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Photo: A woman fish trader at the local market in Masinloc, Philippine/ Jed Leonard Caasi/ USAID SuFiA TS

Unlocking the Potential of Women and Youth in Small-Scale Fisheries in the Indo-Pacific Region

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ACRONYMS

BFAR	: Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources
CGIAR	: Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research
FAO	: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FishR	: Municipal Fisherfolk Registration
GESI	: Gender Equality and Social Inclusion
IUU Fishing	: Illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, promote sustainable fisheries and conserve marine biodiversity in the Asia-Pacific region.
KUSUKA	: <i>Kartu Pelaku Usaha Kelautan dan Perikanan</i> (Marine and Fisheries Business Actor Card)
MMN	: <i>Maritim Muda Nusantara</i> (Young Maritime Archipelago)
SEAFDEC	: Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center
SuFiA TS	: Sustainable Fish Asia Technical Support
UN	: United Nations
UNESCAP	: United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
USAID	: United States Agency for International Development
USAID Oceans	: United States Agency for International Development Oceans and Fisheries Partnership

INTRODUCTION

As a longtime partner in the Asia Pacific region, the U.S. Government is instrumental and focused in combating illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing and its impact on the environment, economy, and social dynamics of coastal communities. The Sustainable Fish Asia Technical Support (SuFiA TS) activity is an example of such investment. The goal of SuFiA TS is to improve the management of marine biodiversity and fisheries resources in the Indo-Pacific region by reducing unsustainable and IUU fishing. It is especially committed to integrating gender equity and social inclusion (GESI) approaches in all its activities due to the inherent issues and challenges men, women, migrants, youth, stateless fishers, and other marginalized social groups in the fishery industry are facing.

In coordination with regional, local, and U.S. Government partners, the 4-year SuFiA TS activity aims to provide technical services to advance regional fisheries policy and regulatory frameworks, promote the adoption of fair labor standards and sustainable fishing practices within the seafood industry, and strengthen regional fisheries management capacity. SuFiA TS Activity structures its interventions using the following five Strategic Approaches:

Strategic Approach One (SA1): Adoption and implementation of regional sustainable fisheries policies, standards, and regulatory frameworks.

Strategic Approach Two: Increase in the adoption of fair labor and sustainable fishing practices by fishery businesses in the region.

Strategic Approach Three: Effective and efficient project coordination, administrative and technical support, and outreach and communications delivered. (Cross-cutting theme)

Strategic Approach Four: Improved social inclusion within regional fisheries management, including small-scale fishers, women, and youth empowerment. (Cross-cutting theme)

Strategic Approach Five: Regional institutions and countries empowered to safeguard their fishery resources from foreign malign influences. (Cross-cutting theme)

The geographic scope of the SuFiA TS Activity in Southeast Asia and the Pacific region includes the following countries: Brunei Darussalam; Cambodia; Indonesia; Laos; Malaysia; Myanmar; Papua New Guinea; the Philippines; Singapore; the Solomon Islands; Thailand; Timor Leste; and Vietnam. This geographic scope falls under the wider Indo-Pacific region.

