



# Women in small-scale fisheries: victims or architects of their destiny?

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# Women are still often denied recognition

Time and again, despite often being denied recognition, women have stood tall as entrepreneurs and managers in (small-scale) fisheries in all continents

- ▶ Guinea Case Study
- ▶ REFEPAS (Network of Women in Artisanal Fisheries in Senegal) Challenge
- ▶ Nigeria Case Study
- ▶ Dominance in Harvesting



Photo Aliou Sall

Literature, sample:

**Williams, S. et al.** (eds.) 2005. Gender, fisheries and aquaculture: Social capital and knowledge for the sustainable use of aquatic ecosystems. *ACP-EU Fish.Res.Rep.*, (16):28 p. ISSN 1025-3971 / EUR 20432

**Sall, A.** 2018. Women in fisheries: Interview with Ms Ramatoulaye Barry, leader of a group of women fish mongers in Conakry. <https://archive.mundusmaris.org/index.php/en/projects/beetween/1994-barry-en>

**Chuku EO, et al.** 2022 Spotlighting Women-Led Fisheries Livelihoods Toward Sustainable Coastal Governance: The Estuarine and Mangrove Ecosystem Shellfisheries of West Africa. *Front. Mar. Sci.* 9:884715. doi: 10.3389/fmars.2022.884715

But major gaps remain in implementing the SSF Guidelines' call for gender equity



# Increased fishing costs affect social organisation

- Women formerly pre-financed fishing trips, securing priority access to fish
- Overfishing has increased costs (bigger canoes, longer trips), limiting women's financing role
- Fishers now demand immediate cash, breaking traditional trust-based systems
- Fishmeal factories offer higher prices, encouraging opportunistic sales
- Women lose market share, income, and community status



Photo P. Bottoni

Literature, sample

**Pauly, D. et al.** 2025. From Science to Conscience: The Plunder of Senegal's Fisheries Resources, or Europe's Role in the Making of a Migration Crisis. In *Proc. Paris Inst. Adv. Study* (Vol. 21). <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15833918>



# Challenges for social solidarity networks (1)

- Coastal fisheries once fostered strong social solidarity, with incomes higher than agriculture
- Cohesion sustained through cultural practices, mutual support, and traditional leadership systems
- Informal cross-border trade thrived on trust and enforceable social relations (e.g., Ghana, Senegal)
- Influx of external capital (investors, urban elites) weakened local ties and traditional norms
- Shift in consumer behavior (preference for supermarkets) is undermining local fish trade networks





## Challenges for social solidarity networks (2)

- Artisanal fishing in the Gulf of Guinea is often dominated by migratory ethnic groups like the Fante, Ewe, and Ga, shaping regional trade networks
- In Nigeria, artisanal fisheries rely heavily on coastal lagoons, rivers, and inland waters, linking fishing livelihoods with local commerce
- Increasing resource scarcity and overexploitation are disrupting traditional mobility and cooperation systems
- Women face heightened vulnerability due to limited access to finance, education, and healthcare in many Nigerian fishing communities
- Persistent social and gender inequalities weaken women's roles in fisheries value chains and erode social solidarity networks



Literature, sample:

**Overå, R.** 2005. Institutions, mobility and resilience in the Fante migratory fisheries in West Africa. *Trans.Hist.Soc.Ghana*, N.Ser. 9:103-123

**Uduji, J.I. & Okolo-Obasi, E.N.** 2020. Does corporate social responsibility (CSR) impact on development of women in small-scale fisheries of sub-Saharan Africa? Evidence from coastal communities of Niger Delta in Nigeria. *Mar.Pol.*



# Small-Scale Fisheries Academy

- *Mundus maris* established the Academy in Senegal with artisanal fishers (men and women)
- Uses inclusive dialogue methods (tested in 2019) to build organisational and advocacy capacity
- Learning begins with participants defining what a “good life” means to them
- Participants develop a practical roadmap to improve their social and economic conditions
- Progress is tracked over one year with structured 3-monthly checkpoints



Literature, sample

**Nauen, C.E. and Arraes Treffner, M.F.** 2021. Translating SSF Guidelines into practice with the Small-Scale Fisheries Academy. *Frontiers Mar.Sci.*, 8 <https://doi.org/10.3389/fmars.2021.730396>



# SSF Academy towards collective action

- People are at the centre of change, supported by family and community networks
- *Mundus maris* Academy promotes inclusive, respectful multi-stakeholder dialogue
- Encourages joint learning, co-creation of knowledge, and innovation aligned with SSF Guidelines
- Small successes build trust, confidence, and capacity for advocacy and collective action
- Empowers participants (e.g., Nabia) to pursue larger development goals



Photo MF Arraes Treffner

Literature, sample

*Mundus maris* 2021. Learning steps with the Small-Scale Fisheries Academy. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gX8u1nLOD-c>



