

Where have all the women gone?

Sex-segregated employment data in the recently released State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture 2018 report points to the need for better and more standardised data collection

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July 2018 witnessed the launch of 'The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture 2018' (SOFIA 2018)—the flagship report of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations.

What makes this report particularly interesting is that for the first time, there is the reporting of sex-disaggregated employment statistics. The demand for sex-segregated data has been a long standing one of fishers, their representatives, fishery researchers and civil society organisations struggling for gender equality and equity. This step by the FAO, which is wholly in line with the recommendations of the SSF Guidelines, is therefore indeed very encouraging and useful.

From the pages of SOFIA 2018, we excerpt below the table on: Reporting of Sex-Disaggregated Employment (Women, Men and Unspecified) in Fisheries and Aquaculture, by Region, 2016. The data brings out the dominance of Asia in employment with in the sector. Asia accounts for nearly 80 per cent of employment in fisheries and 94 per cent in aquaculture.

According to the data in this table, women make up only 15 per cent of the workforce, both for the fisheries and the aquaculture sector. In both sectors, a significant proportion

of the workforce—nearly 10 per cent—consists of the category 'Unspecified'. This category would in reality consist of both men and women—we don't know for sure because the data that was collected did not specify gender. For discussion's sake, let us assume that all the workers under the category 'Unspecified' are only women. Even then, this would push up the proportion of women in the workforce in fisheries and aquaculture to just about 25 per cent. Previous data however suggests that women make up nearly half the workforce. The Hidden Harvest report (World Bank, FAO and WorldFish, 2012), for example, found that women make up 47 per cent of fisheries supply-chain workers in the harvest and post-harvest sectors. With the current data adding up to 25 per cent at best, this means in effect that half the women working in fisheries or aquaculture are missing in the data collected, even when the 'Unspecified' category is included in the reckoning.

It is not clear whether the table covers employment data in only the primary sector (that is, production or harvest) or in both primary and secondary (post-harvest) sectors. If it covers both sectors, then, given that the Hidden Harvest report states that when both harvest and post-harvest sectors are combined, women make up nearly half the workforce, women in fisheries and aquaculture employment seem to be significantly under-represented in SOFIA 2018.

These preliminary inferences point to certain shortcomings and discrepancies in the data text. This may be in part due to the use of non-standardised and divergent methodologies across studies. Another example of data discrepancy is immediately observable. Because of different research methodologies employed in the Hidden Harvest report and in SOFIA 2018, women's participation in capture fisheries of developed countries is estimated in the Hidden Harvest report to be about 27 per cent, while in SOFIA 2018 the sex-disaggregated employment of women in fisheries reported from North America and Europe is pegged at just two per cent (See table). This is a considerable difference by any reckoning. At a minimum, there is a need to improve data collection and reporting, and for the use of more standardised methodologies across data sets. ■

Reporting of Sex-Disaggregated Employment (Women, Men and Unspecified) in Fisheries and Aquaculture, by region, 2016

Region	Women		Men		Unspecified	
	No. ('000)	%	No. ('000)	%	No. ('000)	%
Fisheries						
Africa	585.1	11	4,248.3	79	532.6	10
Latin America and the Caribbean	394.4	19	1,383.6	66	306.7	15
North America	<0.1	0	37.9	18	171.1	82
Asia	4,843.9	15	25,020.5	78	2,125.2	7
Europe	6.4	2	115.3	33	232.0	66
Oceania	49.1	15	150.0	45	134.7	40
Aquaculture						
Africa	33.1	11	211.8	70	58.6	19
Latin America and the Caribbean	29.3	8	229.8	60	122.3	32
North America		0		0	9.3	100
Asia	2,764.3	15	14,068.5	76	1,645.5	9
Europe	16.7	18	56.7	62	17.5	19
Oceania	1.5	19	5.2	68	1.0	13