

Invisible actors on a male dominated arena: female fish mongers' roles, strategies and needs in the fisheries sector

Sara Frocklin*, Maricela de la Torre-Castro*, Lars Lindstrom*, Narriman Jiddawi**

*Stockholm University

** Institute of Marine Science

Abstract

In Zanzibar, an increasing number of women have entered fish markets acting as a link between fishers and consumers, i.e. a middleman. However, since fisheries are traditionally male dominated, women receive little recognition. Thus, gender analysis in the fisheries sector potentially can enhance management and development policies as well as environmental issues. In this study 23 women and 23 men from 12 fish markets in Zanzibar were interviewed to examine 1) women's and men's different strategies to succeed on the market, 2) how finance and social networks determine the access to different fish species, 3) knowledge about fish demand and markets, and 4) needs and challenges related to fish trade. Results show that even when women manage to penetrate typical male jobs, the execution of the activity differs greatly between the sexes. Men tend to dominate commercial channels and revenues of large valuable species such as tuna, kingfish and swordfish while women mainly have access to species of low economic value such as anchovies and small mackerels directed to local markets and consumption. The main reason for this was reported to be lack of access to economic and social resources. This, in combination with scarce knowledge about fish demand, market connections and limited mobility, exclude women from more profitable markets. The study suggests that a nuanced understanding of gender dynamics in fishing communities is needed and its relation to wider social, economic, cultural and political processes.