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A photograph of three women walking on a sandy beach. The woman on the left is carrying a white bucket on her head. The woman in the middle is holding a large fish. The woman on the right is carrying a green bucket on her head. They are all wearing colorful headscarves and saris. The background shows a body of water and a clear blue sky.

# SUSTAINING LIVELIHOODS AND ECOSYSTEMS: GENDER-RESPONSIVE AND CLIMATE-SMART APPROACHES: THE CASE FOR WIO SMALL-SCALE OCTOPUS FISHERIES

# Background

Octopus fisheries are an important source of income and food security in many coastal communities, particularly for women who dominate the value chain from harvesting to processing and marketing.

Globally, small-scale octopus fisheries produce ~88,000 tonnes/year (WIO countries export ~3,000 t worth US\$12.2 M/year).

Despite this significance, there is limited information on gender dimensions, socio-economic opportunities, and the impacts of climate change and environmental threats on these fisheries.

In line with AU Agenda 2063, a SIDA supported AU-IBAR project (“Conserving Aquatic Biodiversity in African Blue Economy”) supported the assessment small-scale octopus fisheries blue2 value chains in four selected countries: Kenya, UR Tanzania, Union of the Comoros and Madagascar.



# Gender Roles and Gaps in WIO Octopus Fisheries



## Roles

- Women dominate **gleaning, cleaning, processing, and local trading**
- Reef-flat catches are primarily women's work
- Active in **cooperatives, savings groups, and training**
- Contribute centrally to local livelihoods

## Gaps / Challenges

- **Underrepresented in governance:** rarely in BMUs or fisheries committees
- **Limited decision-making power:** little say in size limits, closures, or market policies
- **Economic exclusion:** many unregistered, restricting access to support, credit, ice, storage
- **Shifts in gender roles:** men entering higher-value export chains can reduce women's income
- **Need for interventions:** gender audits, quota policies, and empowerment programs to secure women's participation

# Regional Status of Small-Scale Octopus Fisheries

## Kenya's octopus fishery

Concentrated in the **Lamu** Archipelago with around 1,600 local fishers, relies mainly on gleaning and skin-diving, where women play a central role. The sector remains largely informal.

The 2016 Fisheries Act promotes co-management and includes gender-sensitive provisions, women remain underrepresented in Beach Management Units (BMUs) and decision-making processes.



# Regional Status of Small-Scale Octopus Fisheries



## Tanzania's octopus fishery

In Zanzibar, about **30% of the 7,313 octopus fishers are women**, primarily engaged in intertidal gleaning. This practice is increasingly threatened as men dominate spear diving, and tourism-driven demand captures over **90% of market share**.

In Mainland Tanzania, octopus fisheries are concentrated in **Mafia, Lindi, and Pangani**, involving several thousand small-scale fishers. **Women (≈30%)** mostly glean at low tide, while men practice skin diving. The fishery remains **informal**, with limited post-harvest facilities and weak market structures.

# Regional Status of Small-Scale Octopus Fisheries

## Comoros Octopus Fishery

Octopus fishing in the Union of the Comoros is primarily subsistence-oriented on the islands of Grande Comore, Anjouan and Mohéli.

Governance is informal: there are no octopus specific regulations and almost no gender quotas.

Women perform much of the gleaning and processing, but their roles are unrecognized in policy.

Climate adaptation measures are absent, leaving reefs and fisheries highly vulnerable.



# Regional Status of Small-Scale Octopus Fisheries

## Madagascar Octopus Fishery

Madagascar hosts one of the WIO's largest artisanal octopus fisheries, featuring **government-legalized LMMAs**, mandated gender inclusion, and a successful Octopus Fishery Improvement Project (FIP). The FIP links community closures to export certification, aligning conservation with livelihoods.

local closures covering ~20–25% of fishing grounds for 2–3 months increased octopus landings by over 700% in the month following re-opening, with catch per fisher nearly doubling within the same period.



# 8 Best Practices and Lessons

## Enactment of Periodic Closures

Community-enforced periodic fishery closures (6–16 weeks) have proven effective in boosting octopus catches and supporting stock recovery.

## Strengthening value-chain innovations

Like in other small-scale fisheries, post-harvest losses are high in the octopus fisheries, due to lack of ice/cold storage and long transport

## Embracing co-management and LMMAs

Empowering fishers to manage reef areas has yielded conservation and social benefits.

## Adopting tested cooperative and network models

exchange visits and training have spread best practices.

## Supporting women-led financial initiatives

Zanzibar's fisheries closure program is accompanied by voluntary savings groups (merry-go-rounds), giving women capital when fishing is closed.

## Adopt emerging data and planning tools and technology

participatory fisheries tools like FishPath (adopted in Tanzania) incorporate fisher knowledge and climate scenarios into management decisions

# Strategic Policy Recommendations for Resilient Small-scale Octopus Fisheries

## Value Chains

Formalize regional coordination of networks

Strengthen gender inclusion in governance

Enhance climate resilience and ecosystem management

Support research and monitoring

Funding and Investment Mechanisms

Invest in value-chain development





Thank you