



Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
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# Mapping women's small-scale fisheries organizations in Sierra Leone: results from assessing current capacities, gaps and opportunities to strengthen women's organizations in the sector

## Applying the handbook

in support of the implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines  
for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries  
in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication



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Required citation:

Smith, H. 2022. *Mapping Women's Small-Scale Fisheries Organizations in Sierra Leone: Results from assessing current capacities, gaps and opportunities to strengthen women's organizations in the sector*. Rome, FAO. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cb8497en>

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ISBN 978-92-5-135718-7

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# Overview

To support sustainable food systems and nutrition in sub-Saharan Africa, the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD) provided funding to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) to support project activities in five countries – Ghana, Malawi, Sierra Leone, Uganda, and United Republic of Tanzania – with a focus on strengthening women’s roles in post-harvest processing and trade. Around the world, women perform essential work throughout small-scale fisheries food systems, yet much of this work is overlooked. Where women are not seen or acknowledged as important actors in fish value chains, they remain underrepresented in or excluded from formal governance processes and have limited say in decision-making. This lack of visibility also hinders women’s equal access to needed extension services and assets, such as credit and technology. As part of the FAO-NORAD project “Empowering women in small-scale fisheries for sustainable food systems”, the decision was made to focus on strengthening women’s roles in small-scale fisheries value chains as a means to increase the quantity and quality of small fish for human consumption and trade. In addition to the focus on food security and nutrition, the project aimed to help women both individually and as members of small businesses, professional organizations and cooperatives to build and improve their skills and capacity to do their work. To attain these goals, it was determined that a baseline empirical assessment of the current landscape of organizations and their primary characteristics, capacities and needs was needed as a first step.

The focus on gender equality and women’s small-scale fisheries organizations in the FAO-NORAD project aligns with the priorities for small-scale fisheries governance outlined in the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines). Gender equity and equality are core objectives and guiding principles of the SSF Guidelines. An entire thematic chapter (Chapter 8) is dedicated to this goal, as it outlines the right to organize and the need to support women’s small-scale fisheries organizations as a means to enhance women’s access to and participation in governance, and to strengthen their position within fish value chains. This chapter also foregrounds the need for alternative evaluation systems, measures, and technologies appropriate to women’s work in fisheries.

Through the FAO-NORAD project, survey data was used to “map” women’s organizations and assess their present capacities and needs in the small-scale fisheries sector. Data collection for this study (herein referred to as the Women’s SSF Mapping Assessment) in Sierra Leone focused on five districts: Kambia, Port Loko, Moyamba, Bonthe and Pujehun. Between 26 February and 15 March 2021, a total of 59 groups were surveyed (for a full overview of data collection and methods, see Appendix 1), including 10 groups in Pujehun, 11 groups in Port Loko, 18 groups in Kambia, 13 groups in Bonthe and 7 groups in Moyamba. The results of this study and related recommendations for capacity enhancement activities were later validated by stakeholders at the National Inception and Consultative Workshop, held 22 June 2021 in Freetown. Twenty participants attended the workshop, including representatives from all five coastal districts. A variety of stakeholders provided their input on the recommendations to enhance the capacity of women’s small-scale fisheries organizations, including the minister, director and other senior staff members from the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources (MFMR), fisheries out-station personnel, and community stakeholders (e.g. Community Management Associations [CMAs], women fishworkers).



# Part A: Summary of present capacities and opportunities to strengthen women's small-scale fisheries organizations in Sierra Leone

## Overview of present organizational characteristics

Women's small-scale fisheries groups in Sierra Leone work in both inland and marine fisheries and identify as a variety of different types of groups (associations, community-based organizations, etc.). Most groups are newly formed (average of 2.7 years as a group), but while only one-third are formally registered, most already have good governance structures and internal rules in place. Most groups were formed either on their own initiative or by their village fisheries governance body for the purposes of improving their livelihoods, social welfare, and access to fish.

## Current strengths, capacity gaps and opportunities to strengthen women's small-scale fisheries organizations

**STRENGTHS:** Women's small-scale fisheries groups currently have several strengths including relatively strong rates of member participation, good internal communication, and high levels of trust and mutual support. Despite being recently formed and not receiving much outside support, most groups feel they still have been at least somewhat successful at meeting their goals. Members feel they are benefitting from their current group membership in a variety of ways and also see value in their group being or becoming a member of a higher-level platform or umbrella group (e.g. such as a district-, regional- or national-level group). Groups perceive their main strengths as unity among members, strong social support, and giving back to their communities.

**CAPACITY GAPS:** Currently, groups need assistance strengthening their internal leadership, group governance skills, and conflict resolution procedures. However, it is access to equipment, processing infrastructure and financial resources – as well as continued government support – that is most needed. Better access to training and technologies for post-harvest processing and external financial support would help these groups develop further and achieve their goals. Below, these capacity gaps are translated into opportunities to strengthen the capacity of women's small-scale fisheries groups in Sierra Leone.

## Opportunities and proposed interventions to enhance the capacity of women's small-scale fisheries organizations

- 1) **Formalize groups and enhance their current administrative capacities.**
  - a. Help newly formed groups **become registered and get bank accounts.**
    - i. *Feedback:* Agreed. Ensure that women's groups are harmonized into fewer, stronger groups (rather than many weak or disorganized groups).
    - ii. *Priority level:* High.
    - iii. *Partnerships:* Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources (MFMR), fishers' organizations, Community Management Associations (CMAs), FAO, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

- b. Enhance basic administrative structures and procedures through **training on group administration, leadership and conflict resolution.**
    - i. *Feedback:* Agreed
    - ii. *Priority level:* High
    - iii. *Partnerships:* CMAs, MFMR, fishers' organizations, FAO
- 2) **Increase access to external financial support.**
- a. **Connect groups with opportunities to access soft loans, grants and microfinance institutions**
    - i. *Feedback:* Agreed
    - ii. *Priority level:* High
    - iii. *Partnerships:* CMAs, MFMR, fishers' organizations, FAO
- 3) **Expand technical training combined with access to needed equipment and follow-up support.**
- a. Given that nearly one-half of groups have yet to receive any technical training, **expand access to training on post-harvest processing, marketing and group governance** (e.g. conflict resolution, administration, financial literacy).
    - i. *Feedback:* Agreed. Train women in methods for improved fish processing and reduction of post-harvest losses.
    - ii. *Priority level:* High
    - iii. *Partnerships:* MFMR, fishers' organizations, CMAs
  - b. **Combine technical training with access to needed equipment.** Groups need access to post-harvest processing technologies including raised drying racks, dry and cold storage space, improved ovens, and knowledge of or access to spaces with better ventilation when smoking fish. Access could be enhanced through grants to purchase these items or through communal resource centres where these resources are made available for use to multiple groups operating in the same area.
    - i. *Feedback:* Agreed
    - ii. *Priority level:* High
    - iii. *Partnerships:* MFMR, fishers' organizations, CMAs, FAO, UNDP
  - c. **Technical training should include planned follow-up communication and extension support** to help groups successfully apply their new knowledge and solve any problems that arise.
    - i. *Feedback:* Agreed
    - ii. *Priority level:* High
    - iii. *Partnerships:* MFMR, fishers' organizations, community leaders, MFMR, CMAs, FAO, UNDP
- 4) **Enhance government outreach and communication with women's small-scale fisheries groups.**
- a. **Ensure government contact with groups occurs regularly** (e.g. seasonally) and includes field visits to landing sites and invitations to meetings, consultations and training events.

