



# The Role of Women's Fish Organizations in Contributing to Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries

AWFISHNET as a Case Study from Africa

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# Outline

- Context
- Aim and Objectives
- Overview of Women in African Small-Scale Fisheries
- AWFISHNET and the African Context
- Conceptual Framework
- AWFISHNET's Impact
- Recommendations
- Conclusion



## Context

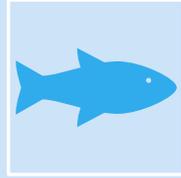
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### Key Facts: Women in Africa's Small-Scale Fisheries

Aspect	Details	Impact
Women's Role	Post-harvest processing & trading	Up to 90% in some regions
Barriers	Patriarchal norms, limited access	Restricted contributions, increased vulnerability

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# Aim



AWFISHNET's Contribution to Small-Scale Fisheries



Integration of women in Fish Value chains



Insights on Gender Equity in Fisheries Management

What are the key structural barriers to women's participation in African SSF, and how do these affect sustainability?



How does AWFISHNET empower women in SSF through its programs and initiatives?



What are some results from AWFISHNET's efforts in terms of women's access to finance, markets, and decision-making?

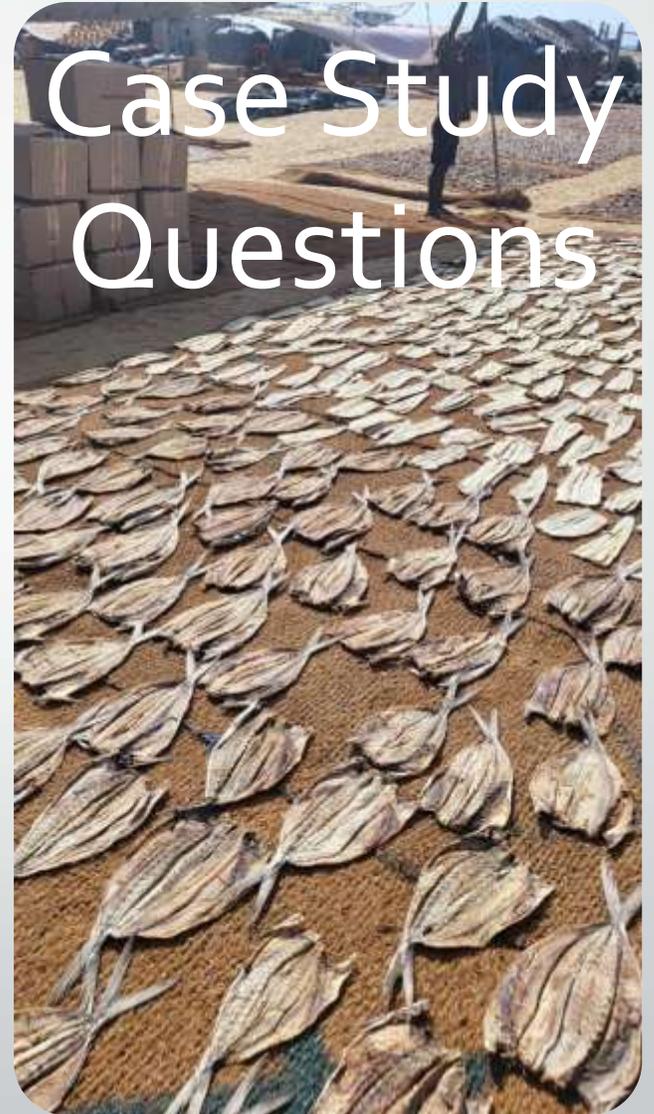


How does AWFISHNET contribute to climate-resilient practices in SSF, and what are the implications for sustainability?



What lessons can policymakers and practitioners draw from AWFISHNET's model to promote gender equity and sustainability in SSF?