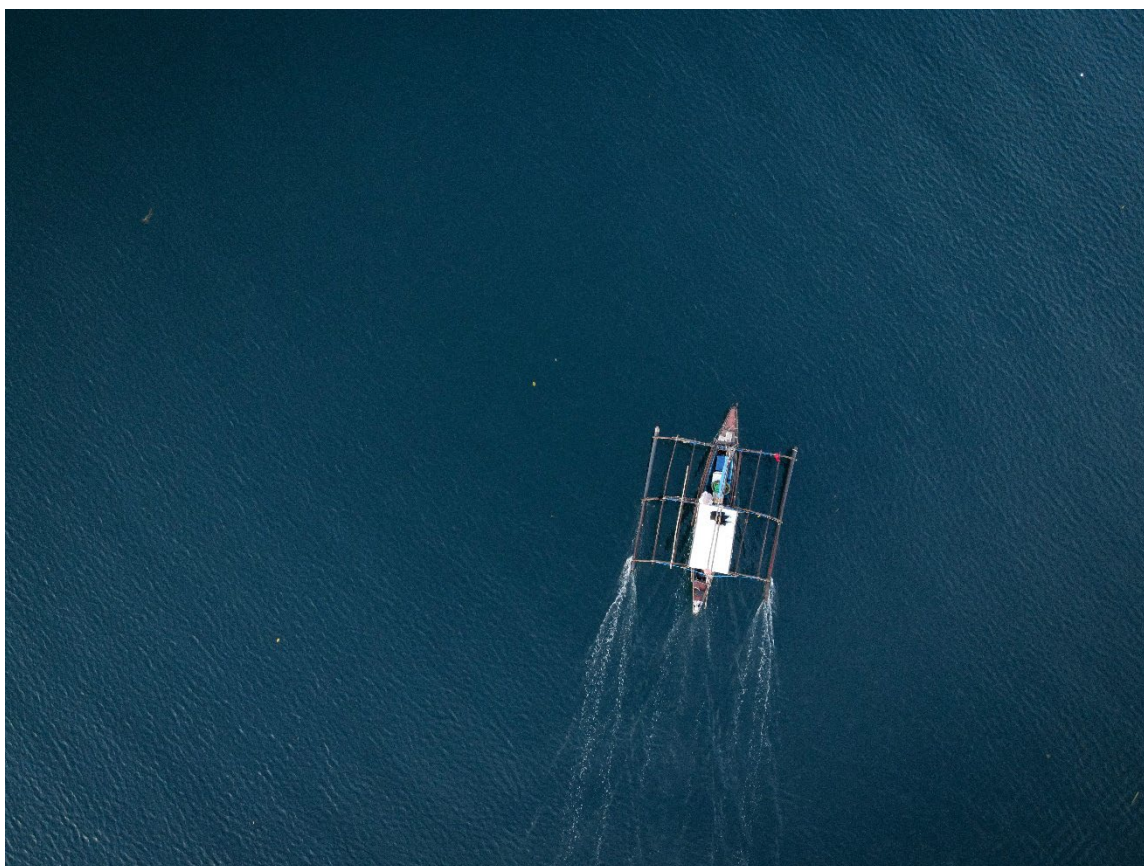
In 2022, SuFiA TS conducted a GESI Analysis during its start-up to identify and assess pressing gender and social inclusion issues and constraints and specify how proposed interventions will affect not only women, but also the youth, small scale fishers, migrants, and other marginalized social groups. This Analysis was developed around five domains looking at laws, policies, and institutional practices; gender roles, responsibilities and time uses; access to and control over assets and resources; and patterns of power and decision-making. From this GESI Analysis, a Gender and Inclusive Development Action Plan (GIDAP) was developed to outline proposed systematic interventions that could help address the issues and challenges identified.

SuFiA TS's GESI Analysis in the Indo-Pacific Region identified the lack of easily accessible and pertinent gender-disaggregated data covering the issues, gaps, and status related to women and youth in regional fisheries. As a result, the role and potential of women and youth in the fisheries sector, including in the sustainability of small-scale fisheries, has largely been undocumented or absent.

In response, and as part of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID)'s efforts to address gender inequity and social exclusivity within regional seafood supply chains, SuFiA TS conducted fieldwork activities from February 13 to March 4, 2023 to document first and second-hand testimonials from small-scale fishers (men, women, and youth), fishing communities (wives of fishers and youth), government officials, private sector entities, business associations, academia, and community-based organizations in three countries (Indonesia, Philippines, Vietnam), on the learnings and experiences related to the role of women and youth in fisheries.

Based on the fieldwork findings and desk reviews, this case study highlights the roles and challenges of women and youth in small-scale fisheries in selected countries in the Indo-Pacific region, drawing from their voices in the Southeast Asian coastal communities. The case study also outlines how USAID efforts, through SuFiA TS, will contribute to unlocking women's and youth's full potential and provide more opportunities for women, youth, and under-represented fishers working in the global seafood supply chain. The case study focuses on financial aspects and alternative livelihood of small-scale fishing communities.

BACKGROUND



A wooden boat, view from the top, used by small-scale fishers in Masinloc, Zambales, Philippines/ Jed Leonard/ USAID SuFiA TS.

Geographically, the Indo-Pacific region covers the interconnected space between the Indian and Pacific Oceans and has the highest marine biodiversity and the most productive fisheries on the planet (Roberts et al., 2002; Veron et al., 2009). The region's fisheries sector provides most of the animal protein for its people, fosters economic growth, and lowers poverty in the Indo-Pacific region by providing jobs and livelihoods in coastal, urban, and rural communities (SuFiA TS, 2022).

Within the fisheries sector, small-scale fisheries are complementary in contributing to food security, poverty alleviation, and employment opportunities (FAO, 2021). They are deeply rooted in local communities (FAO, 2015) and can be characterized by their social production and exchange (Fabinyi et al., 2022). Many small-scale fishers are self-employed and usually provide fish for direct consumption within their households or communities. However, they also contribute to about half of global fish catches and are dependent on market trade (FAO 2015; Fabinyi et al., 2022; Johnson, 2006).