- i. *Feedback:* Agreed
- ii. *Priority level:* High
- iii. *Partnerships:* MFMR, CMAs, community leaders, women's groups, FAO, UNDP

5) **Strengthen existing higher-level groups and connectivity among groups through the formation of a national platform for women in fisheries.**

- a. **Strengthening linkages between local-level groups and higher-level (i.e. district, regional, national) groups** is a critical opportunity to enhance the capacity of organizations at all levels, as nearly all groups report that they see membership in higher-level groups as beneficial. **Strengthening these existing higher-level groups (CMAs)** and ensuring they are providing benefits (e.g. training, access to loans) could help strengthen women's small-scale fisheries groups.

- i. *Feedback:* Agreed
- ii. *Priority level:* High
- iii. *Partnerships:* CMAs, MFMR, community leaders, women's groups, FAO, UNDP

- b. **Establish a national association or platform for women in fisheries** to promote greater participation of women in fisheries governance and direct support to women's organizations while enhancing connectivity among existing groups. This would strengthen Sierra Leone's present membership in the African Women Network of Fish Processors and Traders (AWFishNET), linking to continent-wide opportunities for training and knowledge sharing, and for participation and representation in African Union and global governance processes.

- i. *Feedback:* Agreed
- ii. *Priority level:* High
- iii. *Partnerships:* FAO, UNDP, CMAs, MFMR, community leaders, women's groups

- c. Higher-level groups (i.e. CMAs, a newly formed type of national association for women in fisheries), once strengthened, could become **key hubs for offering training** (and follow-up support after training), **sharing information, providing credit and soft loans, supplying collective high-value assets** (cold storage, office space) and **facilitating learning exchanges**.

- i. *Feedback:* Agreed
- ii. *Priority level:* High
- iii. *Partnerships:* CMAs, MFMR, FAO, UNDP, community leaders, women's groups

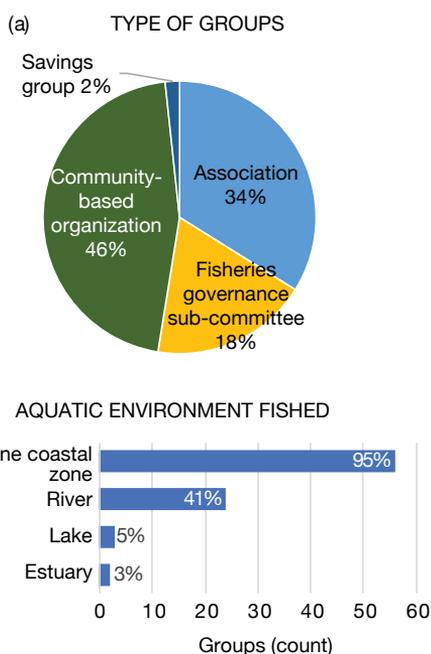


# Part B: Results of the Women’s SSF Mapping Assessment Survey

## Group location and structure

Most women’s small-scale fisheries groups (83 percent) operate at the village level, while 15 percent operate at the district level and one group is a regional-level organization. A variety of different types of groups are present in Sierra Leone (Figure 1a), including community-based organizations (46 percent of groups), associations (34 percent), and subcommittees of the local fisheries governance body (18 percent). Groups work in fisheries that are linked to a variety of marine and inland environments (Figure 1b). Most groups work in fisheries focused on the marine coastal zone (95 percent), and many of these also work in freshwater riverine fisheries (41 percent). Only one-third of groups (32 percent) are formally registered, and the majority (68 percent) remain unregistered at present. Groups are registered at a variety of government offices, including with their district or local council and often also with the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources (herein, the Ministry of Fisheries) or the Ministry of Social Welfare and Gender (Table 1). Although most groups are not registered at present, nearly all groups have basic administrative procedures (Figure 2), including an executive committee (97 percent), maintenance of updated membership lists (93 percent), a constitution or by-laws (83 percent), and meeting records or minutes (81 percent). Bank accounts are less common among organizations, with only 42 percent of groups currently having one. **There are opportunities to formalize groups and help strengthen their basic administrative attributes (such as having bank accounts, a constitution, and keeping meeting minutes) through assistance with the formal registration process, access to administrative training, or through accessible guidelines on best practices for administrative procedures for women’s small-scale fisheries groups.**

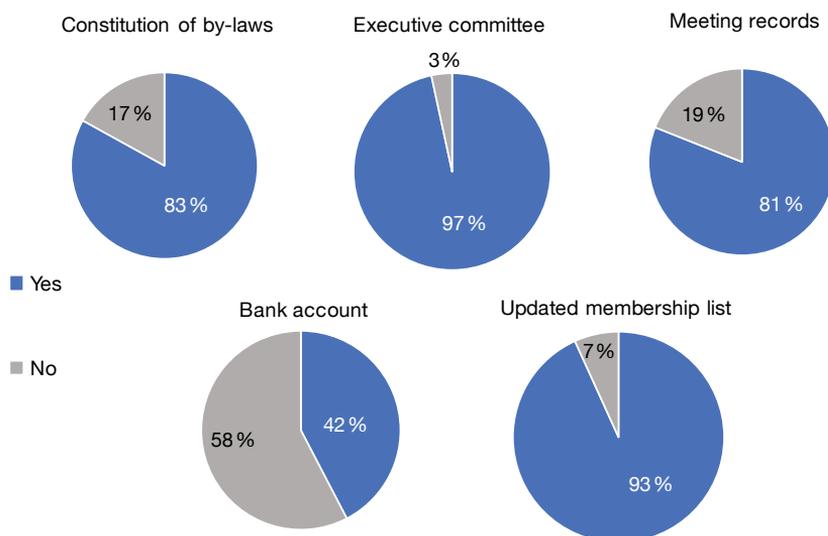
**Figure 1. Different types of groups present (a) and the aquatic system(s) of the fishery they work in (b)**