# Case Study Questions



# Overview of Women's Roles in SSF

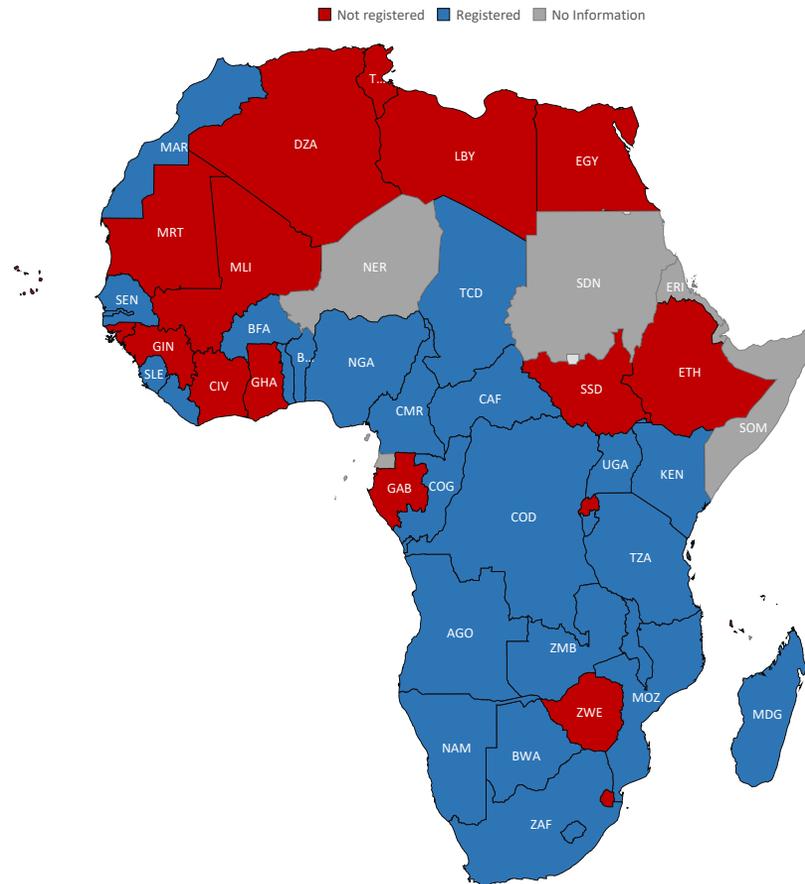


## Women's Roles and Challenges in African SSF

Aspect	Details	Regional Example
Post-harvest Workforce	50–80% women	All regions
Key Activities	Processing, trading, marketing	Lake Victoria, West Africa
Economic Contribution	17–32% household income	East Africa
Challenges	Marginalization, limited resources	All regions
Organizations	AWFISHNET and Chapters	All regions
Barriers	Cultural taboos, low-value segments	All regions

# AWFISHNET

AWFISHNET Member Country Chapter Registration Status June 2025



## WHAT IS AWFISHNET

- African Women Fish Processors and Traders Network for women from 44 countries
- Coordinates national networks of women fish processors and traders

## WHAT THEY DO

- Partnerships and knowledge sharing for women fish processors and traders
- Capacity Building: Provides training, technical assistance/ training such as hygienic processing
- Research and Innovation (Active in research that highlight women's organizations' role in addressing inequities)
- Facilitates market access
- Advocacy: Gender equality and sustainable fisheries
- Works with chapters in response to Disasters like COVID-19

# Framework for the Case Study

## We use the Feminist Political Ecology (FPE) Framework

- Examines gender, power, and environmental change impacts
- Focuses on women's evolving roles in fisheries

## Critique of Structural Barriers

- Highlights patriarchal exclusion in fisheries governance
- Addresses economic marginalization of women

## Emphasis on Women's Agency

- Showcases organizations like AWFISHNET
- Demonstrates collective action for change

## Integration of Sustainability and Resilience

- Considers ecological, social, and economic sustainability

## Women's Organizations as Governance Drivers

# Emergence and Structure of Women's Fish Organizations

## Expansion of Women's Fish Organizations Since 2010s

- Driven by SSF Guidelines emphasizing gender equity
- Increased advocacy and networking across Africa

## AWFISHNET: A Pan-African Network

- Founded in 2017 by AU-IBAR with EU support
- Comprises 44 national chapters advocating for women

## Partnerships with NGOs and Regional Bodies (FAO, WorldFish, BMGF)

## AWFISHNET's Organizational Structure

## Impactful Initiatives by Chapters

## Amplifying Impact Through Collaboration



# Economic Contributions of AWFISHNET Chapters

- Market Access and Value Addition
  - Women's organizations help members reach new markets
  - Value addition activities increase product worth and income
- Income Generation and Training
  - AWFISHNET's trainings in Ghana contribute to women's incomes by 20%
  - Solar drying and hygienic processing reduced post-harvest losses by 15%
- Market Linkages in Tanzania
  - TAWFA's programs enabled access to urban markets
  - Contribute to profits for women by about 30%
- Cross-Border Networking and Trade
  - AWFISHNET and AFRIFISH-Net collaboration to boost intra-African fish trade by 10–15%
- Reducing economic vulnerabilities among women

# Capacity Building for Inclusive Aquaculture

- AWFISHNET's Innovation Program: Trained 2,000 women in climate-smart aquaculture (2024).