Women account for 46% of the total small-scale fisheries workforce in the pre-harvest, harvest, and post-harvest segments (SuFiA TS, 2022), such as net mending, processing, marketing, and trade. In addition, although reported statistics largely fail to capture youth engagement in the sector (Arulingam et al., 2019), the region is currently home to over 60% of 15- to 24-year-olds, or more than 750 million young women and men (UNESCAP, 2013). The fieldwork findings revealed that in the small-scale fisheries sector, both women and youth are significant participants as part of the family members of small-scale fisher household and fishing communities. Moreover, youth

participation in small-scale fisheries follows the broader patterns of gendered divisions of labor, where young men are primarily involved in the main fishing activities and young women in other aspects of the value chains, such as processing and trading (Arulingam et al., 2019).

These findings imply that women and youth play essential roles in the small-scale fisheries sector. However, their contributions are often hidden and informal (CGIAR, 2016; Arulingam et al., 2019; Kusakabe and Thongprasert, 2022), making them invisible as contributing actors for economic development, key transmitters of knowledge and change agents, and limiting their potential to benefit from small-scale fisheries economies and become equal contributors to the sector.

Through this case study, SuFiA TS aims to recognize the roles of women and youth in sustainable small-scale fisheries in the region and identify their challenges. The case study also aims to describe how USAID, through SuFiA TS, will contribute to unlocking women's and youth's full potential to participate in the collective efforts to achieve the sustainability of small-scale fishers in the region, with focus on financial aspects and alternative livelihood of small-scale fishing communities.

WOMEN IN SMALL-SCALE FISHERIES



A woman fisher in Bitung, North Sulawesi along with her son pulling their fishing boat ashore/ Revel Parengkuan/ USAID SuFiA TS.

Previous studies show that women's contribution to fisheries is often overlooked or undervalued (USAID Oceans, 2018; FAO, 2018; SuFiA TS, 2022). Women are often considered unsuitable for fishing due to perceived physical limitations or social roles such as their responsibility to care for their households. As a result, they face barriers, including limited access to credit, training, technology, mobility, and natural resources (FAO, 2018; SuFiA TS, 2022).

These existing inequalities cause women to have less bargaining power and significantly limit their opportunities to contribute to and benefit equitably from the small-scale fisheries economy. In spite of these challenges, SuFiA TS found that in some cases, women own boats and finance fishing operations that employ men or participate in primary fishing activities.

The following section provides more information on women's roles in small-scale fisheries in the Indo-Pacific region, drawing from their voices and experiences in coastal communities surrounding the Southeast Asian waters.

WOMEN'S ROLES AND CHALLENGES

In Batuputih Atas village, located along the coastline of the Sulu-Sulawesi Seascape near Bitung in North Sulawesi, Indonesia, a few of the women go out to sea to fish. However, many work as marketers (intermediaries) and traders (retailers), both referred to as "Tibo-Tibo" in Bitung.

"Fishing is the main livelihood in this village. While most fishers are men, there are also women, like me, who go fishing," says Elsy Takarendehang, a fisher, and a mother of two.

During the interview, Elsy mentions that being a fisher is physically challenging for women and men, especially when the weather condition is terrible, with high tides and strong winds.

When she is away fishing, her in-laws or neighbors always lend a hand to care for her children. In addition to fishing, Elsy markets and sells the fish herself. She mostly catches grouper, bream, and snapper.



Elsye Takarendehang during an interview in Bitung, North Sulawesi, Indonesia/ Revel Parengkuan/ USAID SuFIA TS.

"I always sell the day's catch while still on the boat at sea. Once I catch a certain volume of fish, I would post on my Facebook and receive confirmation instantly from my buyers, and they would pick up the fish on shore off my boat," said Elsy.

While she claims she could instantly sell her catch by marketing it on Facebook, Elsy only has access to intermediary buyers rather than the market itself.

Elsye understands that she should not rely only on fishing for her livelihood but should also find an alternative income source to support her family. This is useful especially when she could not go fishing due to unfavorable weather conditions or during closed fishing season. However, she also understands that she needs access to appropriate training and financial capital to do so.

