



Photo: Local fish market in Bitung, North Sulawesi. Photo by: Revel Parengkuan/ ©USAID SuFiA TS

Bringing Women and Youth in the Regional Efforts to Address Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing (IUU) in the Indo-Pacific Region

Submission Date: August 24, 2023

Approval Date: February 27, 2024

GSA OASIS Contract GS00Q14OADU138 (Pool I)

Task Order No. 72048622N00001

Contract/Agreement Period: November 24, 2021, to November 23, 2025

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The authors' views expressed in this document do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Agency for International Development or the United States Government.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This white paper was planned and co-authored by Ariani Hasanah Soejoeti, Senior Communications and Outreach Specialist, SuFiA TS, Chelsea Lanzoni, Associate I, Environment and Natural Resources, and Jasmin Mohd. Saad, Gender Equality and Social Inclusion, Fisheries Management, and Marine Biodiversity Specialist, member of the Regional Expert Technical Team, SuFiA TS with the support and invaluable contributions of the SuFiA TS team, specifically John Parks, Arlene Nietes Satapornvanit, T. Hue Nguyen, Farid Maruf, Frengky Sihombing, and Joey Pedrajas.

We want to express our profound gratitude to the amazing partners and small-scale fishers, including women and youth, who shared their experiences in the interviews. Their willingness to contribute was instrumental in shaping this white paper.

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ACRONYMS

ASEAN	:	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
APEC	:	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
APFIC	:	Asia-Pacific Fishery Commission
BOBP	:	Bay of Bengal Programme
CTI-CFF	:	Coral Triangle Initiative on Coral Reefs, Fisheries, and Food Security
FAO	:	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
GESI	:	Gender Equality and Social Inclusion
GIDAP	:	Gender and Inclusive Development Action Plan
ICFA	:	International Coalition of Fisheries Associations
IUU Fishing	:	Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated fishing
IPNLF	:	International Pole and Line Foundation
RFMO	:	Regional Fisheries Management Organizations
RPOA-IUU	:	Regional Plan of Action to promote responsible fishing practices including combating IUU Fishing
SEAFDEC	:	Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center
SEAFish	:	Southeast Asia Fish for Justice Network
SuFiA TS	:	Sustainable Fish Asia Technical Support
SDG	:	Sustainable Development Goals
UN	:	United Nations
UNDESA	:	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UN Women	:	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
USAID	:	United States Agency for International Development
USAID Oceans	:	United States Agency for International Development Oceans and Fisheries Partnership

INTRODUCTION

Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing activities are critical threats to worldwide maritime security, global fish stocks, the economy, and the environment. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations and SDG 14, "Life Below Water," reflect the growing concern of the severe consequences and extent of IUU fishing on a global scale, which emphasizes that 30% of the world's fish stocks are overexploited and threatening over three billion people who depend on marine and coastal biodiversity for their livelihoods (Chapsos, Koning, and Noortmann, 2019). This includes women and youth in coastal and fishing communities who provide labor to the fishing industry or conduct trading along the fishery value chain. Small-scale and stateless fishers are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of IUU practices exacerbating poverty incidences, increasing food insecurity, and causing loss of livelihoods (Mackay, Hardesty, and Wilcox, 2020; SuFiA TS, 2022).

Past studies also highlighted a nexus between IUU fishing and other transnational organized crimes, such as drug trafficking and forced and unfair labor (Chapsos and Hamilton, 2019; Mackay, Hardesty, and Wilcox, 2020; SuFiA TS, 2022) as IUU fishing occurs both on the high seas and in areas within national jurisdiction and mostly driven by economic reasons.

The U.S. Government has and is one of the main partners and supporters in combating IUU fishing in the Asia-Pacific region, through various investments such as the ones implemented by the United States Agency for International Development Regional Development Mission for Asia (USAID/RDMA). One of these initiatives is the Sustainable Fish Asia Technical Support (SuFiA TS) Activity (2021-2025), with the goal of improving 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 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.

Systematic discrimination in the fisheries sector makes it challenging for them to participate in decision-making and access resources and information about their rights as equal contributors to the fishing and seafood industries. Moreover, women staff half of all fisheries jobs and are critical to keeping the industry operational, but their contributions are hidden and undervalued, and they are almost always at a disadvantage when compared to men.

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 youth, small scale fishers, migrants, and other marginalized social groups. This Analysis was developed around five (5) domains looking at the 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.