## Role in Environmental Sustainability and Climate Resilience

### Key Contributions of AWFISHNET Chapters to Sustainability

Initiative	Location	Impact
Mangrove Restoration	Senegal, The Gambia	Increase in fish stocks
Solar Dryers & Fish Powder	Africa (AWFISHNET)	Fuelwood & losses down 20%
HER+ Partnerships	East Africa	2,000+ women benefit
Climate Impact Mitigation	African Fisheries	Addresses 30% stock depletion

# Identified Policy and Research Gaps

Key Policy and Research Gaps in African Fisheries in Relation to AWFISHNET roles			
Area	Current Status	Challenges	Our Recommendation/Plan
Policy Implementation	Advocated by SSF Guidelines & AU policies	Inconsistent integration of women's organizations	Mandate women's representation in councils
Research Coverage	Focus on West & East Africa	Limited data on inland fisheries & other regions	Expand region-specific and longitudinal studies
Intersectionality	Recent literature highlights need	Insufficient consideration of age, ethnicity, class	Adopt intersectional research approaches
Women's Organizations	Transformative role in SSF	Funding and cultural barriers	Increase policy and financial support



# AWFISHNET's Social and Gender Equity Contributions

## Contributions to Social Equity

- Chapters promote fair opportunities in communities
- They support marginalized groups and foster inclusion

## Advancing Gender Equity

- Chapters empower women in the fisheries sector
- They advocate for equal participation and leadership roles

## Challenges Encountered

- Women's organizations face barriers to resources and recognition
- Social and economic obstacles hinder their growth

## Need for Support

- Greater support is required to overcome these challenges
- Collaboration with stakeholders can enhance their impact



# Identified Barriers and Opportunities for AWFISHNET in SSF

## Women's Central Role in SSF

- Responsible for up to 90% of post-harvest activities in Ghana, Nigeria, and Tanzania
- Key contributors to food security and economic stability

## Barriers Faced by Women

- Limited access to credit and markets restricts economic opportunities
- Exclusion from decision-making due to patriarchal norms

## Impact of Climate Change

- Fish stock declines of up to 30% in some regions
- Increased vulnerability for women reliant on fisheries

## Importance of Traditional Knowledge

- Women's expertise is vital for resource management and adaptation

## Policy and Implementation Gaps

# Systemic Barriers and Data Gaps

## Key Challenges for Women in Fisheries

Challenge	Impact	Region
Limited access to credit, markets, equipment	Exclusion from decision-making	Global
Profit disparities	Women processors earn more but face discrimination	Nigeria
Post-harvest losses	20–30% losses due to resource discrimination	Nigeria
Climate shocks	Increased vulnerability for women	Global
Data gaps	Only 27% gender-disaggregated workforce stats	Africa
Low-value task overrepresentation	Women pressured by industrial fleets	Global

## Severity of Barriers for Women in SSF

Barrier	Severity	Key Impact
Access to Finance	Severe	Limited credit, reliance on informal loans
Gender Discrimination & Cultural Norms	Severe	Restricted decision-making, low committee representation
Climate-Related Challenges	Severe	Fish stock declines, erratic weather, reduced catches
Infrastructure Gaps	Very Severe	Up to 40% spoilage losses due to lack of cold storage

# Severity of Inequalities

# Empowerment Strategies of AWFISHNET



## Comprehensive Skill Development Programs

Over 5,000 women trained in hygienic processing, business management, and leadership since 2017

Technical training, such as solar dryer use, improved product quality and marketability



## Market Access Initiatives

Trade fairs and regional market linkages increased intra-African fish trade by 15% for pilot participants



## Policy Advocacy and Engagement

Workshops enabled women to interact with national fisheries bodies

Chapters in Malawi and Senegal submitted gender-focused policy proposals



## Cross-Border Networking and Knowledge Sharing

Exchanges between Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire promoted knowledge transfer

Focus group discussions highlighted improved bargaining power in regional markets

# Impacts on Power Imbalances and Governance



- Income Stability and Growth Among Members
  - Conducting a study to assess improvement
- Enhanced Leadership Roles for Women
  - Women now on cooperative or committee roles
  - Previously, less than 15% held such positions
- Improved Confidence in Decision-Making
- Reduction in Power Imbalances
  - Women now included in male-dominated committees
  - AWFISHNET actively working towards engaging men
- Policy Advocacy Achievements
- Overall Shift Toward Gender Equity

## Climate-Resilient Practices and Outcomes

Practice/Initiative	Impact	Region/Partner
Solar dryers, efficient kilns	25% reduction in post-harvest losses	Senegal
Training on sustainable processing	Mitigated fish stock decline	WorldFish, HER+
Conservation training	Community-led breeding ground protection	East Africa
Policy advocacy	Influenced Blue Economy Strategy	AU, regional

Climate-Resilient Practices and Sustainability

# Lessons



## AWFISHNET's Scalable Model

Demonstrates effective integration of women's organizations in fisheries governance  
Model can be adapted for broader application



## Successful Advocacy Efforts

Memoranda of Understanding with similar organizations improves synergies (CAOPA and AFRIFISH-Net)  
Women organizations easily promote gender-inclusive policies