**Table 1. Departments or offices where groups report they are registered**

Office registered with	Group (count)
Ministry of Social Welfare and Gender	6
Ministry of Fisheries	10
District local council	17
Registrar General	1
Ministry of Cooperatives	1

**Figure 2. The presence of basic administrative structures and procedures in women's small-scale fisheries groups**



## Group age and stage of activity

Women's small-scale fisheries groups in Sierra Leone are young, with an average group age of 2.7 years and median age of 2 years (ranging from less than one year old to 19 years old). Most groups were self-formed, either by a group of like-minded community members (66 percent) or by an individual (16 percent), or were formed with outside help from their village fisheries governance body (24 percent – Table 2). The main objectives of groups vary, with the most common objectives being to improve household income (83 percent), enhance social welfare and solidarity among members (73 percent), improve access to fish (59 percent), improve access to external financial resources (44 percent), or learn new technical skills (44 percent), among others (Table 3).

**Table 2. Different types of actors who initiated group formation (groups could identify more than one actor)**

Actor who formed the group	Groups (count)	Percentage
Self-formed by a community group	39	66%
Village fisheries governance body	22	37%
Self-formed by an individual	14	24%
District government	7	12%
Separated from a fisheries group	6	10%
Other	2	3%
Central government	1	2%
NGO	1	2%
Development project	1	2%
National association	0	0%
Local council or chairperson	0	0%
Academic institution	0	0%

**Table 3. Groups' main purpose or objective (groups could identify more than one)**

Main purpose/objective	Groups (count)	Percentage
Improving household income	49	83%
Social welfare	43	73%
Access to fish	35	59%
Access to external financial support	26	44%
Learning new skills	26	44%
Expanding trade and market access	23	39%
Access to workspace	19	32%
Participation in formal fisheries management	19	32%
Collective savings	16	27%
Greater visibility to the government	8	14%

Most groups (71 percent) felt they have been somewhat successful at meeting their objectives, while 19 percent stated “yes”, they have been successful at meeting their objectives; only 10 percent said “no”. (Figure 3). The majority reported that they are currently focused on acting to meet their primary objectives (68 percent), while some are working towards new emergent objectives (12 percent) or on their initial formation (10 percent); 10 percent of groups consider themselves inactive at present. **Women’s small-scale fisheries groups in Sierra Leone are young and still mostly focused on their initial formation and meeting their primary objectives, with most feeling they have made some progress towards their goals.** For all groups, capacity enhancement activities that help groups identify their primary and secondary objectives and translate these objectives into short-, medium- and long-term plans would help groups make more progress towards their goals and enhance perceptions of group success. Groups that are currently inactive should receive targeted support to show how they can become active, functioning groups.

**Figure 3. Groups' perceptions of how successful they have been at meeting their stated goals**

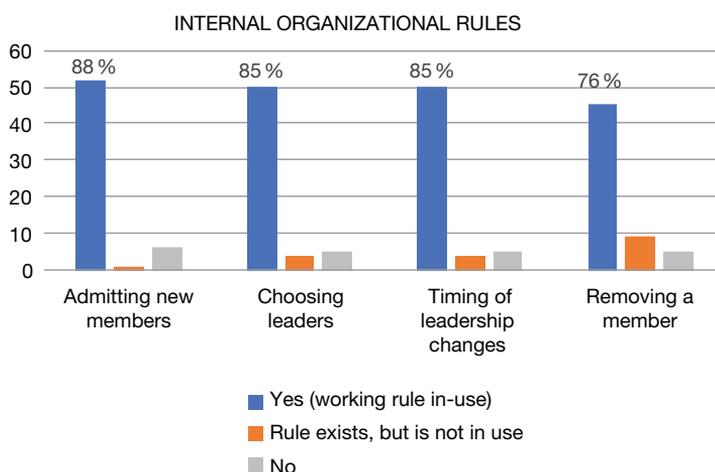


## Rules

Internally, most groups reported that they have functional rules in place governing their day-to-day operations, including admitting new members (88 percent), choosing leaders (85 percent), and the timing of leadership change (85 percent). Three-quarters of groups (76 percent) also have a working rule for how to remove a member (Figure 4). Nearly all groups (93 percent) reported that

all members (both executive committee and regular group members) participate in rule-making, although 7 percent of groups reported that only executive committee members make internal rules. Group members typically pay their membership dues either always or most of the time (83 percent and 12 percent, respectively), but a handful of groups struggle to collect membership fees consistently (n = 5). Leadership changes occur regularly within groups, on average every 2 to 5 years. **Most groups have good democratic rule-making and working rules in place.** Groups who reported having either non-functional internal rules or none at all were also groups who reported they were inactive at present. Targeting inactive groups and supporting their development of internal, democratic rules could help give them the internal rule structure they need to become functional groups.

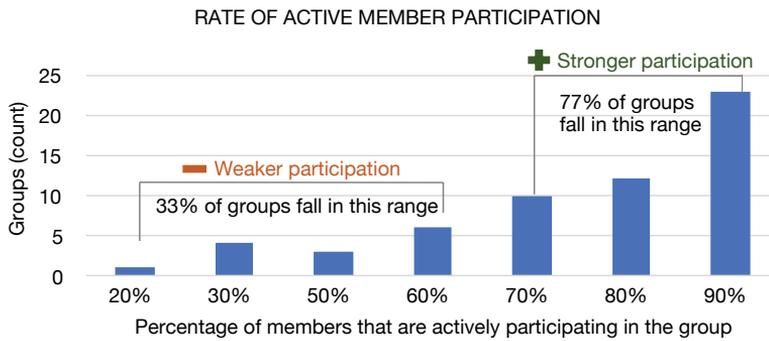
**Figure 4. Presence of different types of internal rules and their status (e.g. in use, not in use, non-existent)**



## Group characteristics: size, gender and participation

Currently, the average group size is 39 members. Most groups have grown (e.g. added members) since they initially formed. The majority (89 percent) are mixed-gender groups, with the average gender composition across all groups at 84 percent female membership. Of these, 68 percent reported a gendered division of labour, with men either fishing or cutting fish while women do other processing and marketing activities. Most groups (80 percent) are interested in adding new members. The 20 percent of groups that are not interested in growing have reached the cap on group size (placed by the MEG rules of the NaCSA). Most groups who want to add more members say they are able to grow (79 percent). Member participation rates average 75 percent (median of 80 percent) across all groups, with a low of 20 percent and a high of 90 percent (Figure 5). **Overall, average member participation rates are strong across groups (70 percent or higher), but targeted support should be offered to groups with lower rates of participation (e.g. 60 percent or lower) to enhance member commitment.** Training on leadership and group governance could enhance member participation by creating better-run, well-functioning groups or by helping groups create rules to remove inactive members from their rolls.