The GESI Analysis identified two key issues: (i) the lack of data and information in reporting, analysis, monitoring and evaluation of fisheries projects and programs; and (ii) the lack of visibility of women and other marginalized social groups' contribution to the fishery industry, that when addressed, may result in improving the status quo of these communities. The GIDAP highlighted one key priority intervention in this regard – to develop and organize wider communication, outreach, and tools to increase the visibility of women and other marginalized social groups.

To address the recommendations, SuFiA TS conducted desk review research and fieldwork activities on the impacts of IUU fishing on small scale fishers' communities and the role of women and youth in addressing the issue. The information gathered from research and field work activities produced materials aimed to raise the awareness of stakeholders on the importance of ensuring full and equal participation of women and youth in regional efforts in addressing IUU fishing.

The fieldwork documented 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, and Indonesia).

This paper is an output of this desk and field work and outlines the importance of involving women and youth in regional efforts to address IUU fishing in the Indo-Pacific region, and current efforts by regional organizations in addressing IUU fishing. This paper also provides recommendations for regional organizations' consideration on how to increase more opportunities for women and youth to contribute to the regional efforts to address IUU fishing.

BACKGROUND



Map of the Indo-Pacific region developed by SuFiA TS, 2023.

As the world's most biodiverse, species rich, vast body of water, the Indo-Pacific region is highly vulnerable to IUU fishing. Agnew et al. (2008) cite that an estimated 3.4 to 8.1 million tons of fish are taken by IUU fishing each year. Moreover, fishing is the primary source of protein that contributes to economic growth and supports the reduction of poverty in the region (SuFiA TS, 2022), making IUU fishing a severe threat to small-scale fishing communities.

Based on the FAO definition, IUU fishing entails a wide variety of fishing activities and is found in all types and dimensions of fisheries. These occur both on the high seas and in areas within national jurisdiction and concern all aspects and stages of the capture and utilization of fish. They may sometimes be associated with organized crime.

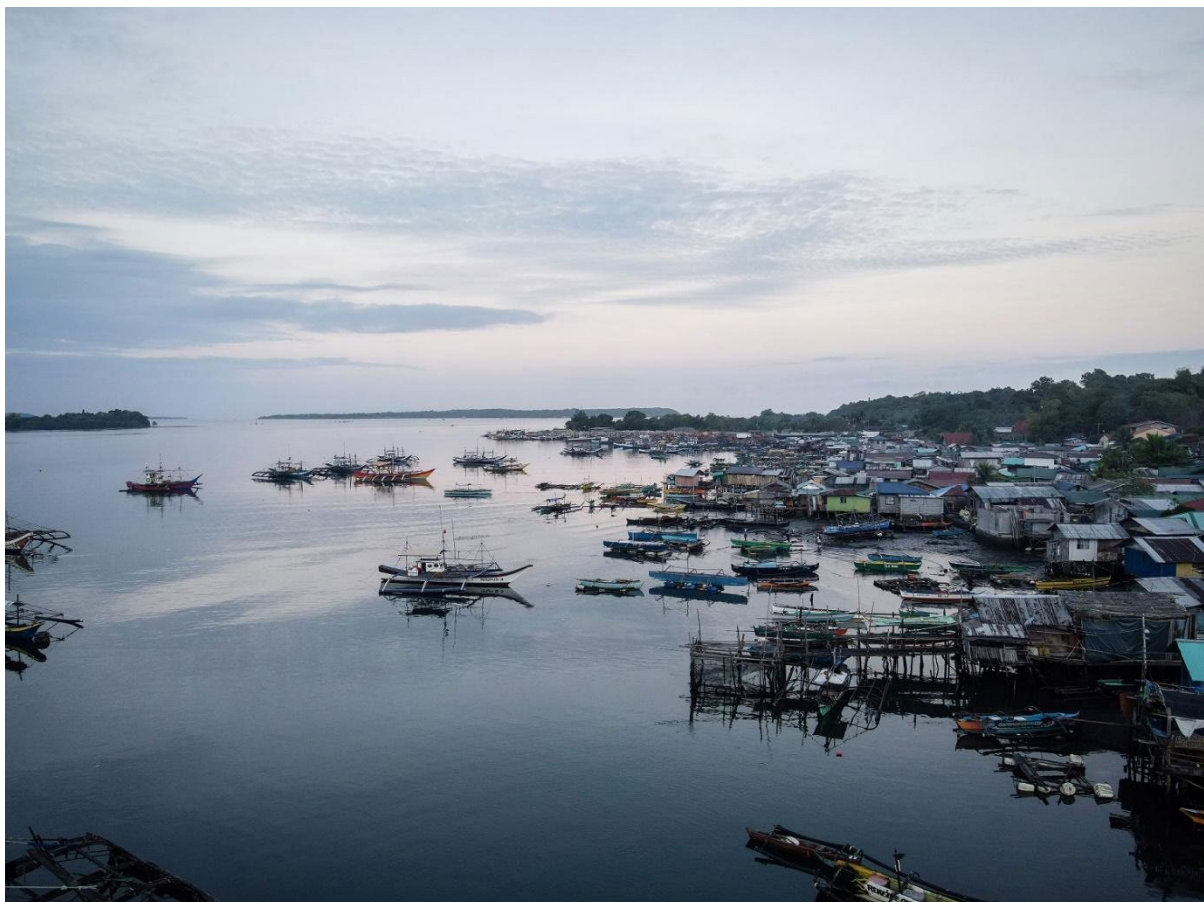
Moreover, IUU fishing is a complex and transboundary policy problem within national jurisdiction and on the high seas (Österblom, 2014). Hence enhancing regional resilience to IUU fishing through regional efforts initiated by regional organizations, including inter-governmental organizations, non-governmental organizations, and business associations, becomes vital for the benefit of all.