## Grassroots-to-Policy Approach

Mandatory women's representation in fisheries councils improves outcomes

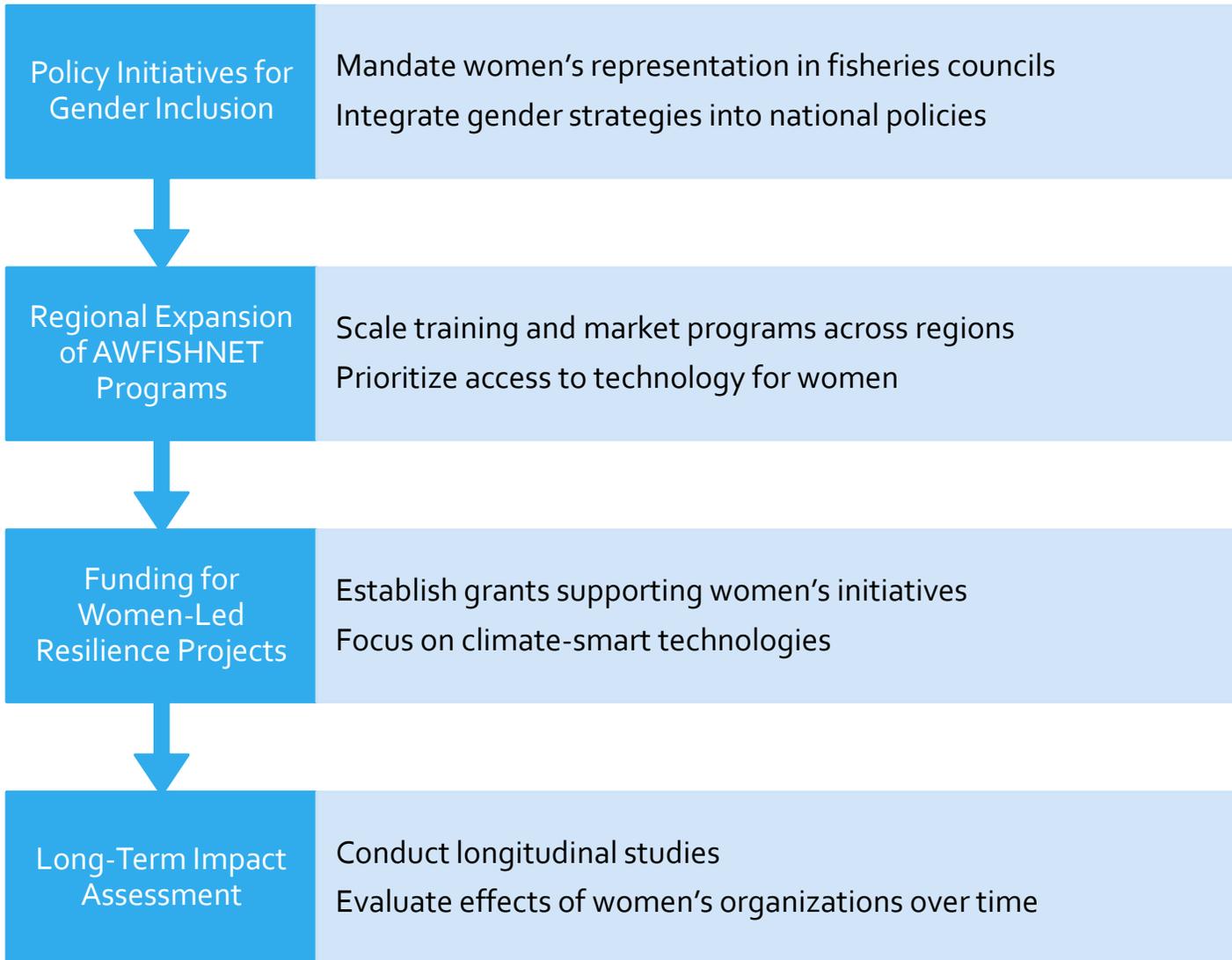


## Funding and Technology Access

Increased funding is necessary to scale training efforts



## AWFISHNET Aligns with Global Best Practices



# Conclusion

## AWFISHNET as a Transformative Model

- Demonstrates the impact of women's organizations in small-scale fisheries (SSF)
- Promotes gender equity and sustainability

## Addressing Structural Barriers

- Tackles obstacles faced by women in SSF
- Encourages adaptive and inclusive practices

## Governance Integration

- Provides a framework for integrating gender and sustainability into fisheries governance
- Model can be replicated in other regions

## Contribution to Africa's Blue Economy

- Supports economic growth through sustainable fisheries

## Advancing Global Sustainability Goals





Thank You!