

Power to the People

Five members of the Katosi Women Development Trust (KWDT) talk about various policies and initiatives to empower small-scale fishing communities in Uganda

Does the Government of Uganda pay due attention to social and economic development to empower small-scale fishing communities? How?

The Government of Uganda has made strides to put in place policies and initiatives to bolster the social and economic development of small-scale fisheries (SSF) communities through the National Fisheries & Aquaculture Policy, and the newly completed National Plan of Action (2023) for the implementation of the SSF Guidelines, as well as via infrastructure development

development (HRD) in the areas of health, education, literacy, digital inclusion and other technical skills?

The Health Sector Development Plan (HSDP) includes strengthening health infrastructure, training healthcare workers and healthcare financing, as with the national health insurance scheme. However, fisher communities highlight the inadequate access to healthcare due to distantly located facilities, which are poorly equipped with medicines. “You only find Panadol, a painkiller. We don’t have quality health services except for the medicines for bilharzia brought once in five months,”.

HRD through education includes allocating resources towards education development to enhance access, quality and equity in education through infrastructure improvements, teacher training and curriculum reforms, the introduction of free Universal Primary Education (UPE), Universal Secondary Education (USE) and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) to equip youth and adults with skills relevant for employment through training and programmes targeting out-of-school youth and adults, which offer basic literacy, numeral skill and vocational training, all of which have been enhanced.

Although distance was the challenge for fishers to access education, disruption of the SSF economic activities by regulations and policies prevented children from being placed in good schools. More so, TVET does not reach fishing villages and due to poor UPE and USE many in the community do not benefit from financial support for higher education through bursaries and scholarship programmes provided by the government. There is not much information on how digital inclusion and information and communications

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and programmes to alleviate poverty. However, these initiatives are characterized by weak implementation, low budget allocation and inadequate monitoring.

The Uganda Women Entrepreneurship Programme, the Youth Livelihood Programme and the Parish Development Model (PDM), which aim to increase access to financing to meet the needs of the fisher people have all been characterized by shortcomings. According to the 2023 SSF People-Centred Assessment of the SSF Guidelines Implementation in Uganda, fisherfolk reported that the funds allocated to fishers through the government development programmes are insufficient to support them to engage in fisheries and the process of accessing these funds is cumbersome.

How does the government promote investment in human resource

This interview with Margaret Nakato (nakato@katosi.org), Vaal Namugga, Joan Kayisinga, Catherine Nalugga and Jackline Kasoga, members of the Katosi Women Development Trust (KWDT), Uganda, was conducted by N. Venugopalan (icsf@icsf.net), Programme Manager, ICSF

technology (ICT) development efforts are expanding internet access and promoting ICT literacy through the National Information Technology Authority (NITA-U) that supports entrepreneurship to bridge the digital divide in fisher communities.

How do you ensure that fishing communities have affordable access to services such as health, education, literacy, digital inclusion, housing, basic sanitation, safe drinking water and energy sources?

The Katosi Women Development Trust (KWDT), through women working in groups, has played a key role in increasing access to social services. KWDT has provided communities with income-generating opportunities, enabling them to access healthcare, particularly in areas where health centres are inadequate and poorly equipped.

Fishers and fishworkers organized in groups have been trained on financial literacy to ensure they run viable and profitable businesses. With support from GIZ RFBCP, the trust has trained and graduated 600 participants in business development services and functional knowledge and skills for women in fisheries. Complemented with training on the SSF Guidelines, this has enhanced their capacity to make informed decisions.

To bridge the digital divide, women in fishing communities were trained by KWDT on using digital apps like Abavubi for marketing and record-keeping. In all 9,764 people were trained on mobile monetary transactions to enhance their capacity to navigate digital financial systems, and understand cybersecurity, especially in rural communities where cyberfraud is rampant.

Most fisher communities are informal settlements where land is the key factor for housing. Land conflicts and irregularities in collection of rental fees by landlords deter efforts to access housing. Since 2017, when forests have been cut, houses are being de-roofed more often and people are increasingly seeking refuge in other people's houses. Training by KWDT on human rights, including land regulations and establishing of village disaster management committees (VDMCs) in 13 fishing villages have helped fishing

communities make informed decisions on building houses 200 m from the lake as a community initiative to reduce vulnerability to flooding and destruction.