Figure 5. Member participation rates



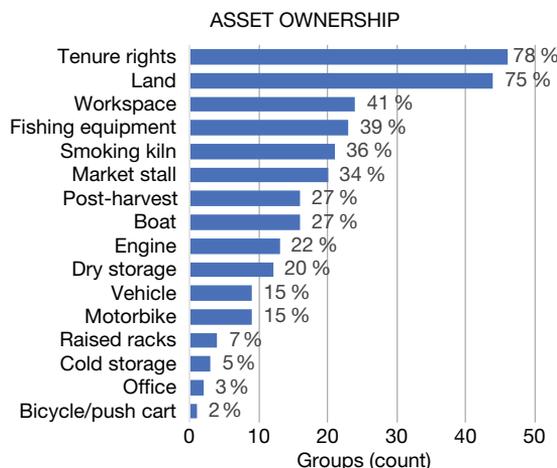
## Internal communication and meetings

Strong internal communication and information sharing was reported among groups. Most groups reported that information is shared “always” or “most of the time” among groups members, and that this information is accessible to all or most members. For the groups where the accessibility of information was rated as an issue, a variety of factors were to blame, including a lack of clear administrative procedures for information sharing, levels of literacy, access to technology, and levels of trust. All groups hold generally assembly meetings and most also hold more frequent meetings to work regularly and discuss business, meeting at least once a month. **Information sharing and accessibility of information is strong within groups on average, but some groups still need support with establishing regular procedures to ensure information is shared consistently and openly, and would thus benefit from administrative training and support with communication skills.**

## Assets

Most groups have access to tenure rights for fishing resources and land, but asset ownership for all other categories is low (40 percent of groups or less), including fishing equipment, smoking kilns, post-harvest processing equipment, drying racks, storage space and transportation (Figure 6). **Access to financial support (grants, loans, in-kind support) could enhance groups' access to needed assets. Additionally, communal spaces and training centres could be made available for groups to access certain assets (e.g. dry and cold storage, kilns) on a rotating or shared basis.**

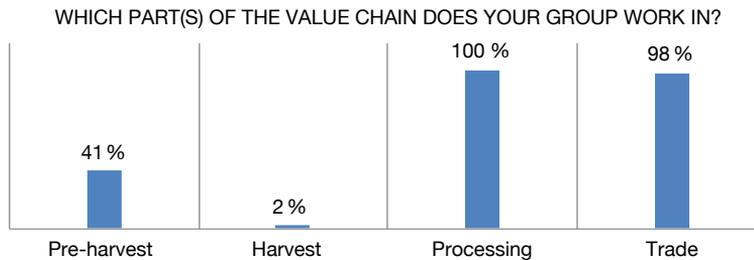
Figure 6. Types of assets groups have access to.



## Value chain activities

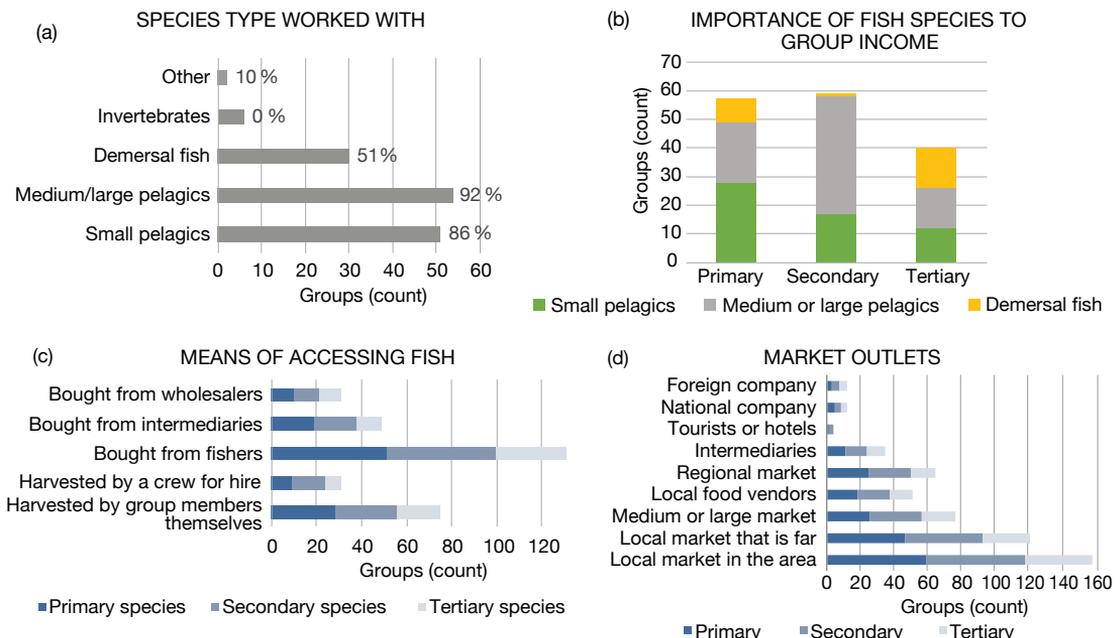
All groups work in post-harvest processing and trade of fish products (Figure 7), with 41 percent also working in pre-harvest activities; only one group directly harvests fish resources. Groups vary in how they divide the labour of pre-harvest, processing and trade, with some conducting activities individually, others collectively, and many doing both.