According to Elsy, the local Marine Fisheries Office provides access to the "KUSUKA" (*Kartu Pelaku Usaha Kelautan dan Perikanan/ Marine and Fisheries Business Actor Card*) as a verification of professional identity for all fishers. The card serves as evidence that the holder is a registered fisher, facilitating protection and empowerment, services, and guidance to business actors in the marine fisheries sector. With the card, all men and women who are involved in fisheries (including fishers, fish farmers, traders, and distributors) across Indonesia, have access to insurance, social assistance, and welfare benefits (Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries of the Republic of Indonesia, 2018). Elsy was able to access the card through the collaborative efforts of USAID Oceans and Fisheries Partnership (USAID Oceans) and the Marine Fisheries Office in Bitung, North Sulawesi in 2020.

"I can access micro-credit loans with the card, but I do not have access to a financial literacy program to help me understand interest rates, installment plans, and most importantly, how to succeed in the business," says Elsy.

Elsye's experience confirms that the role of women in small-scale fisheries is not limited to processing and marketing. It is also essential to recognize that more efforts are still required to address the need for women's full participation in small-scale fisheries, including access to adequate and relevant training.

Moving to the other end of the Sulu-Sulawesi coastlines, in Bongao, Tawi-Tawi, Philippines, the role of fishers is primarily associated with men because fishing is considered too physically challenging for women. Meanwhile, despite cultural beliefs that women should bear the primary responsibility of caring for their households, women in Bongao also play the role of dried fish processors or traders, and some are boat owners.



An-Rafi (first from the right) and a group of fishers' wives during an interview in Bongao, Tawi-Tawi, Philippines/ Fauriza Saddaril/ USAID SuFiA TS.



A woman drying fish in An-Rafi's community in Bongao, Tawi-Tawi, Philippines/ Fauriza Saddaril/ USAID SuFiA TS.

An-Rafi also helps her husband, a fisher, make logistic preparations before he sets sail, such as preparing baits, clothes, and food. In addition, she helps her brother sort quality dried fish (sardines) before her brother delivers them to the buyers. Similar to Elsy's situation in Batuputih Atas, most small-scale fishers in An-Rafi's community only have access to intermediary buyers. However, unlike in Bitung, the women in Bongao claim that there is no similar program here to the "KUSUKA." An-Rafi also says that small-scale fishers in her community do not have any insurance, savings, or access to financial support. Instead, debt is their life partner.

The women in An-Rafi's community explains that their husbands would only receive payment from buyers two weeks after they reached home. Since they must buy food for the family and prepare for the next fishing operation, they would seek loans from the buyer or boat owner to make ends meet. As a result, the women in An-Rafi's community wish for economic empowerment programs, such as access to capital to start small businesses, training in marketing, access to fishing or drying equipment, and access to markets.

From her claims, it seems that An-Rafi is not aware of the FishR or Municipal Fisherfolk Registration, a fishers' registration program of the Philippine government implemented by the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR), and the fisherfolk associations. FishR facilitates BFAR's delivery of services directly to fisherfolk comprised of the municipal and city fishers, fish vendors, fish farmers and all other workers in the sector. Through the FishR program, BFAR is able to identify actual beneficiaries, thus, this will help the national government to allocate budget for the fisherfolk. The specific benefits might not be the same as Indonesia.

In the Natuna Islands regency, part of the Riau Islands province in Indonesia situated along the coastlines of the North Natuna Sea, women are perceived as unsuitable for fishing due to their responsibility to care for their households.



Maya (left) with her husband during an interview in front of her house in the Natuna Islands Regency, Riau Islands, Indonesia/ Ariani Hasanah Soejoetil/ USAID SuFiA TS.

Maya, a fisher's wife, and the head of the neighborhood, observes that most women in her community are stay-at-home wives, caring for their children and occasionally involved in social and religious activities in the neighborhood. However, she has seen a few neighbors helping their husbands with their fishing businesses – hauling fish off the boat, and drying fish. She also mentioned that there are a few female retailers who travel around her neighborhood selling products with their motorbike.

Maya notes that although most women are not involved directly in fisheries, they are responsible for the financial management of their household. She said that the husbands give their wives the money they earn from fishing, and the wives manage it. When asked to whom her husband sells his catch, Maya says,

"the boss." She referred to "the boss" as the intermediary buyer with whom her husband has a long-binding relationship.

Maya then explains that the money she receives from her husband is often not enough for them to get by, and they are constantly in debt to "the boss." According to Maya, "the boss" provides small-scale fishers, like her husband, with boats, seed money to buy fuel and gears for fishing operations, and loans for daily necessities. All fishers in her community have this kind of relationship with their boss for over a decade.

