposes major actions to improve SSF to make the sector more sustainable and equitable. This following list carries a summary:

**Reconsider how SSF are characterized and defined:** The characterization matrix developed by

the IHH study provides a standardized tool to identify small-scale fisheries and distinguish them from their large-scale counterparts.

**Further explore and build on IHH country case study data:** The richness of information collected through the IHH study should be leveraged to enhance knowledge and develop indicators that can inform decision making.

**Go beyond business as usual:** This includes building on the IHH study approach to improve data collection and analysis, moving beyond the limitations of 'business as usual', including disaggregating data, applying participatory and innovative approaches, and using multi-disciplinary and multi-source approaches.

**Empower women in fisheries:** Collect gender-disaggregated data. Women play a crucial role in SSF but their contributions are often not recognized. To ensure gender equality, we must collect meaningful gender-disaggregated data to actively include women in decision making.

**Recognize the needs and benefits of effective participatory approaches:** The knowledge, culture and traditions of SSF communities must be recognized and put into practice. Greater and more equitable participation is necessary, including empowering fishers and fishworkers in decision making.

**Improve data and information for the SSF Guidelines implementation:** Better data is what the SSF Guidelines call for. This requires a substantial shift in how diverse information systems are integrated and linked.

**Capacity building and partnerships:** This is essential for better association and coordination among all stakeholders, including governments, SSF organizations and researchers includes the co-production of knowledge to further uncover the hidden contributions of small-scale fisheries.

**Incorporate the multi-dimensional contributions of SSF across policies:** SSF should be conceptualized and governed as multi-dimensional livelihood portfolios and not just as an economic activity. This because the sector has multiple functions providing an

OSCAR AMARASINGHE



Multi-day boats anchored in Beruwala harbour in the West of Sri Lanka. SSF's share in catch is highly variable across regions. It accounts for 66 percent in Africa, 47 percent in Asia, and 5 percent in Europe, respectively

38

enabling environment for sustainable development. Strategies are needed to leverage the full range of benefits, particularly for vulnerable groups.


**Incorporate nutrition and other livelihood outcomes into management decisions:** Governance processes need to optimize the benefits from SSF for everyone by, for example, taking into account the nutrition potential of catch, and ensuring equitable access for women.

Activities based on the IHH study's recommendations already took off, even as the report was getting finalized. Firstly, at the country level, Tanzania and Madagascar have started a process with support from the Duke University and FAO to build on the IHH approach, improving SSF data collection and analysis for better management and policies. Tanzania, Uganda, Malawi and Zambia have prepared policy briefs on the multi-dimensional contributions of SSF based on IHH data and other relevant sources in a participatory manner.

Secondly, a number of IHH-related peer-reviewed papers have been published already. Others are in the pipeline for a Nature IHH collection due for release in early 2024. It will further engage the academic community and

inform policy. Further, data gathered and used for the compilation of IHH will also be released to the public.

Thirdly, the findings and recommendations of IHH will be shared through multiple information and communication products, including the release of the IHH executive summary as a stand-alone publication in English, French and Spanish; the release of the videos of the IHH findings and recommendations (also in the three languages); and IHH newsletter updates.

All of these efforts are timely interventions to advance the implementation of the SSF Guidelines, which will enter their 10th anniversary in 2024. 

#### For more

**IHH report** - <https://www.fao.org/voluntary-guidelines-small-scale-fisheries/ihh/en/>

**IHH infographic** - <https://www.fao.org/3/cb8233en/cb8233en.pdf>

**IHH webpage** - <https://www.fao.org/voluntary-guidelines-small-scale-fisheries/ihh/en/>