**Figure 7. Different stages of the small-scale fisheries value chain that groups are engaged in**



Groups work with a variety of types of fish species (2.5 types on average) including medium or large pelagics (92 percent of groups), small pelagics (86 percent) and demersal fish (51 percent – Figure 8a). Small pelagics were ranked most often as the greatest income-earner, followed by medium or large pelagics (Figure 8b). Groups most often access fish by buying directly from fishers, harvesting it themselves, or buying it from intermediaries (Figure 8c). Outlets for selling fish vary, with most relying on local markets in the area or far away (meaning more than 2 hours travel), or on medium or large national markets in the country (Figure 8d). **Women's small-scale fisheries groups conduct a variety of fishing activities throughout the value chain. They work with a variety of species types, and access and sell fish through different market channels.**

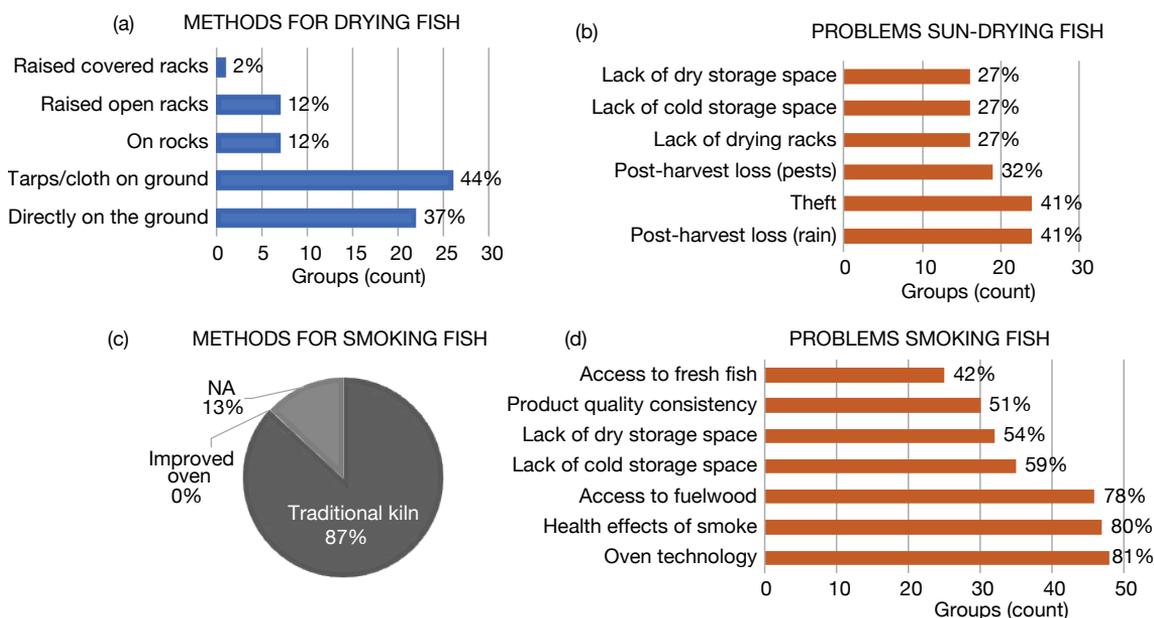
**Figure 8. Variety of different species types groups work with (a) and their relative importance to group income (i.e. primary income-earner, secondary, etc.) (b), the sources for accessing them (c), and the main market outlets for selling them (d)**



## Post-harvest processing

In post-harvest processing, most groups sun-dry fish without racks, placing fish either on tarps or cloth on the ground (44 percent), directly on the ground (37 percent), or on rocks (12 percent); raised open or covered racks are not commonly used methods (12 percent and 2 percent, respectively – Figure 9a). All groups experience challenges related to sun-drying fish, with the most common being post-harvest loss due to rain (41 percent) and theft (41 percent), followed by post-harvest loss due to pests (32 percent), lack of access to improved drying racks (29 percent), and lack of storage space (27 percent – Figure 9b). When smoking fish, all groups use a traditional kiln – none have access to improved oven technologies. Groups reported a steady high rate of problems when smoking fish, including lack of access to improved ovens (81 percent), negative health effects due to smoke exposure (80 percent), and access to or price of fuelwood (78 percent), among others (Figure 9d). Technological improvements in post-harvest processing would help groups address their current post-harvest processing challenges. For instance, access to raised drying racks and dry storage space would help address post-harvest loss and theft. Increasing access to improved ovens and better ventilation when smoking fish would help address the challenges related to oven technology, smoke exposure and accessing fuelwood.

**Figure 9. Technologies used and problems experienced when sun-drying fish (a, b) and smoking fish (c, d)**

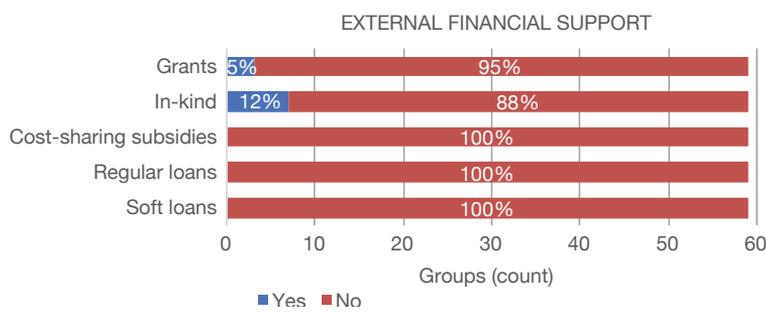


## Finances

Groups vary in how they divide their profits or income earned. The most common model is for individual members to keep their profits from the sale of fish products and make regular contributions to the group account (43 percent), followed by contributing all profits to the group account first (to be allocated as dividends to members later – 37 percent), and making financial contributions to the group account as needed (20 percent). External financial support is not a common source of group income; only three groups (5 percent) have received an external grant in the last five years (provided by either a non-governmental organization [NGO] or the NaCSA), and seven groups have

received some in-kind support from the Ministry of Fisheries or an NGO (Figure 10). No other forms of support (regular or soft loans, subsidized assistance) were received. When asked about their degree of financial independence and self-sufficiency, responses were mixed: the most common response (44 percent) was “somewhat dependent on outside support”, followed by “fully independent” (34 percent) and “completely dependent on outside support” (22 percent). Most groups (83 percent) make their financial records available to regular members to review, whereas one-quarter said these records are not available. Given the young age of groups and low propensity for outside financial support to date, better access to a mix of external forms of financial support (e.g. soft loans, grants) would help groups become more firmly established, improve their working conditions, and help them accomplish their goals. Along with this support, groups should be encouraged to (continue to) practice financial transparency and keep good financial records that are available for members to review.