For over seven years KWDT has been implementing a comprehensive water and sanitation programme, in partnership with the Germany-based non-profit arche noVa, in 13 fishing villages, including two islands. Construction of water sources, latrines and bathing facilities is complemented with the promotion of standard good hygiene practices not constrained by the diverse culture beliefs prevalent. Menstrual hygiene education, training to maintain the functionality of water and sanitation facilities, and the use of ecosanition latrines have also been promoted. Waste management committees, primarily comprising women, convert organic waste into briquettes, as an alternative to firewood and charcoal. Women are trained as borehole technicians to maintain water sources, and communities are trained on safe water practices to prevent contamination and outbreak of diseases. Women's groups also use music and dance to effect change through the Women Advocacy Committees (WACs).

Interventions on energy conservation and the use of renewable energy have included marketing solar lights, energy-saving fish-processing technologies (like solar driers) and climate-adaptation technologies have been introduced to women in groups.

How are the rights of children to education protected in fishing communities?

UPE and USE are government initiatives to provide free education at the primary and secondary levels. The government also enacted the Education Act (2008), mandating compulsory primary education and delineating responsibilities to ensure compliance. KWDT has contributed to the rights of children to education through the construction of classrooms, and water and sanitation facilities in fisher communities. Women have been trained on human rights with support from Fokus Frauen and they are playing a key role in protecting the rights of children to education.

By invoking laws against child labour, women in groups have been ensuring that all children in their communities go to school. Poverty in fishing communities, poor school infrastructure, the long distances that need to be surmounted to reach school, and the lack of meals, water and sanitation have all contributed to the violation of children's rights to education.

With increasing poverty, children are working with parents in fishing and in stone quarries. Poverty is the major driver of child labour in fishing communities. KWDT is supporting economic empowerment, particularly of women, to address these challenges. "In our community, we ensure that all children of school-going age attend school", according to the Bugoye women's group. "We rescued girl brides who were taken from the east and brought to our landing site and made sure the men responsible were arrested," according to the Bisobooka women's group.

What social security measures are available to protect workers and their families along the small-scale fisheries value chain?

The existence of the National Social Security Fund (NSSF) provides retirement benefits to formal sector employees in fisheries-related industries. But the majority of fishers and fishworkers are in the informal sector; they lack coverage.

What social protection measures are available to fishing communities (marine and inland)?

Financial services and credit access through the Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) are available in fishing communities through governmental and non-government organizations (NGOs) and the private sector. Efforts to diversify livelihoods among fishing communities include training and support in alternative activities like agriculture, aquaculture and craft.

Are there services such as savings, credit and insurance schemes accessible to small-scale fishing communities, especially women?

Access to services such as savings and credit are at present scarcely provided by organizations and insurance

schemes are notably absent. Savings mechanisms are primarily informal, including physical savings boxes, group savings, and mobile money services provided by telecommunication companies. According to KWDT's assessment report, savings boxes are vulnerable to theft; the loss may go unnoticed for an extended period.

Mobile money transactions, while common, are susceptible to scams, and the process of replacing a lost phone is cumbersome, with telecom offices being physically located mainly in cities and major trading centres, posing accessibility difficulties for the fisherfolk. Despite progress on access to credit, high interest rates, short-term loans and inadequate capital are among the other prevailing challenges.

Are there complementary and alternative income-generating opportunities for small-scale fishing communities? Examples?

Small-scale fishing communities in Uganda have access to complementary and alternative income-generating opportunities to diversify livelihoods and enhance their economic resilience, including, but not limited to, agriculture, livestock rearing, trade, tourism, hospitality, handicrafts, brick making and sand mining, among other sectors.

Is decent work, minimum age requirements, and acceptable working and living conditions protected for all small-scale fishworkers, even those in the informal sector?

The legal frameworks, including the Employment Act (2006), protect the rights of all workers, including small-scale fishworkers. However, fishers and workers engaged in the assessment of the implementation of SSF Guidelines highlight minimal or zero access to decent employment as a result of the lack of social services.

Do you have measures to eradicate forced labour and debt bondage of women, men and children, both resident and migrant, in small-scale fisheries?