# SSF Academy helps innovation

- Lagos State University (LASU-CESAR) and Mundus maris led practical innovation workshop
- Water hyacinth converted into biochar and smokeless briquettes
- Plant stems processed into handcrafted bags and decorative items
- Sargassum transformed into livestock feed
- Demonstrates turning environmental challenges into income opportunities



Source: **Mundus maris 2026.**

<https://www.mundusmaris.org/ocean-literacy-and-outreach/turning-a-water-pest-into-a-source-of-income/>



# SSF Academy can help against poverty

- Weak access to credit, education, and social services increases women's poverty risks
- Women risk losing their role as key household economic managers
- May lead to subordination, migration, or low-paid industrial labour
- Strong link between women's access to education/healthcare and economic success
- Empowered women improve household welfare, especially for children



Women deserve better futures than this

Literature, sample

**Oyetade, O.P. et al.** 2023. Assessment of women involvement in artisanal fishery enterprises in Lagos State, Nigeria. *Ghana Jnl. Agric. Sci.* 58 (2), 115 - 127



# Renewed momentum for SSF

The forceful presentations and demands of SSF at the UN Ocean Conference 2025 claimed their rightful place in governance.

REFEPAS, the Network of Women in Artisanal Fisheries in Senegal, with support of Greenpeace, ADEPA, and Blue Ventures, is stepping up its advocacy activities for more rights.

The extension of the exclusion zone from 6 to 12 nm in Ghana came into effect in March. Together with efforts to strengthen the traditional representations of men and women in SSF at local and national levels promises moves towards co-management.



UNOC3: SSF at the centre of ocean governance and food security

Literature, sample

**Mundus maris** 2025. <https://www.mundusmaris.org/small-scale-fisheries-academy/small-scale-fishers-at-the-center-of-ocean-governance-and-food-security/>



- Women must have **access to social services and professional support** – build networks and trust, not cheap factory labour
- Strengthen local organisational and technical capacities; respect and emphasise **cultural heritage** for buy-in
- **Connect** international agreements to local experience to enhance agency, confidence and fairness, fight IUU fishing
- Listening, respectful and inclusive dialogue and encouragement of **collaboration** are key
- Build **broader coalitions**, incl. with local businesses, to support institutional reforms to break vicious circles towards rights-based inclusive governance approaches. **Tenure rights for women and men in SSF!**

## Call to more action



Literature, sample

**FAO** 2015. *Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication*. FAO, Rome.

**FAO et al.** 2024. *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2024. Financing to end hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition in all its forms*. Rome, FAO

**Basurto, X., et al.** 2025. Illuminating the multidimensional contributions of small-scale fisheries. *Nature*, 637:875-884.



# Small selection of add. literature

- Akintola, S.L., Fakoya, K.A., Areola, F.O., Olatoye, K.A., Abiodun-Solanke, A. (2024). Legal and Policy Instruments on Rights and Provisions on Other Issues in Small-Scale Fisheries of Nigeria. In: Nakamura, J., Chuenpagdee, R., Jentoft, S. (eds) Implementation of the Small-Scale Fisheries Guidelines. MARE Publ. Series, vol 28.
- Appiah, S., Antwi-Asare, T.O., Agyire-Tettey, F.K. et al. (2021). Livelihood Vulnerabilities Among Women in Small-Scale Fisheries in Ghana. *Eur. J. Dev. Res.* 33, 1596–1624
- Crona B., Bodin Ö. (2010). Power asymmetries in small-scale Fisheries : a barrier to governance transformability? *Ecol. Soc.* 15 (4), 16. doi: 10.5751/ES-03710-150432
- Nauen C.E. (2023). Bridging the Implementation Gap in International Agreements on Marine Protection and Sustainable Use. *Examines Mar Biol Oceanogr.* 6(3). EIMBO. 000636. 2023.
- Nauen, C.E., & Arraes-Treffner, M.F. (2022). Strengthening Capabilities of Individuals and Communities through a Small-Scale Fisheries Academy. S. Jentoft, et al. (eds.). *Blue Justice* (pp. 611-633). MARE Publ. Series 26,
- Sall, A., & Nauen, C.E. (2017). Supporting the small-scale fisheries guidelines implementation in Senegal: Alternatives to top-down research. In S. Jentoft, R. Chuenpagdee, M. Barragan-Paladines, & N. Franz. (eds.), *The Small-Scale Fisheries Guidelines* (pp. 609-634). MARE Publ. Series14.
- Sall, A., & Sow, O. (2025). A Situational Analysis of Small-Scale Fisheries in Senegal: Livelihoods, gender and governance in the context of globalization and climate change. *V2V WP 2025-01*. V2V Global Partnership
- Williams, S. (2021). How IUU Fishing impacts small-scale fishers' lives. Presentation at the SWAIMS Webinar "Curbing Maritime Insecurity in the Niger Delta", March 31, 2021



**Thanks for your attention**

***Mundus maris* looks for collaboration**

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