**Figure 10. Different types of external financial support groups have received to date**



## Membership benefits, group strengths and barriers to success

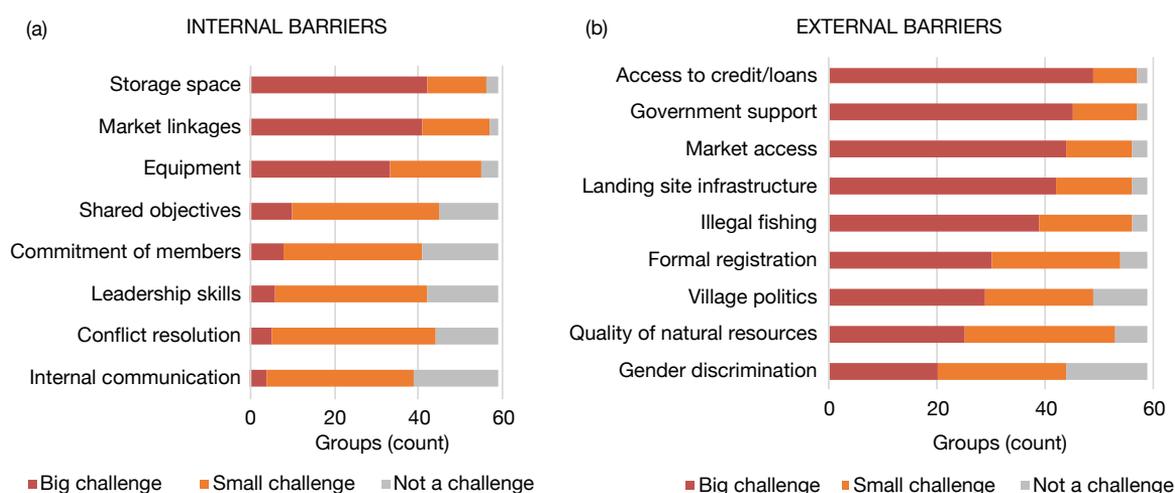
Benefits of group membership include a voice to engage in decision-making (75 percent of groups), access to technical knowledge and training (69 percent), better market access (66 percent), social support (61 percent), empowerment (59 percent), and better access to fish (53 percent – Table 4). For social support, multiple groups said members contribute to a “funeral fund” or a fund for naming ceremonies for each other to draw on as needed. Groups reported that their main strengths are unity or togetherness, strong social support and commitment to each other’s mutual welfare, support for their community, the growth of their fish processing business, and good group governance. The most common group achievements are providing soft loans to members, paying school fees, and acquiring equipment or storage/workspace.

Groups experience a handful of significant internal barriers (reported as “big challenges”), especially inadequate storage space, poor market linkages and insufficient equipment (Figure 11a). Internal group dynamics were rated as “smaller challenges”, including shared objectives, commitment, leadership skills, conflict resolution, and internal communication. The number and types of significant external barriers are much greater, including lack of access to external credit and loans, inadequate government support, lack of access to formal market spaces, landing site infrastructure, illegal fishing, and formal registration status (Figure 11b). While less common than in other countries studied, gender discrimination was still a frequent challenge reported by the majority of groups. **Groups report fewer issues with internal challenges, but shared objectives, member commitment, leadership skills, and conflict resolution could be enhanced through training on group governance and leadership. Moreover, access to equipment and storage space could be addressed through grants, loans and subsidies. Newer groups would also benefit from assistance in becoming registered.**

**Table 4. Different types of benefits members receive through their group membership**

Benefits	Groups (count)	Percent
Other	5	8%
Better access to inputs	9	15%
Better access to fish	31	53%
Equipment	21	36%
Facilities or workspace	24	41%
Better access to inputs	9	15%
Individual loans/credit from the group	29	49%
Empowerment or respect	35	59%
Social support	36	61%
Market access	39	66%
Technical knowledge and training	41	69%
Voice in decision-making	44	75%

**Figure 11. How groups rate different potential internal (a) and external barriers (b) that limit their capacity**

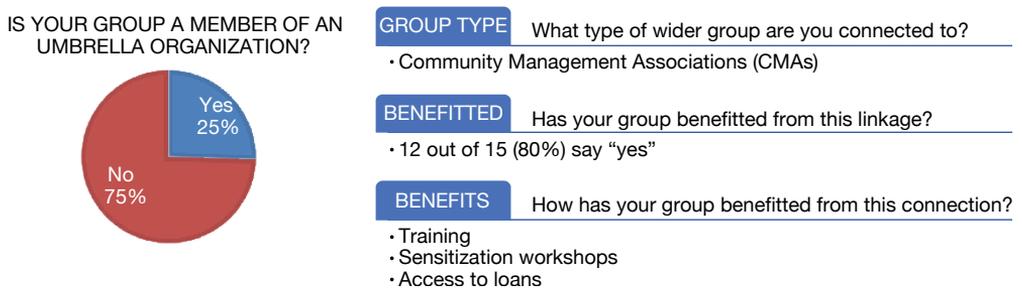


## External linkages

Only one-quarter of groups (25 percent) are already members of a higher-level umbrella organization. Of these, all reported that they are members of CMAs or the NaCSA. Among groups that are members of a wider group, most (80 percent) reported that they benefit from this membership, with benefits including access to training (e.g. on value addition), sensitization workshops, or access to loans (Figure 12). Of the groups that are not already connected to a higher-level group, most (84 percent) said that they thought it would be beneficial to join a higher-level group. Slightly more than one-half (56 percent) of groups have participated in a learning exchange with another women's small-scale fisheries organization, and 70 percent report that they are in regular contact with other women's small-scale fisheries groups. Strengthening linkages between local-level groups and higher-level

(district, regional, national) groups is a critical opportunity to enhance capacity of organizations at all levels, as nearly all groups report that they perceive membership in higher-level groups as beneficial. Strengthening these higher-level groups (CMAs, the NaCSA) and ensuring they are providing benefits (e.g. training, access to loans) could help strengthen women’s small-scale fisheries groups. In addition, promoting learning exchanges and connectivity among existing women’s small-scale fisheries groups should be prioritized. These higher-level groups are well-positioned to provide training, facilitate learning exchanges, and disseminate information and services to local women’s small-scale fisheries groups, and most local-level groups already perceive benefits from their membership and have a positive opinion of higher-level groups.

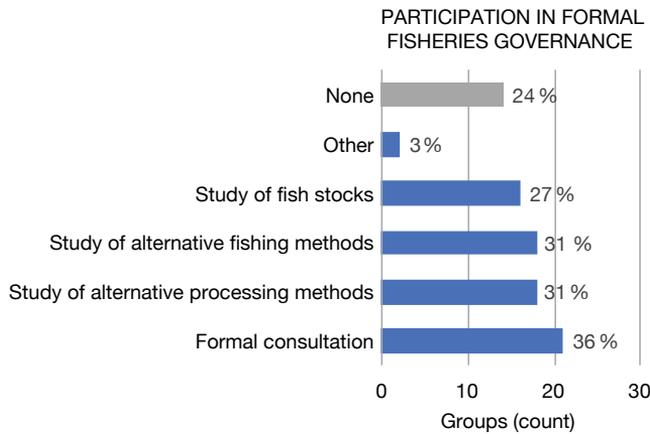
Figure 12. Membership in higher-level umbrella groups and perceived benefits