Over the past years, regional organizations have made increasing efforts to address IUU fishing, such as increasing collaboration in promoting regional catch documentation systems, organizing capacity-building programs in fisheries management, conducting information sharing and joint patrol programs, and improving enforcement (Wilcox et al., 2021). However, information on women and youth involvement in addressing the issue is still scarce, even though almost half of the population in

the region are women and youth (Stephenson, 2020). Women, through their different roles in the fisheries sector, paid or unpaid, potentially are able to improve livelihoods and more importantly contribute to sustainable fishing, such as preservation, conservation, and management of nearshore resources. While youth, as the future beneficiaries and guardians of the region's natural resources, can leverage and amplify regional efforts to enhance marine biodiversity conservation, promote (sea)food security, and advance the sustainable management of fisheries resources. Both women and youth can be considered as an extension of government efforts in managing coastal resources. That being the case, ensuring women and youth's full, equal, and meaningful participation in fisheries management, including addressing IUU fishing, is fundamental to achieve sustainability and inclusivity (USAID Oceans, 2018a; USAID Oceans, 2018b; FAO, 2020; SuFiA TS, 2022).

Drawing from the findings from field interviews and desk review research, this white paper highlights the importance of involving women and youth in regional efforts to address IUU fishing in the Indo-Pacific region and provides recommendations for regional organizations' consideration.

REGIONAL EFFORTS TO ADDRESS IUU FISHING



Coastlines Masinloc Zambales Philippines from above/ Jed Leonard/ USAID SuFiA TS

IUU fishing activities are driven mainly by economic reasons and given the strong demand in both local and global markets for seafood, it will most likely continue (Pauly et al., 2002; Le Gallic and Cox, 2006; Garcia and Rosenberg, 2010), resulting in severe consequences regionally and globally.

These IUU fishing activities are done through several modus operandi. According to Long et al. (2020), the modus operandi of IUU fishing, includes (list not exhaustive):

- Transshipment, or an activity where a fishing vessel transfers the catch to another fishing vessel without having to enter a port.
- Flags of convenience, or an activity where a fishing vessel flies a flag registered to a state without a genuine link to its owners.
- Ports of convenience, or an activity where a fishing vessel lands at ports with limited monitoring or reporting systems so the vessel can easily avoid proper inspection.
- Complex ownership networks, or when fisheries and their value chains operate across jurisdictions.
- Deactivating vessel identification and monitoring systems, or when a fishing vessel hides its identity by deactivating or manipulating the satellite-based automatic identification system.
- False documents and identification, or when a fishing vessel intentionally forges or alters its documentation.
- Poor working conditions and standards, or when a fishing vessel operator tricked its crews and provided no adequate labor conditions or safety equipment.

From the above modus operandi and acknowledging that IUU fishing occurs both on the high seas and in areas within national jurisdiction, collective efforts to address IUU fishing are critical to protect sensitive marine environments and ensure food sustainability, prevent damage to coastal economies, and uphold the security of the world's maritime communities.

