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Gender and Youth Dimensions in Regional Cross-Border Fish Trade

Authors
Joseph Nagoli¹, Sloans Chimatiro², John Linton³, Bamidele Omitoyin⁴

Executive Summary
There is very active inter-regional fish trade in Africa with over 70% participation of women and of youth age of 25 to 35 years especially in the main traded small pelagic species of *Rastrineobola agentae* (Dagaa), *Haplochromines spp.* (Furu), *Scromberomorus commerson* (Spanish Mackerel), *Oreochromis rukwaensis* (Perege), *St lethrissa tanganicae*, (Dagaa) *Engraulicypris sardella* (Usipa) and *Rastrineobola argentea* (Mukene). Fish trade in Africa is largely informal exacerbated by tariff barriers, high illiteracy rates of as high as 80%, particularly among women, general lack of information on the rules of trade with which traders need to comply when they are taking their products across the border. Informal trade has a higher marketing margin (21%) than formal (14%) mainly driven by avoiding taxes. Despite the presence of Regional Economic Community groupings and presence of non-tariff barriers for free movement of goods and services within the region including fish, there still presence of restrictive trade regulations which include paying for sanitary certificate, export and import permit lengthy and duplicated immigration procedures, cumbersome inspection requirements, unharmonized standards, police road blocks, among others.

Key Recommendations

- Gender mainstreaming and transformation should be included in fish trade policies to enhance linkage of women and youth fish traders to the regional and international fish markets.
- Evidence-based, gender-focused interventions and innovations should be promoted in order to address gender inequities and positively influence production and equitable distribution of fish.
- Trade-related development programs should effectively identify and address gender barriers and mechanisms of change of the identified gender inequalities that will enable lasting shifts towards reducing poverty, increasing food and nutritional security, and safeguarding fish resources with and for women, men, girls and boys.
- Novel entrepreneurial entry points for women and the youth in fish trade should be identified and developed in order to increase accessibility of wealth-generating opportunities and leadership roles for women.
Women and Youth in the Regional Fish trade

Women are involved in many activities along the value chain of fish trade in Africa including post-harvest handling, processing, branding and marketing. Based on studies carried out by WorldFish and our partners across the African continent, an average of two-thirds of informal cross-border fish traders are under 40 years of age. Overall in the value chain, youth involvement is also very high. For example, in Central Africa the range if the age of fishermen was between 25 and 35 years, representing 35.2%; and in Lake Chad the youth were 67%, and 41-81% of these were women. Cross-border fish traders between Nigeria and Benin were generally below 40 year of age (42%) and 41% of these were women. On the border between Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire, traders are predominantly women from villages and often married to fishermen. In Southern Africa, cross-border fish traders were also predominantly young with ages below 40 years: 60-80% of traders between Malawi and Zambia; 38% of traders between Mozambique and neighboring countries.

Figure 1. Fish Trader, Lusaka, Zambia
Despite their importance and contribution to the artisanal fish industry, women have received little attention from both government and non-governmental organizations. The recognition of women's role in the fish trade value chain is a matter of priority if the fishery sector is to maintain its current level of contribution towards household and national economy. In developing countries, lack of access to and control of key assets such as capital, skills and technologies limit women's engagement in formal trading. Social norms and power relations further increase women and youth's barriers to enter into cross-border fish trade resulting in harassments and growing opportunities for corrupt practices by trade authorities. 

The study findings show that women are relatively integrated in all the nodes and activities of the value chain, even though their participation in leadership positions is limited because men dominate leadership and decision-making positions. From a governance point of view, the patterns of interactions identified are characterised by special proximity and family ties. The study also identified an intermediary node of auxiliary actors who play a critical role of brokering trade at the production and processing levels. It found that this role is not adequately recognised by external support and government as there are no support services targeted for such actors. The study contributed to a deeper understanding of women-specific issues in the fisheries sector in Malawi, hence providing further opportunities for gaining support for women's empowerment in the fisheries sector.