"The boss is also our regular buyer. My husband will sell his catch to the boss at any price he sets. The boss then sells the fish somewhere else, but we do not know where, to whom, and for how much," says Maya.

Like the situations faced by Elsy and An-Rafi, small-scale fishers in Maya's community only have access to intermediary buyers, which undervalue their catch, leaving small-scale fishers with very little profit.

In Masinloc, Zambales, Philippines, the interviews revealed that most women in the small-scale fishers' community are not involved in the main fishing activities. However, most of them are involved in post-harvest activities, such as sorting out the fish and delivery. Many women also play a more active role in small-scale businesses, selling snacks or processed meats to generate more income for their family.

"Every day, I help my husband prepare the logistics before he goes fishing, like fishing gear, battery, and food supplies," says Minerva.

She then adds, "I also help with the delivery. I usually wait for my husband's boat to come ashore, then I will get the cooler box with the fish from him, sort out the fish, and once it is ready, I will call my buyer, and he will pick it up."

As was the case for Elsy, An-Rafi, and Maya, in Minerva's community, fishers also have no direct market access. Instead, they all sell their catch to intermediary buyers. As a result, the negotiated price of the catch falls way under the market price.



Minerva during an interview in Masinloc, Zambales, Philippines/ Chelsea Lanzoni/ USAID SuFIA TS.

According to Minerva, she has gone to the same buyer, "suki," over the past 20 years. She also mentioned that her husband goes fishing every day and, on average, can catch 40 kg of fish, with the lowest price of PHP 100 per kg (equivalent to \$2). The type of catch includes squid, bonito/skipjack tuna, yellowfin tuna, and round scad.

Although it is rare for women in Minerva's community to go fishing, they try going with their husbands at least once or twice over their lifetime.

"Fishing is physically and mentally challenging, not only for women but for men too," says Minerva.

She also says the financial aspects of being a fisher or living in a fisher's household are challenging. For example, during closed season when fishing is not allowed, or their husbands could not go fishing due to the weather or illness, they have no income. Therefore, they must find alternative sources of income and, most of the time, ask for loans. Similar to Bongao, small-scale fishers in Minerva's community do not have any insurance or savings. However, there is a cooperative initiative that is accessible to fishers.



From left to right: Letecia, Leonicia, Florencia, and Charrelyn, a group of fishers' wives in Minerva's community who are doing businesses in Masinloc, Zambales, Philippines/ Ariani Hasanah Soejoeti/ USAID SuFiA TS.

The financial constraint drives the women in Minerva's community to think creatively about how to generate more income without being away from their children. Although there is no formally structured system in Masinloc for women's empowerment programs, these women formed an organic system within their community wherein they can establish small businesses, allowing them to complement each other by providing products or services among themselves. For example, Minerva sells breakfast packages, allowing other women who cannot cook (for various reasons) to buy breakfast from her. Meanwhile, another woman provides delivery services for daily needs products, allowing other women who could not go out to benefit from this service.

The women have realized that they wanted their businesses to grow too, and for that, they need more support, such as access to capital and markets, and financial and life skills training.

This adaptive capability demonstrated by the women interviewed in this study showed that with adequate access to finance and training, women can potentially contribute to the economic growth of small-scale fishing communities and increase their resilience toward poverty.

YOUTH IN SMALL-SCALE FISHERIES



A young fish trader at a local market in Batam, Riau Islands/ Firmansyah Maulana Mughni/ USAID SuFiA TS.

With 60% of the world's youth residing in the region, the youth represent a crucial group that has the potential to contribute to the sustainability of small-scale fisheries and effect change. While reported statistics largely fail to capture youth engagement in the sector (Arulingam et al., 2019), the fieldwork findings revealed that in small-scale fisheries, youth are significant contributors to the sector despite many challenges. These challenges are shared with other social groups, including women, people with disabilities, and other traditionally marginalized groups (SuFiA TS, 2022).

The participation of youth in small-scale fisheries generally follows the broader patterns of gendered divisions of labor highlighted in the previous section, where young men are primarily involved in the main fishing activities and young women in other nodes of the fisheries value chain, such as processing and trading (Arulingam et al., 2019). In many small fishing communities, most young men involved with the main fishing activities consider fishing the only livelihood they can access due to their low educational background. For these young men, fishing is not a choice but a necessity.

The following section provides more information on youth's roles in small-scale fisheries in the Indo-Pacific region, drawing from their voices in the Sulu Sulawesi Seascape and the South China Sea coastal communities.