Within the Indo-Pacific region, a range of efforts and programs are implemented by various intergovernmental organizations that focus on improving fisheries management capacity, surveillance, and enforcement. These organizations include the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Bay of Bengal Programme (BOBP), the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), the Asia-Pacific Fishery Commission (APFIC), the Coral Triangle Initiative on Coral Reefs, Fisheries, and Food Security (CTI-CFF), the Regional Plan of Action to promote responsible fishing practices including combating IUU Fishing (RPOA-IUU), and the Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center (SEAFDEC). Within these groups, both formal and informal collaborative working relationships are formed. (Wilcox et al., 2021; ASEAN website, 2020; SEAFDEC website, 2023)

Wilcox et al. stated that SEAFDEC is considered one of the key regional partners providing comprehensive standard operating procedures and training towards improving and enabling sustainable fisheries practices in the region.

Their training and program include a regional vessel registration program, capacity development for addressing IUU fishing, creating a regional catch documentation system, and a number of other efforts to address IUU fishing in the region. Meanwhile, the RPOA-IUU, which covers Southeast Asia and Oceania, is an active group for regional coordination and cooperation to address IUU fishing. Meanwhile, BOBP works in fisheries in the Bay of Bengal region and coordinates with surrounding countries and regional organizations. Furthermore, APEC ratified a roadmap for addressing IUU fishing among its members in 2019.

Aside from the above-mentioned intergovernmental organizations, several regional efforts initiated by non-government organizations also contribute to the fight against IUU fishing. These organizations include WorldFish, which contributes to the management of small-scale fisheries in the region, with strong collaborations in Bangladesh, Cambodia, Myanmar, and Timor-Leste; and through the Southeast Asia Fish for Justice Network (SEAFish), that focuses on fisheries and trade, community-based coastal resources management and trade, shrimp and aquaculture, and women in fisheries.

Other organizations and/or associations that work at the international and country level also contribute to the regional efforts in addressing IUU fishing. These organizations include VinaTuna, representing the interests of Vietnam's tuna fishers, traders, and processors; the International Pole and Line Foundation (IPNLF), an international organization that works both directly on the ground with fishers and communities and with decision makers such as Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs), local governments and multiple stakeholders; and the International Coalition of Fisheries Associations (ICFA), a coalition of the national fish and seafood industry trade associations from the world's major fishing nations.

The above overview indicates that regional efforts are essential to address IUU fishing because of its complexity and transboundary policy problem, and it also confirms that regional organizations have the power to facilitate the efforts. Nevertheless, despite the growing efforts and political will to address IUU fishing in the region, many studies and reports pointed out that challenges still exist, particularly since IUU fishing activities occurs on the high seas, beyond national jurisdiction, where governance frameworks are often weak, fragmented, or poorly enforced (Swan, 2004; Sydnes, 2005; Long et al., 2020; Wilcox et al., 2021). As much as the commercial fishers are affected by IUU fishing, the small-scale fishers are equally affected where catches are declining so much so that they had to fish further out to sea potentially encroaching into other fishing zones. Within these fishing groups and throughout the fisheries value chain, women comprise nearly half of the workforce, especially in the processing and trading (for small-scale fisheries) segment. Therefore, any fisheries management interventions and/or programs would only be successful if they consider the challenges and needs of the women and youth.

WHY ENGAGE WITH WOMEN AND YOUTH TO ADDRESS IUU FISHING?



Women fish traders at the local fish market in Nha Trang, Vietnam/ Huy Dong/ USAID SuFiA TS

Through the desk review, SuFiA TS found that information about women and youth involvement in addressing IUU fishing is still scarce, despite the growing efforts and political will of regional organizations mentioned in the previous section. Meanwhile, as pointed out in the background section, almost half of the population in the region are women and youth (Stephenson, 2020), making them equally prominent groups in the region. The Sustainable Development Goals Agenda (hereafter referred to as the 2030 Agenda) also recognizes that women and youth have a pivotal role to play as beneficiaries of actions and policies under the 2030 Agenda and as partners and participants in its implementation (UNDESA, 2018; UN Women, 2021). More importantly, ensuring women and youth's full and equal participation in fisheries, especially in addressing IUU fishing, is fundamental for achieving sustainability and inclusiveness (USAID Oceans, 2018a; USAID Oceans, 2018b; FAO, 2020; SuFiA TS, 2022).

