

Women's small-scale fisheries organizations in Jubaland State of Somalia

Research Study 2023/Policy Brief

INTRODUCTION

Somalia has the longest coastline in Africa, and its fisheries sector is, therefore, crucial to strengthen food and nutrition security among the Somali population, as well as to generating employment. **Women** occupy a **central place in the fishing sector in Somalia**, representing 40 % of fish workers involved in the artisanal fish trade in the Jubaland State of Somalia. It is now well recognized that women play important roles along the entire fishery value chain, especially the **post-harvest sector**. Fisheries offer important **business opportunities** for women, creating valuable incomes for them through which women support local nutrition and food security. However, women are **marginalized** in the fishing sector and **limited in their scope of activities**: lack of financial resources, difficulties in market access, inequity in earning, and social and political exclusion are just a few of the difficulties faced by women.

Collaborating in **fishing organizations** allows women to act together to improve their livelihoods and increase their participation in social, economic, and political decision processes, thereby optimizing long-term benefits for their communities.

In this view, actions are needed to further enhance the capacities of cooperatives, and more specifically women's cooperatives, in the region, which can be a key leverage to improve women's livelihoods and support local and regional food and nutrition security.

Cooperatives represent a key tool to professionalize small-scale fisheries (SSF) on three levels: social (increasing employment), economic (market development and continued profitability for fishing operators), and environmental (mitigating illegal fishing and sharing the management plan for the conservation of the Jubaland's fish stock with State authorities).

In that context, commissioned and financed by the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), its advising sector project "Food and Nutrition Security" of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) commissioned HOPE Foundation and FEDERPESCA to conduct a **comprehensive overview examination of women's small-scale fisheries organizations in Jubaland State of Somalia**, including rural areas. The specific objectives of the study were to assess their present organizational characteristics, challenges, and capacity gaps, identify existing strengths and good practices and assess opportunities to scale these up, and recommend interventions for policy maker to support the women organizations, including relevant indicators.

The study covered two districts – Kismayo and Badhadhe – and is based on information collected from 26 organizations through a survey deployed on the ground by a team of local consultants between December 2022 and January 2023. Out of these, 21 were groups (i.e., having more than one member) and 5 were individual vendors (all from Kismayo).

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RESULTS

Organizations Characteristics

Primarily created to improve **households welfare and livelihoods**, women's SSF organizations provide a key space for women to **meet, discuss their problems and find mutual support**. Most of them have been **recently established** and are therefore still in the process of formalization or in the first steps of development. **Internal rules and procedures** are not always in place and only half of the organizations consider themselves financially independent. Access to external sources of finance (e.g., grants and loans) is not common. In the Jubaland State, women's SSF organizations mainly focus their **fisheries activities** on trading and, to a lesser extent, **processing** of medium or large pelagic and demersal fish. Interestingly, if compared with similar organizations in other regions, women buy the fish from fishermen thus suggesting that they are not directly related to fisherman (who otherwise would have provided them with the fish). This shows that women, regardless of their families' linkages with fishing, see fisheries activities as a way to improve their living conditions. Groups tend to operate **outside big umbrella organizations** and significantly vary in terms of openness to external collaborations, with around half of the groups having regular **interactions** with other groups (mainly via phone or informal meetings) and the other half being more independent and reluctant to join wider umbrella organizations. Despite the differences in the key organizational characteristics, all groups face similar challenges in the access to **key fishery assets and to trainings**. Being part of a group does not seem to provide better access to these elements that, however, are considered key for the development of the group activities. Overall, full-female membership is highly valued. Sharing similar problems, communicating more easily and striving to empower women in the local communities are at the heart of their motivation, and groups generally share the **willingness to continue to expand and develop**. To this end, overcoming some key barriers and creating the right enabling conditions appears to be essential.