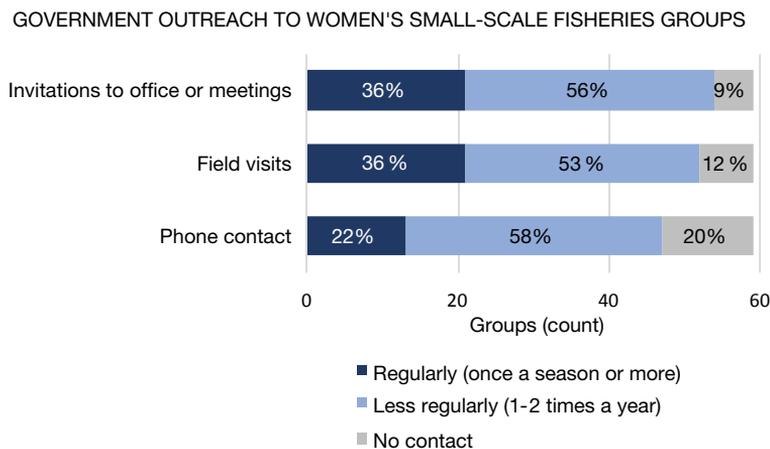
## Participation in fisheries governance and access to extension services

Most groups (76 percent) have participated in formal fisheries governance activities, the most common being a consultation or formal fisheries management decision-making process (36 percent of groups), followed by a study of alternative processing methods (31 percent) or of fishing methods (31 percent), among others (Figure 13). Most groups reported receiving regular or less regular contact from the government and receiving technical outreach services either through phone contact, field visits, or through invitations to meetings or training events (Figure 14). However, most groups do not receive regular government contact (i.e. at least once a season) and would like to receive support through field visits and invitations to meetings (93 percent and 97 percent, respectively) in particular. Currently, only 24 percent of groups regularly provide annual reports of their activities to the government. **There is an opportunity to increase the frequency of technical outreach services provided by the government to women’s small-scale fisheries groups so that such contact occurs on a more regular basis (e.g. seasonal contact) using a combination of methods, especially through field visits to groups and invitations to meetings and training events.**

**Figure 13. Types of formal fisheries governance and management activities women's small-scale fisheries groups have participated in (outside of their own internal group governance)**



**Figure 14. Types and frequency of government outreach (e.g. technical extension services and communication) provided to women's small-scale fisheries groups**

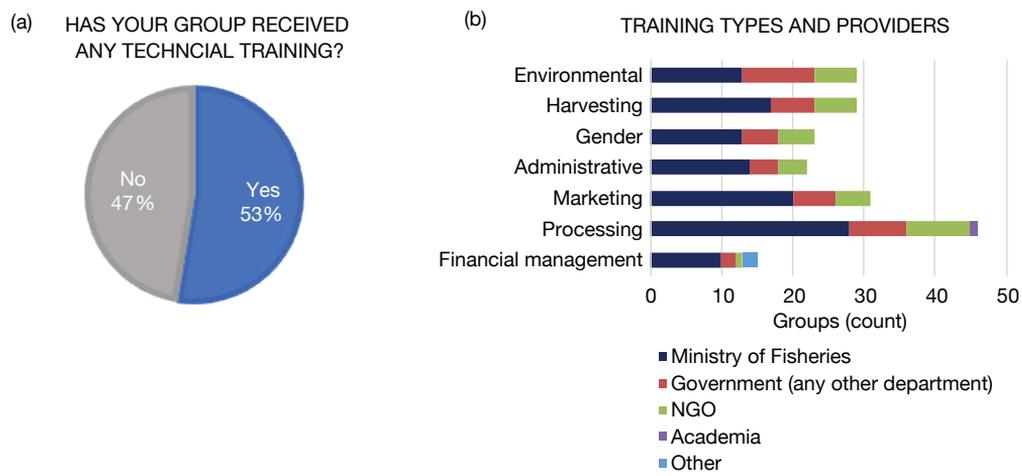


## Training

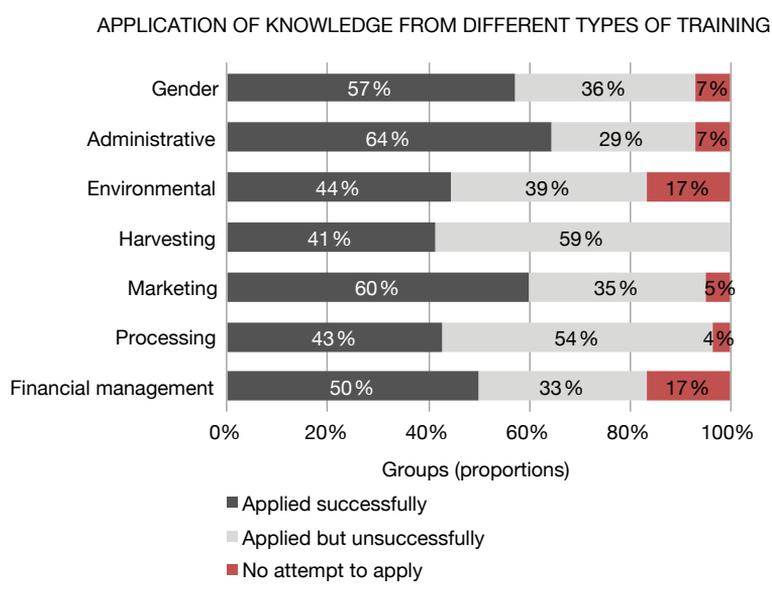
About one-half of groups (53 percent) have received some form of technical training (Figure 15a), the most common being training on post-harvest processing, marketing, environmental conservation, and harvesting (Figure 15b). Across all types of training, success rates (e.g. successful application of the training received) range between 41 and 64 percent. Harvesting, environmental conversation, and processing-related training have the lowest rates of successful application. Administrative, marketing and gender-related training have the highest rates of successful application (Figure 16). Few groups have not attempted to apply the knowledge gained form training at all, showing that groups have taken initiative to integrate and apply the knowledge gained. Groups that reported that they were unsuccessful at applying training (or did not attempt it) most often said this was because they lacked equipment and facilities to apply what they learned (e.g. fishing gear, cold storage, processing gear) or could not avoid buying undersized or illegally caught fish because that is what is

available to them on the market. The most common institutions providing training are the Ministry of Fisheries, followed by other government divisions and NGOs (Figure 15b). Given that many groups have yet to receive any training, more technical training is needed coupled with access to materials, equipment and facilities needed to apply what they have learned. Training should be coupled with “start-up kits” or access to needed facilities, as well as follow-up support from the training partner (e.g. Ministry of Fisheries, NGO).

