

Illuminating gender dimensions of hidden harvests

Sarah Harper^{1,2} and Danika Kleiber³

*“47 per cent of the total workforce is women, which in developing countries equates to 56 million jobs”
(World Bank 2012)*

Since 2012, gender and fisheries papers and presentations often start with a statement that 47 percent of fishworkers worldwide are women. This estimate challenges assumptions of fisheries as a male-dominated sphere, broadening the production-focus of fisheries to include the range of fisheries-related work that contributes to this sector. But where does that number come from? Forty-seven percent was a key finding from efforts by WorldFish and the World Bank to count what had previously been hidden: the small-scale fisheries sector that included both fishing and post-harvest activities. These global estimates were based on fisheries data from 28 case study countries. While the study was ground-breaking, it also had limitations. For example, sex-disaggregated data were very limited, and there were no Pacific Island nations or territories included in the assessment.

As a follow up to this report, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations, Duke University (United States) and WorldFish have launched the Illuminating Hidden Harvest (IHH) project, which focuses specifically on the small-scale fisheries subsector and its potential contributions to the Sustainable Development Goals.⁴ Like the 2012 Hidden Harvest study, the IHH project is based on a case study approach, but this time there will be more case studies, representing a greater diversity of small-scale fisheries contexts, including the Pacific. The research delves into the social, environmental, economic and governance effects and roles of marine and inland small-scale fisheries at the local and global level. It will incorporate gender analysis in all themes, while also having gender as a stand-alone theme.

The IHH approach to gender reflects the current understanding of gender as a cross-cutting theme in small-scale fisheries, and in ecosystem services more broadly (Fortnam et al. 2019). The importance of gender in fisheries has been recognized in the Small-scale Fisheries Guidelines (FAO 2015) and is being increasingly echoed in regional and national fisheries policies (e.g. SPC 2015). The emphasis on gender equity and equality emerges from a human rights-based approach to small-scale fisheries (FAO 2017), which is gaining momentum worldwide (Smith and Basurto 2019). However, much remains unknown about gender dimensions of small-scale fisheries in various contexts around the world,

despite increasing efforts to bring a gender lens to this sector, especially in certain regions such as the Pacific.

Working with gender and fisheries experts from around the world we are leading the IHH gender theme team to illuminate gender dimensions of this project. The IHH gender team, which includes researchers and practitioners from a range of institutions and with expertise from a variety of small-scale fisheries contexts, are investigating gender and intersectional aspects of small-scale fisheries to provide a more in-depth account of gender and small-scale fisheries than was possible for the initial Hidden Harvest study. The project is already underway, with IHH project partners collecting data in over 50 countries around the world on food security, livelihoods, governance and the environment. These data will be collated for further analysis and defined within each of the theme chapters.

For the gender thematic component of this project, we have developed research questions to align with the five thematic areas outlined for the IHH study: 1) Social; 2) Environmental; 3) Economic; 4) Governance; and 5) Drivers of change. Recognising that gender is crosscutting, we have developed questions based on the indicators developed for each of these themes, which asks for specific data to be disaggregated by sex. While much of the gender-relevant data being collected will not go beyond the gender binary, we aspire to draw out additional details regarding identities to broaden

¹ Fisheries Economics Research Unit, Institute for the Oceans and Fisheries, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada.

² Corresponding author email: s.harper@oceans.ubc.ca

³ WorldFish, Penang, Malaysia and ARC Centre of Excellence for Coral Reef Studies, James Cook University, Queensland, Australia.

⁴ See: www.fao.org/voluntary-guidelines-small-scale-fisheries/ihh/en/

intersectional understandings of small-scale fisheries participation and contributions.

The methods used for this component of the study include a literature review, quantitative data analysis from country case studies, and a text analysis of open-ended questions from these case studies. Although the data will not cover all countries and contexts of the world, the case studies from over 50 countries represent all regions of the world and will provide a reasonable cross-section of small-scale fisheries contexts and the diversity that exists. The goal is to highlight both similarities and differences across contexts and regions, while also identifying gaps in data and understanding.

This study is an excellent opportunity to draw attention to the embedded and crosscutting nature of gender and small-scale fisheries, a topic that has largely been under-represented in fisheries management and policy worldwide. This work also invites a critical look, through a systematic, cross-country investigation, at the state of sex-disaggregated fisheries data necessary for developing gender aware policies and programmes. The gender theme chapter that emerges from this work will highlight both of these dimensions, as an important part of advancing gender equality in small-scale fisheries. Stay tuned for the results and insights from this work, which will be widely shared in 2020. If you are interested in the progress of this work or have insights to share that could enhance our global understanding of gender and small-scale fisheries, please reach out to us.

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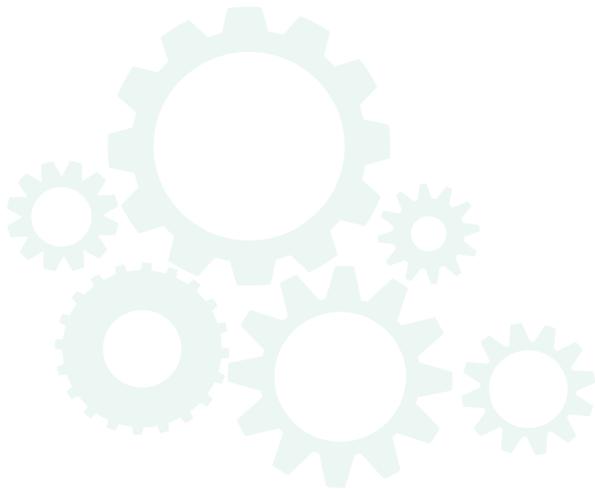
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Digging for mud shells in Malaita Province, Solomon Islands - ©Wade Fairle



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Measuring an urchin - ©Danika Kleiber

Women removing the shell from mangrove mudshells in Malaita, Solomon Islands - ©Wade Fairley