Uganda has implemented a comprehensive framework to combat forced labour and debt bondage. Within SSF, measures include awareness on legislative frameworks that prohibit such practices, mechanisms for monitoring implementation, capacity

building for officials, and collaboration with legal NGOs. KWDT has contributed to awareness through training 2,016 persons from 15 districts on the SSF Guidelines, with support from GIZ RFBCP, and 3,500 persons on human rights and gender, with support from Fokus Frauen and arche noVa.

Are conditions conducive for men and women of small-scale fishing communities along the value chain? Free from crime, violence, piracy, theft, sexual abuse and corruption?

Fishing communities are characterized by high rates of crime, violence, piracy, theft, sexual abuse and corruption, all of which affect the conditions for men and women engaged in fisheries-related activities. Criminals often find refuge in fisher communities due to their remote locations. Violence, particularly towards women, is exacerbated by the use of illicit drugs, alcoholism and poverty. The participatory disaster risk assessment done in 13 fishing communities, with support from arche noVa, identified eight cases of domestic violence and four of theft as threats to the lives of the women. They are also more prone to losing their fishing equipment—nets and boat engines—to theft, as compared to fellow fishermen.

The competition for fisheries resources has fuelled sexual abuse, as well as the use of sex to gain access to fisheries resources. “We bear the children of fishermen in order to secure access to fish,” reported a fisherwoman in Lutoboka. The use of derogatory names to describe women who directly engage in fishing creates an even more unpalatable environment.

In Uganda the fishing environment is marked by payment of bribes to rescue confiscated engines and boats. “We pay UGX 70,000 per month to access and fish from the LPA,” reported a fisher. “We usually collect money as a community to recover our fishing equipment,” reported another.

How are migrant fishers treated? Are they integrated into fair and equitable sustainable fisheries? Is there regional co-ordination for regular migration of fishworkers across national borders?

Uganda’s fishery is characterized by migrant fishers, given the number of shared water bodies. Nonetheless, a

harmonious relationship exists among the fishers, although conflicts arise occasionally.

Is there effective and timely access to justice for victims of violence and abuse?

Timely access to justice for victims of violence and abuse along the fish value chain in Uganda is limited to legal centres in fisher communities. Ignorance, low rates of reporting, and poverty further constrain the ability to get justice. KWDT, along with other development actors, has put in place measures to enhance legal access, including through training on human rights, to enable communities to recognize and report violations, and create platforms where communities, individuals and victims can engage in dialogue with the authorities to link them to the various reporting mechanisms. Continued efforts are needed to address the existing challenges and ensure that victims receive timely and effective support and redressal.

Do you think better social development institutions, processes and mechanisms contribute to effective fisheries management?

They can significantly enhance fisheries management. Integrating the social development of fisher communities with government plans, coupled with investing in the implementation of the plans, can have a huge impact on effective fisheries management.

Empowering fishing communities, promoting livelihood diversification, improving social protection and community well-being, building capacity, sharing knowledge, facilitating conflict resolution and social cohesion, and advocating for policy reform and governance improvements can contribute to sustainable fisheries outcomes. They do so by fostering local stewardship, reducing dependency on fisheries, addressing socio-economic vulnerabilities, enhancing governance effectiveness and promoting inclusive and equitable decision making.

At the global level, such initiatives facilitate international co-operation, knowledge exchange and policy harmonization, leading to more responsive and sustainable fisheries management practices. 3

For more



Uganda Women Entrepreneurship Programme (UWEP)

<https://mglsd.go.ug/uwep/>

The Youth Livelihood Programme (YLP)

<https://mglsd.go.ug/yyp/>

Parish Development Model

<https://ict.go.ug/programmes/parish-development-model/>

Govt directive on silverfish sparks hike on prices in Busoga

<https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/govt-directive-on-silverfish-sparks-hike-on-prices-in-busoga-4563132>

Fishermen in Namayingo, Uganda, want Fisheries Protection Unit disbanded over human rights violations

<https://www.icsf.net/newss/fishermen-in-namayingo-uganda-want-fisheries-protection-unit-disbanded-over-human-rights-violations/>

Ministry Of Health Strategic Plan 2020/21 – 2024/25

<https://www.health.go.ug/cause/ministry-of-health-strategic-plan-2020-21-2024-25/>