Regional fish trade is a major activity in Africa and this presents important and relatively untapped opportunities to enhance gender equity. Informal cross-border trade (ICBT) is thriving almost everywhere in Africa, but it remains unrecognized component of Africa's economy. Intra-regional informal trade is mainly conducted by women as micro, small and medium-sized enterprises. These traders operate entirely outside the formal economy, escape fully or partially trade-related regulations and duties. They avoid official border posts or pass through such posts yet resort to illegal practices such as under-invoicing, misclassification of goods and mis-declaration of country of origin.

What are the current challenges affecting women and youth in regional fish trade?

Several studies have reported institutional, regulatory and policy constraints in intra-regional fish trade. Some of the existing policies on fish trade in the region are not favourable to small scale traders who are mostly women and youth. The policies are not conducive for traders to plan and operate. For instance in some trade corridors, in order for traders to export or import fish, they are required to possess sanitary certificates and export and import permit. All these documents demand processing fees and duty stamp fees which most women and youth traders cannot afford because of their scale of operations. Furthermore, there is lack of transparency and predictability of trade-related regulations, procedures and fees and charges which is not known
to women and youth trades. This in turn results in women and youths preferring to engage in informal and often unregulated trade.

Women often work under poor conditions with the use of obsolete processing equipment which exposes them to health challenges. According to FAO, most women using smoking ovens suffered from serious respiratory illnesses because of their exposure to frequent heat and smoke. They also face other challenges such as exclusion and lack of access to credit for working capital among others. Manyungwa-Pasani et al. also report of exploitative trading practices both at the beach and the markets. At the markets the local brokers would steal from the women. The result is low productivity, exclusion with demonstrable social and economic cost.

Due to stiff competition between women and men on access to fish, women have developed coping strategies. Some women may have special arrangements with fishers in order to secure sufficient supplies. The arrangement could be gifts of food and loans of money. Competition can be so stiff that female traders may prostitute themselves to fishers in order to obtain favours, low prices, and guaranteed supplies.

Our research in Central Africa, reported that minors were being exploited in Lake Chad, by working as fishermen; and most of the time by wholesalers who used them to pack fish, as well as load and unload products from and onto boats and vehicles. Being under the age of regular fishers, processors and traders, the youth and not included in the plans for fisheries and aquaculture development; therefore, their potential to contribute to the sector is forgone.
Policy Recommendations
The vulnerability of women and youth in fish trade and intra-regional fish trade in particular has so many implications and therefore require urgent attention. The following are some critical areas of interventions to reduce women and youth’s economic, social and psychological stresses in fish trade:

- Gender mainstreaming and transformation in fisheries related policies, increasing access to investment finances and market information for the women, and promoting investments in the fisheries sector will link women and youth fish traders to the regional and international fish markets.
- Evidence-based, gender-focused interventions and innovations can address women’s inequities and positively influence production and equitable distribution of fish to reduce poverty and enhance food and nutrition security for women, youth and children. Countries should improve capacities for trade among women fish processors and traders and aquaculture producers, to make better use of expanding trade opportunities through competitive small and medium scale enterprises.
• Gender inclusion, equity and equality are critical in fish trade and overall economic development. Trade programs should therefore effectively identify and address gender dimensions of barriers and mechanisms of change of the identified gender inequalities that will enable lasting shifts towards reducing poverty, increasing food and nutritional security, and safeguarding fish resources for women, men, girls and boys.

• In many African countries, local demand for fish is high and projected to increase in the future as a function of natural demographic progressions in which growing economic prosperity among middle and upper classes in both absolute and relative terms drives an increase in the amount of protein they consume. As such identification and development of novel entrepreneurial entry points will increase accessibility of wealth-generating opportunities and leadership roles for women, rather than competing for existing male-dominated nodes of the fisheries value chain.

Figure 4. Women and youths trading catfish in Nigeria
References


**Authors’ Affiliations**

1 WorldFish
2 Natural Resources Institute, University of Greenwich
3 University of Ibadan
4 Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources, Malawi

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