

# SMALL-SCALE FISHERIES FOR FOOD SECURITY IN AFRICA

The importance of small-scale fisheries is neglected, misrepresented and undervalued in the global food discourse and in the Sustainable Development Goals

Jeppe Kolding and Ragnhild Overå

University of Bergen  
jeppe.kolding@uib.no  
ragnhild.overa@uib.no



Photo by Ragnhild Overå

## ABSTRACT

Small fish from small-scale fisheries are the most eco-friendly and socially equitable food production system we have.

They sustain essential food security and supply vital nutrients for millions of people in developing countries.

By fishing small fish lower in the aquatic food chain we can increase food production significantly.

However, small-scale fisheries are undervalued in the global food discourse and under increasing pressure from misguided reforms and maladapted regulations.

## Important livelihood

Small-scale fisheries are crucial in Africa for feeding over 200 million people and for the income of numerous fishers', processors and traders.



Photo by Ragnhild Overå

However, the importance of small-scale fisheries' contribution to the diets, especially for low income people and vulnerable groups is undervalued and unreported.

## Food and nutrition

The unique content of nutrients in fish plays a significant role in combating the triple burden of hunger, micronutrient deficiencies and non-communicable diseases.

However, fish are largely absent from the global food security discourse (HLPE 2014), and fish is strikingly missing from strategies for reduction of nutrient deficiency, precisely where it could potentially have the largest impact.

## Governance for food security

Wild small pelagic fish species from both marine and freshwater fisheries are the most energy efficient food production systems and have the least environmental impacts in terms of greenhouse gases, water use, fertilizers, insecticides or herbicides compared to other human food production systems.

Small fish provide the bulk of fish supply for food security and nutrition in developing countries (Kolding et al. 2014). Their sustainable utilisation will be crucial for meeting the challenge of feeding an increasing population (Bene et al. 2015).

Restricting fishers access and regulating their fishing practices is often seen as a prerequisite for achieving a sustainable utilisation of fish resources. However, many small-scale fisheries are characterized by self-governing mechanisms that have significant conservation value.

## Constraints and challenges

The reluctance to conform to Western-inspired management models makes small-scale fishers subject to a negative image, particularly for using indiscriminate fishing methods to catch small fish (Kolding and van Zwieten 2011).

The sector is therefore vulnerable and under increasing pressure. The push for governance reforms, entailing a two-pronged approach of area closures and effort control, usually results in marginalization, increased conflicts and lower catches.

## The ecosystem Approach

Recent findings challenge the mainstream fisheries narratives and suggest that small-scale fishers' exploitation pattern often might be closer to an ecosystem approach than conventional selective fisheries (Kolding et al. 2014).



Photo by Ragnhild Overå

## SmallFishFood

The researcher group 'Small Fish and Food security' (SmallFishFood) led by the University of Bergen offers innovative thinking by focusing on how the utilization of small fish (often labelled as trashfish) can be transformed in a direction where fisheries governance, marketing mechanisms and health policies ensure that these fish are utilised sustainably for human consumption and good health.

We look at sustainability from two simultaneous perspectives: How to maximize nutritional value while minimizing the environmental impacts and maintain ecosystem structure and functioning.

## REFERENCES

- Béné, C., Barange, M., Subasinghe, R., Pinstrup-Andersen, P., Merino, G., Hemre, G.-I. & Williams, M. (2015) Feeding 9 billion by 2050 – putting fish back on the menu. *Food Security*, 7: 261–274.
- HLPE (2014) Sustainable fisheries and aquaculture for food security and nutrition. A report by the High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition of the Committee on World Food Security, Rome 2014.
- Kolding, J., Béné, C. and Baavinck (2014) Small-scale fisheries – importance, vulnerability, and deficient knowledge. In: Garcia, J. Tice and A Charles (eds) (2014) *Governance for Marine Fisheries and Biodiversity Conservation. Interaction and coevolution*. Wiley-Blackwell.
- Kolding, J. and van Zwieten, P.A.M. 2011. The tragedy of our legacy: how do global management discourses affect small-scale fisheries in the South? *Forum for Development Studies* 38(3): 267–297.



Photo by Modesta Medard



UNIVERSITY OF BERGEN