Key Strengths

Benefits of group membership are **primarily economic**. Being part of a SSF group bring to women a better **access to fish** and a better **access to the market**. This is consistent with the main reasons that brought to the creation of the groups and namely to improve household welfare or livelihoods. Only few groups reported that group membership created opportunities to receive **technical trainings or knowledge**. Few groups also reported that being part of a group contribute to **receiving a voice to engage in decision-making or more empowerment** or respect. Groups generally do not seem to create better condition to get equipment or to get social support. When asked about the main qualities or characteristics of the group, many reported the **mutual support and understanding** received by the members and the commitment to each other's mutual welfare. This suggests the importance for women of the creation of small communities where their specificities and **needs are recognized** and where they can find ground for their **self-development**. **Being part of a SSF group does not seem to trigger more empowerment or inclusion in the society** for women yet. However, it seems to set the **suitable conditions for future developments** by providing a first level support to women that still face challenges in being heard and understood. By grouping to perform processing and trading activities, women's SSF groups also consider that they have successfully contributed to the development of their local community, to the creation of a forum for discussion of their own problems and, though to a lesser extent, to the strengthening of the skills needed to operate in the fisheries sector.

Challenges

Internally, the biggest challenges are linked to **conflict resolution, poor market linkages, inadequate leadership skills and lack of equipment and storage space**.

Externally, the biggest systematic challenges include **lack of access to external credit and loans, inadequate government support, lack of access to landing site infrastructures, and absence of an enabling political environment in the village**. Recent adverse events such as the **Covid-19 outbreak**, or the **drought brought by climate change** developments represented a major threat for almost all organizations.

Needs

Analysis of the data gathered from the interviews highlighted the **major needs** of women's SSF organizations: **technical and organizational training, fishing equipment and financial support**. Training is needed on general business administration as well as on specific technical skills. When focusing on their practical work, organizations also need infrastructure and tools for fishing such as boats and nets, and for post-harvesting activities such as cold storage and safe water. Economically, organizations need financial support from external donors but at the same time they need to learn to be more self-sufficient. This requires access to soft loans and microfinance resources as well as investments in financial trainings.



RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Improve the internal organizational structures

A large part of groups lacks basic administrative structures and procedures. In addition, several groups are not registered correctly i.e., formally and with the relevant administration. Only a correct judicial registration provides the groups with rights and with formal recognition by other institutions and only groups that are correctly registered can benefit from state aid.

- **The Ministry of Fisheries should take a census of the groups** operating in the fisheries sector in Jubaland. These groups can then be targeted with specific **information and awareness campaigns** to encourage them to **formally register**.
- In parallel, the **Jubaland Fisheries Consortium** (a network of groups based in Kismayo that financially supports those who need help and interacts with the Ministry of Fisheries) **should also be promoted** and linked to other cooperatives outside Kismayo, to facilitate the identification of worker-members of each cooperative to counteract the undeclared work.
- Groups can also **be encouraged to register the deed of incorporation** through specific **tax relief mechanisms**.
- The local administration could provide **assistance in becoming registered** and give information on the possibilities for registered groups to **get state aid** (if any). This might further contribute to encouraging groups to proceed with the formal registration.
- It is also recommended to **make an agreement with local banks** (with the guarantee, if possible, of international organizations that carry out cooperation activities in Somalia) to facilitate the opening of bank accounts and to make banking services free for SSF groups.

2. Enhance access to credit

The main goal of the groups is to improve household income, living conditions and gender equality. This necessarily implies a motivation to enter the labor market and to progressively acquire more expertise and professionalism. In pursuing this objective, access to financial resources proved to be a major challenge for all groups. While membership fees represent the main source of income, half of the groups still struggle in collecting the fees as their members rarely or never pay their contributions. Despite this situation, very few groups accessed external financial resources, thus suggesting that the existing mechanisms are somehow not suitable for these types of groups. Providing them with a better access to a mix of external financial support (e.g., soft loans, grants) would help SSF groups to become more firmly established, have a better access to key assets, improve their working conditions, and help them accomplish their goals.

Micro-credit can generate progress and self-esteem among women. Offering micro-credit opportunities allows to better recognize women's roles and specificities and eventually foster their empowerment. It can also strongly contribute to growing the whole fisheries sector as women are usually the key actors in the distribution, preservation, processing, and sale of fresh fish in the existing fishing cooperatives. Micro-credit opportunities can be activated through the National Fisheries Fund or other private or public funds from various international donors.



3. Invest in key infrastructure and assistance services

Data collected show that women's groups have limited access to the key assets that are needed to perform fisheries activities. Access to storage facilities (dry or cold storage) is limited and most groups do not have transportation equipment to move fisheries products to the selling points. The analysis further showed that groups often have preservation issues, especially the ones from the river areas and lots of food is being wasted because of this. Data collected through the survey also show that only 7% of the groups benefit from some form of social assistance.