**Figure 15. Whether or not groups’ have received any technical training (a), and the main types and providers of training received (b)**



**Figure 16. Groups’ success in applying knowledge from the different types of training they have received**



## Greatest needs

The greatest needs reported by groups, in terms of strengthening the capacity of their organization to do their work, were financial support (especially soft loans and microfinance resources), access to fish processing infrastructure (e.g. workspace, cold storage or cooling room, processing equipment, toilet and clean water facilities), and access to fishing equipment (e.g. boats, gear). Groups also consistently requested further technical training (on group management, financial management and literacy) and also follow-up with support to acquire the needed materials to successfully apply the knowledge gained through training (Table 5). **Groups' greatest needs are for access to external financial support through soft loans and microfinance opportunities, as well as equipment and infrastructure for fish processing (e.g. ovens, tarps, storage space, cold storage, inputs). Groups also need more follow-up and material support accompanying technical training so that groups can succeed in applying what they have learned.**

**Table 5. Greatest needs reported by groups for enhancing their capacity to do their work**

Need	Group (count)
Financial support (soft loans, microfinance)	46
Fishing and fish processing equipment	18
Technical training	11
Training materials and follow-up	8
Financial literacy training	5



# Appendix 1. Methods

## Logistics for data collection

Prior to implementing the Women's SSF Mapping Assessment, existing information on the number of women's small-scale fisheries groups in each district was used for sampling (supplied by the government and supplemented by expert knowledge of the research team). Based on these estimates and applying the sampling protocol (described below), the target number of surveys to be collected in each district was determined (see Table 6). Data was collected by a team of 14 trained enumerators between 26 February and 15 March 2021.

**Inclusion criteria.** To be included in the survey, organizations had to meet the following criteria:

- a. The group identifies as an organization, either formally registered or informal.
- b. Membership is majority (more than 50 percent) women.
- c. Women are an active part of the organization's leadership.
- d. The majority of group members are engaged in capture fishing and related activities including pre-harvest, processing, and trade of fish or fish products.

**Sampling protocol.** The following sampling protocol was applied to the estimated number of women's small-scale fisheries groups (always rounding up to a whole number):

- Fewer than 7 organizations: do not sample (i.e. survey all groups);
- 8–10 organizations: sample 60 percent;
- 11–14 organizations: sample 50 percent;
- 15–20 organizations: sample 40 percent;
- More than 20 organizations: sample 30 percent where possible, 20 percent as needed.

**Table 6. Districts surveyed, and target and actual numbers of surveys collected for the study**

Province	District	Total number of clusters	Number of clusters to survey	Total number of communities	Communities covered by the survey	Target number of surveys to be collected	Actual number of surveys collected
Northern	Kambia	6	2	24	4	17	18
	Port Loko	5	2	37	4	13	11
Southern	Moyamba	5	1	45	4	4	7
	Bonthe	9	3	85	3	9	13
	Pujehun	14	6	27	3	10	10
<b>Totals</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>218</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>59</b>

## Training

Training for data collection was led virtually by the consultant for all data collectors. The four-hour training covered the purpose and scope of the study, the survey questions, and how to arrange for and facilitate surveys. For a detailed overview of the training materials, see the FAO report *A Methodological Guide for Mapping Women's Small-Scale Fishery Organizations to Assess their Capacities and Needs*.

## Survey data collection

Data collection was overseen by the National Project Coordinator in the field who supervised the team of data collectors implementing the survey. Surveys were administered with 5–10 members from a women's small-scale fisheries group present (including both executive committee members and regular members) and one member from the data collection team. Group members answered questions from the semi-structured questionnaire collectively, responding as to their group-level (i.e. not individual) characteristics only. Each survey took 1–2 hours to complete and was administered outdoors to allow for social distancing. Respondents were introduced to the purpose of the survey and asked to give their consent before proceeding; they were also informed of their right to skip any question or end the interview at any time. Data was collected digitally with a smartphone or tablet, using the free software KoboToolBox and the app KoboCollect to record responses.

## Survey instrument

The survey included informed consent language. After consent was granted, enumerators guided participants through questions about their group's history and formation, their objectives, their internal operations (e.g. rules, information sharing, meetings, participation rates, financial structure), external support received, external linkages, barriers, and their greatest needs. To review the survey's development and the survey instrument in full see the FAO report *A Methodological Guide for Mapping Women's Small-Scale Fishery Organizations to Assess their Capacities and Needs*.



Globally, women perform essential work throughout small-scale fisheries (SSF) food systems, yet much of this work is overlooked. Where women are not seen or acknowledged as important actors in fish value chains, they remain underrepresented in or excluded from formal governance processes and have limited say in decision-making. This lack of visibility hinders women's equal access to needed extension services and assets, such as credit and technology. Forming organizations (e.g., associations, cooperatives, savings, and credit groups) is one means of adapting to gender-specific challenges women face in the sector. Recent high-level commitments outline achieving women's full and effective participation in decision-making and leadership as global governance goals. For example, the dedicated chapter on gender in the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines) encourages women's participation in fisheries organizations and their inclusion in monitoring and implementation. In addition, Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 on gender equality includes a target on ensuring women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic, and public life. But while enhanced access to organizations and decision-making spaces for women is critical for achieving global goals, current research on women's SSF organizations is lacking, leaving gaps in our understanding of existing barriers and opportunities to affect change.

The report provides a national overview of women's SSF organizations, defined as formal and informal organizations engaged in fisheries activities (including pre-harvest, harvest, or post-harvest processing and trade) whose leaders and members are majority women. The study of women's SSF organizations was part of a broader initiative, "Empowering women in SSF for sustainable food systems," through funding provided by the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD) to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). To support sustainable food systems and nutrition in sub-Saharan Africa, NORAD provided funding for initial project activities in five countries – Ghana, Malawi, Sierra Leone, United Republic of Tanzania and Uganda. With a focus on strengthening women's roles in post-harvest processing and trade, the project aimed to help women both individually and as members of small businesses, professional organizations, and cooperatives to build and improve their skills and capacity to do their work. To attain these goals, an initial empirical assessment of the current landscape of organizations was undertaken as a first step. The report summarizes the results of the mapping assessment survey of women's SSF fisheries organizations carried out, and underscores the diversity of women's fisheries organizations and their present accomplishments and opportunities for governments, research institutions, non-governmental organizations, and private sector actors to support women's SSF organizations in line with the principles of the SSF Guidelines. For an overview of the methodology, see 'A methodological guide for mapping women's SSF organizations to assess their capacities and needs').

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