From the fieldwork interviews, SuFiA TS found that women play many roles at all levels within the fisheries sector. They can be fishers, surveillance officers, prosecutors, lawyers, influential mothers and wives, investors, fish processors, storytellers, researchers, and many more. Each role can contribute to the collective efforts to address IUU fishing. For example, as a wife, a woman can

influence her husband's decision-making regarding responsible fishing and avoiding harmful tactics, like using dynamite and cyanide. Meanwhile, as a mother, she could navigate her children's pathways in attaining their careers in the fisheries sector.

Moreover, as law enforcement officers, women can directly contribute to enforcing the IUU fishing law and regulations and advocating for social protection. As storytellers, women can narrate and amplify the voices of other women and traditionally excluded, marginalized, and vulnerable groups, including small-scale and stateless fishers, of the serious consequences of IUU fishing on their livelihoods and their surrounding marine ecosystems that they depend on.

As investors, women can contribute to responsible business practices, especially in marine capture fisheries, by ensuring that businesses and companies receiving the investment abide by the IUU fishing law and regulations.

Similarly, based on the fieldwork interviews, SuFiA TS found that youth also play many roles at all levels in the fisheries sector. They can be fishers, entrepreneurs, researchers, and influencers. They bring new ideas and have the ability to seek out partnerships, network, and build alliances, not only within their generations but also between generations. Additionally, from the fieldwork interviews, SuFiA TS found that women and youth at different levels may complement each other's roles when addressing IUU fishing.

In small-scale fisheries communities for example, many youths play the role of boat crew members where they abide by the rules and regulation of sustainable fishing. Many of the groups that were interviewed by SuFiA TS during the fieldwork stated that fishing is their main livelihood and therefore they want to protect the ocean and prevent themselves from conducting any destructive fishing. SuFiA TS also met with youths who are working in local non-government organizations, working on different issues, including IUU fishing prevention.

In urban settings, SuFiA TS found that many youths play the role of entrepreneurs, establishing startup seafood businesses, may it be local, national, or international. They were full of ideas and always craved innovation. These young entrepreneurs wanted to be part of the change; therefore, they need more opportunities and access to policy makers and business associations.

Engaging with youth can offer policy decision makers a better understanding of the current trends in IUU fishing in today's rapidly changing work. Youth are more adaptable to new technologies and therefore they are also faster in finding out new sources of information as much as spreading causes. Youth represents a crucial generational node that will be responsible for the management and stewardship of the coastal and marine resources across the Indo-Pacific region. In sum, when given opportunities, women and youth can contribute equally to the sustainability of the fishing and seafood industries, including addressing IUU fishing.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Based on the findings and considering that women and youth are the two most prominent groups in the region who can play important roles in sustainable fisheries, the following are recommendations for regional organizations, including inter-governmental organizations, non-governmental organizations, and business associations to consider implementing, on how to bring women and youth in the regional efforts to address IUU fishing in the Indo-Pacific region.

Recommendations for inter-governmental organizations

- Open more access to women and youth to observe and learn regional policy decision-making processes through participation in regional learning exchange forums. Women and youth shall have more opportunities to share ideas and thoughts on how to address IUU fishing in their respective areas.
- Provide women and youth working in commercial fishing vessels and processing plants with knowledge and access to legal aid and information on fair labor, trafficking, and smuggling. Access will allow them to understand their rights and contribute to the regional advocacy efforts to address the issue.
- Invite women and youth to co-design and co-implement regional advocacy and campaign efforts to address IUU fishing. Inviting them to regional forums formed by RFMOs or other stakeholders will generate more creative and tangible ideas and amplify their voices.

Recommendations for non-governmental organizations

- Increase opportunities for women and youth in small-scale fisheries to access adequate education and training to improve their knowledge of sustainable fisheries. These opportunities will allow them to understand the consequences of IUU fishing and be able to participate in regional efforts to address them.

Recommendations for business associations

- Provide women and youth in the fisheries businesses, (micro, small, and medium) access to financial support, open market, training related to responsible business development, technology, and learning exchanges through regional forums. By accessing these, women and youth will have more opportunities to play a pivotal role as active contributors in addressing IUU fishing.

These recommendations align with the US Indo-Pacific Strategy (2022), ASEAN Communication Master Plan (2018), CTI-CFF Regional Plan of Action 2.0 (2021), SuFiA TS GESI Analysis Report (2022), and SuFiA TS GIDAP (2022). SuFiA TS encourages regional development partners and interested stakeholders to support the implementation of these recommendations.

In conclusion, regional efforts in addressing IUU fishing should include the promotion and systematic integration of women, youth and other marginalized or vulnerable groups into regional fisheries policy and management decision-making.

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