YOUTH ROLES AND CHALLENGES

The male youth groups interviewed in Bongao, Tawi-Tawi, come from a generation of fishing families whose ancestors started fishing at a young age (between 7 to 13 years old). They all spent a great deal of their time working as boat crews in small to medium-scale fishing vessels. When asked about their educational background, they claimed they only went to primary school due to financial constraints. As a result, fishing became a necessity and not an option for them.



Young fishers working as boat crews in small to medium-scale fishing vessels in Bongao, Tawi-Tawi, Philippines/ Fauriza Saddari/ USAID SuFIA TS.

"Most of my friends with better access to education opted to work onshore. Like me, they came from a generation of fishing families but had little interest in following their father's footsteps. However, they all want a better economic situation," says 18-year-old Sali, one of the interviewees.

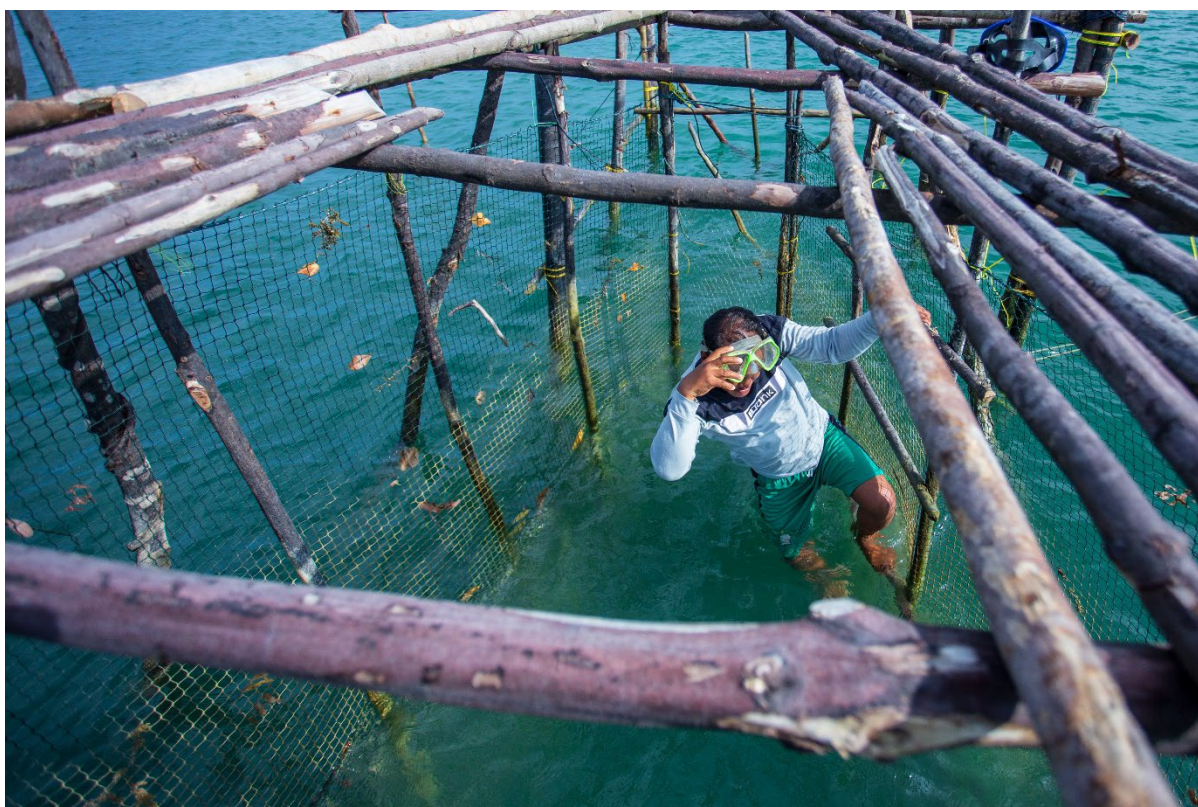
"I tried to find work in other places, like restaurants, clerical work, and others, but was constantly being rejected. So, in the end, I gave up and started to work as a boat crew in the Kulibo fishing vessel," says 19-year-old Reymond,

With fishing as a necessity, they have to work diligently. They go fishing every day, up to 22 days a month, leaving at 4 pm and returning at 6 am the next morning. These youth care about protecting their waters and do not practice illegal fishing activities, such as using dynamite, cyanide, or compressors. Instead, they use ring nets to catch small pelagic fish, like sardines and scads.

