

Women fish more than you think!

Women's small-scale, part-time fishing and gleaning activities globally may contribute nearly 3 million tonnes of seafood, with a landed value of around \$5.6 billion.

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In many cultures and contexts around the world, fishing (like hunting) is considered a male domain and is closely associated with masculinity. Moving along the fish value chain from fishing to processing, more women appear. In fact, much of the labour needed to convert fish into consumable products is done by women. The role of women is more visible in seafood processing, especially on an industrial scale, than in fishing activities. But, as we take a closer look, and challenge assumptions about gender roles, we can see examples of women fishing along beaches and shorelines around the world. They are often on foot, collecting seafood by hand or using the most basic fishing equipment. Fisheries don't just take place on big boats at sea – they involve so much more; however, policies tend to focus more on the former. The implications of missing women as important actors in the fisheries sector is

that fisheries policies may exacerbate existing inequalities by failing to consider gender differentiated outcomes. They tend to be gender blind but not necessarily gender neutral.

At the international policy level, gender equality has been recognised as critical to advancing sustainable development, to food security and to poverty reduction, calling on countries to adopt strategies to promote gender equality across all sectors of the economy, including fisheries. However, the data necessary for understanding gender dimensions of fisheries and advancing gender equality in the fisheries sector is lacking.

My colleagues and I at UBC's Institute for the Oceans and Fisheries and the Vancouver School of Economics set out to address the lack of policy-relevant data on gender and fisheries, focusing specifically on the underrepresented role of women in fisheries. With extensive

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Gleaning in the reef flats of Danajon Bank (Philippines), an activity often overlooked in fisheries data collection and undervalued in considering the food and livelihood impacts of small-scale fisheries.



Women dominate the seafood processing sector, converting the catch into marketable and consumable products. Here a Heiltsuk woman grades herring spawn-on-kelp for international export at Bella Bella's fish processing plant in the Traditional Territory of the Heiltsuk Nation, Canada.

experience in global-scale fisheries studies, the scope of this work was not new to the group, but the subject matter was. This study, titled 'Valuing invisible catches: Estimating the global contribution by women to small-scale marine capture fisheries production' and published on 4 March 2020, is the first attempt at estimating the volume and value of small-scale fisheries catches by women worldwide. This was no small feat, as many countries do not collect sex-disaggregated fisheries data, and the fisheries data that do exist, often omit sub-sectors where women are involved.

What exactly counts as fishing? Typically, what gets recorded in national fisheries statistics and gets the attention of policy makers is large-scale industrial fisheries for commercially valuable species, boat-based operations, and full-time, paid activities. What is usually missed are small-scale, part-time activities for home consumption or sale at local markets; and the collection of invertebrates and small fish from shore for a few hours per day. The latter often involves women and children gathering seafood from the beach on their way to school and back, something that happens, for example, in countries like the Philippines. This might not seem like a lot but can really add up and make substantial contributions to food and livelihood security in some of the most vulnerable regions of the world. This new study indicates that catch

by women really do add up, contributing nearly 3 million tonnes of seafood, with a landed value of around \$5.6 billion, or approximately \$10 billion real, annually when adjusted for purchasing power parity. Putting this in context, this number represents roughly 11 per cent of global small-scale fisheries catches, a portion not recorded in national fisheries statistics or considered in fisheries management plans and policies that aim to promote food and livelihood security. The implications of overlooking these contributions are potentially adverse impacts on sustainability and human wellbeing.

In fisheries contexts around the world, paying specific attention to women, makes for better fisheries management by accounting for activities often not seen as fishing, such as the shoreline collection of invertebrates by women and children. This is key information for understanding the human dimensions of ocean systems, where the future of fisheries and its ability to support humanity must be both ecologically sustainable and socially just. Recognising the role of women in fisheries is a crucial part of this equation. After all, women represent half of humanity! ♣

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