- **Invest in key infrastructures**, improving landing sites, fish processing plants and cold chain, processing and storage facilities (sheltered from rain or other climatic condition), fostering the necessary hygienic and sanitary conditions for fish processing.
- **Technological improvements in post-harvest processing** would help groups address their current post-harvest processing challenges: for example, access to higher drying racks and a dry garage area may help to cope with post-harvest waste and theft, thus limiting product loss. Access to more advanced ovens and higher airflow during fish smoking could help to cope with difficult situations associated with oven technology, smoke, and access to firewood. Also, in case fish is not processed and is freshly sold, further investments are needed to extend the cold chain.
- Besides providing access to key infrastructure, **complementary welfare services** are needed to allow women to perform their fisheries-related activities while keeping their social responsibilities in their families and in the local community. In this view it is suggested to **foster a network of care and assistance services** for working women by setting up a school network for their children, and if they are already present, by implementing shifts and giving rights to free admission.

4. Develop technical and administration skills

Data collected during the study show a big appetite of women's SSF groups for improving their competencies and developing their skills in relation to both technical fisheries activities and business administration. There are still very few groups that have benefitted from trainings and the positive results achieved through them suggest that a wider training campaign may positively contribute to empowering women.

- **Initiate re-skilling and up-skilling training courses** on both, fish production and processing, and business administration.
- To trigger the participation of women in the proposed technical trainings, launch in parallel **awareness-raising and communication campaigns** through social networks and dissemination material (in schools, meeting places, places of worship, etc.).
- Conduct short **business management** courses in the form of “information days” on the administrative, financial and commercial aspects of cooperatives (micro-credit, opening bank accounts, grants, state aid, taxation, commercial aspects, etc.).
- Deploy **trainings on group governance and leadership** to support those groups that reported to experience challenges in conflict resolution, leadership skills, member commitment and shared objectives. These courses can be carried out by NGOs located in Jubaland and by the Ministry of Fisheries or relevant offices.
- Urge the Ministry of Fisheries or the **relevant public authorities** to strengthen training courses, most of which are currently provided by NGOs and international organizations.
- **Desk Offices** can also be **set up at the district level** to provide technical assistance to the groups. Besides providing answers to specific technical or administrative problems, these offices would network with all the direct and indirect actors involved in small-scale fisheries (i.e., associations, NGOs, research bodies, universities, etc.).



5. Strengthen collaborations

To professionalize the artisanal fishing sector in the Jubaland State and ensure diversification of local food supply, there is the need to build networks of cooperatives (especially among women) that operate in both agricultural and fishery sectors. Networks have the potential to improve the access of individual groups to key assets, to trainings and to alternative sources of financial support and eventually they would allow existing groups to grow and develop their skills faster. The creation of networks of SSF groups could also contribute to empowering women by better representing their interests at the local level and in the fisheries management or governance activities. Aggregating interests around networks and associations would make the social dialogue easier and will favour the dissemination of good practices and knowledge, thus promoting the generational change that fishing cooperatives need.

- **Existing cooperation** structures should be first valued and promoted before building new ones.
- Particular attention should be given to the **Jubaland Fisheries Consortium** as the main organization that provides support to groups and facilitates the relationship with the Ministry of Fisheries. Joining the Consortium would also allow women to benefit from the **Jubaland Consortium fund** as an additional source of income.
- **Strengthen existing higher-level structures** and **ensure that they are providing benefits** (e.g., training, and access to loans)
- **Promoting learning exchanges and connectivity** among existing women's SSF groups should be prioritized to give continuity to existing relationships and showing benefits deriving from the exchanges to the groups that still operate in an isolated manner.
- **Promote associations that could offer technical assistance** services to cooperatives and union training courses.
- **Relationships with the Ministry of Fisheries may also be strengthened** as for around half of the groups contacts with technical government officials are not systematic and reports on the group activities are rarely shared.

Based on the present mapping of existing cooperation initiatives, which should be extended to include rural areas not yet covered by this study, **bridges between women's SSF groups and international cooperation stakeholders** could be created to optimize resources and eventually accelerate the growth and development in the coastal region of Jubaland.



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