When they cannot go fishing due to the weather or during closed season for fishing, most of them would do manual labor, including working on construction sites or driving tricycles. This type of seasonal work is common to the other young fishers in their community.

Aside from having limited access to higher education and decent work, these young fishers also share about the financial situation that they are facing. Many of them claim they do not have any savings. Instead, they are always in debt. They borrow money from the boat owner for their fishing operations and daily needs and settle the debt once they receive payment. However, after the settlement, they are left with an insufficient amount of money that could not make ends meet, forcing them to return to the cycle of debt again.

According to Sali, youth should be given more opportunities to access education and training. It will allow them to become better fishers and provide more opportunities to find better alternative livelihoods when they cannot go fishing. Despite the current situation, Sali, Reymond, and other young fishers in their community say they remain hopeful and continue looking for more opportunities to improve their economic situation. In Batam, the capital city of Riau Islands province in Indonesia, a young man named Rusdi, 26, was interviewed about youth participation in small-scale fisheries.



A young fisher preparing to catch the fish in the clap in Batam, Riau Islands/ Firmansyah Maulana Mughni/ USAID SuFIA TS.

Rusdi is a member of the *Maritim Muda Nusantara* (MMN/ Young Maritime Archipelago) Batam chapter, which covers the Natuna Islands regency. His organization is one of the largest youth-based organizations in Indonesia that focus on marine and fisheries issues, with chapters and branches across the country with a vision to support and empower fishing communities in their respective area through data, research, and advocacy.

According to Rusdi, most of the members of his organization come from a generation of fishing families, but only some are willing to continue their family tradition.

"The young generation from small fishing communities become less and less interested in becoming fishers because they do not want to face the same hardship experienced by their elders," says Rusdi, a recent university graduate in water resources management.

In contrast, many of his peers are more interested in the business side of the fishing industry because, like Rusdi, they all want to change the future of small-scale fishers.

Compared to the young fishers interviewed in Bongao, the younger generation in Rusdi's community have greater access to higher education. However, the economic situation of small-scale fishers in his community is similar to the previous group, i.e., no savings and always in debt.

In the pursuit of making small-scale fishers' lives better, Rusdi joined the MMN. He was the chair of the MMN Batam chapter from 2020 to 2021. He explained that in this role, he designed and initiated a community-based financing support program based on his family's experience of being trapped in a vicious lending scheme. "The program aimed to reduce fishers' dependency on loan providers by setting up small community co-operatives to provide financial support to local fishing communities," explains Rusdi.

Moreover, Rusdi says the district-based fisheries supply chain mapping program aims at improving the understanding of the value chain, identifying opportunities for value addition, and addressing issues of price volatility and unfair distribution of benefits.

Unfortunately, the community-based financing support program and district-based supply chain mapping program halted due to the Covid-19 pandemic, and the resulting lack of funding and travel restrictions made fieldwork and data collection challenging.

Now, Rusdi is no longer the chair of MMN but is still an active member and continues to advocate for MMN's work, empowering the youth in his community to think seriously about the future of small-scale fishers and to have savings for the rainy days.

In Masinloc, on the West Philippine Sea, an interview with a youth group (composed of young men and women) also revealed that many of the youth from this small-scale fishers' community have no interest in working in fishing. However, some of them show an interest in the business side of fisheries, such as buying and selling.



A young fish trader at a local fish market in Masinloc, Zambales, Philippines/ Jed Leonard/ USAID SuFiA TS.

One of the interviewees says that he started helping his father to fish because he could not continue his higher education studies due to financial constraints. They mention that their parents do not encourage them to be involved in fisheries, whether as fishers or traders. Instead, most of their parents want their kids to find jobs in government institutions or private companies with a more stable income.

"I do not want to go out to sea to fish, not because I am a girl, but because I am more interested in the buy-and-sell business side of it," claimed Glycel, a 22-year-old who just finished her college degree. She continues, "It is hard being a daughter of a fisher, and there are many factors that caused the hardship.

Almost everyone in the youth group says the same thing. They often worry when their fathers are away fishing because anything could happen, from being stranded at sea to boat accidents.

growing up, I have seen many adversities that they face, but they continue to stand strong against all tides in life," she added.

"Even so, I have so much respect for my father and other fishers in my community. Especially because

Most of the young people agreed with Glycel, and they understand well the hardship that their parents go through. They are also concerned with the injustices their fathers face as small-scale fishers. They know that their fathers have low bargaining power regarding the selling price of the fish they catch. They observe that the buyer always buys the fish from the fishers at a low price but then sells the fish at the market or to commercial fishing companies at a very high price.

"My father has to endure 12 hours of hardship at sea against strong winds and big waves, yet he gets very little in return," says Glycel.

Glycel is currently working as the Communication and Program Associate at the Impl. project, a non-profit organization created to overcome the hurdles of aid work. She explained that through her work, she serves the local fishers by helping them establish a cooperative system that provides basic needs for fishing operations, and savings services and loans to fishers. She feels that her work is important because she can help small-scale fishers reach their full potential as an individual and be able to contribute to local economic development.

The interviews highlighted in this section show that youth have the adaptive capability to respond to the challenging situation faced by their communities. With adequate access to education, training, and decision-making processes, they will potentially contribute to economic development and drive positive changes.

In an effort to address youth inclusion, to amplify youth voices, and to build up their capacities in fisheries and coastal resources management, including leadership and empowerment as agents of change, USAID SuFiA TS and the Coral Triangle Initiative on Coral Reefs, Fisheries and Food Security initiated the Coral Triangle Youth Ambassadors' Program. The young people featured in this article will be reached out by the Youth Ambassadors in their countries to participate in local activities they organize.

UNLOCKING THE POTENTIAL OF WOMEN AND YOUTH FOR THE SUSTAINABILITY OF SMALL-SCALE FISHERIES

The challenges women and youth face are shared by other social groups, including people with disabilities, and other traditionally marginalized groups (SuFiA TS, 2022), as confirmed by the voices of women and youth in the previous sections. These challenges also demonstrate how undervalued small-scale fishers are, although they contribute to about half of global fish catches.

One of the examples showing the undervaluing of small-scale fishers is the patron-client relationship ("suki" in the Philippines or "the boss" in Natuna Islands regency) which replaces formal financial infrastructures in all small-scale fishing communities across the Sulu-Sulawesi Seascape and the South China Sea. Patrons finance fishing operations by providing loans in exchange for fish and loyalty. Patrons also have the power to set the price. Although this relationship is established voluntarily and offers fast financial solutions for small-scale fishers in the short term, it also creates unhealthy dependency, in the long run, harming their resiliencies. Most importantly, it is against the fair-trade principles and undervalues the hardships endured by small-scale fishers.

Despite the challenges they faced, the women and youth interviewed have shown a remarkable creativity and resiliency to adapt and find opportunities to improve their well-being and communities, safeguard their primary source of livelihood, and look for alternative solutions. However, they need more opportunities to unlock their potential fully.

USAID has heard the challenges expressed by women and youth in the small-scale fisheries sector and is working with its regional partners through SuFiA TS to provide additional opportunities for women, youth, and under-represented fishers by implementing the following intervention plan.

1. Support the establishment of a Gender Equality (GE) Regional Hub, working with regional organizations and potential partners to advocate and support efforts to ensure the inclusion of women, youth, and under-represented fishers within regional fisheries policies, standards, legal framework, and programming. SuFiA TS will invite all women and youth featured in this case study to be members of the GE Regional Hub.
2. Develop and conduct inclusive regional capacity development programs and initiatives to elevate understanding and support for women, youth, and under-represented fishers to engage with and participate in fisheries management by regional organizations (including civil society organizations, non-government organizations, and research groups) and the private sector. Additionally, develop and implement inclusive capacity development programs to improve access and control over resources for women, girls, and under-represented fishers and increase opportunities for their representation in decision-making processes.
3. Support the Coral Triangle Initiative for Coral Reefs, Fisheries and Food Security (CTI-CFF) in the revision of the Sustainable Coastal Fisheries and Poverty Reduction Initiative (COASTFISH) Framework with the vision for resilient and self-sustaining coastal communities in the Coral Triangle region supported by sustainable livelihoods that maintain ecological integrity.
4. Support the development of a Youth Ambassadors and Young Program in partnership with the Coral Triangle Initiative for Coral Reefs, Fisheries and Food Security (CTI-CFF) to empower the youth with knowledge, awareness, and capacity to lead, and provide opportunities to network with other youth and young leaders to making positive changes in the region. Additionally connect the CTI-CFF Youth Ambassadors with the youth groups featured in the case study to widen their networks.

5. Develop and organize wider communication, outreach, and tools to increase the visibility of women, girls, and under-represented fishers.

In summary, when given opportunities, women and youth can contribute to the collective efforts in achieving economic growth of small-scale fishers and increase resilience toward poverty.

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