

DISCUSSION PAPER | MAY 2018

WOMEN IN MARITIME

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OVERVIEW: Diverse perspectives are essential to promoting maritime security. Women and men occupy unique roles in the maritime economy and are often differently affected by maritime crime. This discussion paper explores the role of gender in the maritime space across four Stable Seas issue areas: rule of law, coastal welfare, blue economy, and maritime mixed migration.

INTRODUCTION

Women are mending nets in Sierra Leone, building boats in Somalia, and marketing goods across Africa's coastal communities.¹ Defying traditional expectations, women are increasingly present at sea. To support this trend, the International Maritime Organization highlights the work of women in maritime spaces and aims to increase the number of women in industry trainings.² One Earth Future's Stable Seas Maritime Security Index has been developed to identify the complexities of and relationships between maritime challenges. By employing a more interconnected approach, the Stable Seas Index illuminates the diversity of stakeholders, both men and women, involved in maritime security.

This brief highlights several vignettes developed through research on the Stable Seas Index, showcasing the vital roles of women in an area where many assume them to be absent—the maritime space.

The full and meaningful participation of women in the economy, political decision-making, and society is key to addressing maritime challenges. Women contribute directly to coastal stability while playing important roles in solutions to maritime crime. Women's income goes directly to feeding their families and benefiting communities at a rate greater than men's.³ Women strongly influence behavior and decision-making in their families and communities, and this role can be wielded to create positive change and prevent participation in criminal activity, such as piracy.⁴ Increases in gender equality

contribute to more sustainable peace. In our "Gender Equality" vignette, we describe how women's political representation is critical to peacebuilding and conflict prevention. Women's participation in peace agreements increases, by more than a third, the likelihood of that agreement's having lasting impact.⁵ Inversely, gender inequality is associated with increased corruption and violence.⁶ Gender inequality may also amplify grievances around resource allocation, thereby increasing maritime instability.⁷



A female fisher in Thailand. Photo: Eirik Uhlen/Unsplash

Africa is making progress toward improving women's participation in policy making. In the African Union, nineteen member countries have adopted national action plans. In Senegal, women's representation in government has tripled since 2009. In The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Namibia, and Nigeria, women hold half or more of the countries' high-level political positions.

However, women also disproportionately face challenges to maritime-based employment and economic prosperity. They encounter numerous legal and cultural obstacles, some of which are outlined in our "Women and Coastal Welfare" vignette. Fewer than one-third of the countries featured in the Stable Seas Maritime Security Index have laws against gender discrimination in hiring or mandate equal compensation. In our "Invisible Fishers" vignette, we describe how women in the Sierra Leonian fisheries sector face barriers to accessing credit. As a result, women remain underrepresented in maritime positions, from navies to fisheries management, and their salaries are typically lower than those of their male counterparts.

Maritime crime affects women in unique ways. Illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing reduces food and economic security, and women's nutrition is most impacted when food is scarce.⁸ Illicit trade undermines economic security, and women are more likely to live in poverty.⁹ Trade in arms and drugs may facilitate or hide human trafficking,¹⁰ into which women and girls may be lured. In our "Minors for Sale" vignette, we describe how girls escaping desperate economic circumstances and forced labor in Gabon may become subjected to prostitution networks, while boys may be trafficked to work aboard fishing vessels. Illicit maritime activities do not exist in a vacuum, and what happens at sea has ripple effects on land.

While women's perspectives are essential to advancing maritime security, other identity factors—such as race, ethnicity, gender identity, income, education, social status, and age—also profoundly shape the way people are affected by maritime challenges. Poverty and lack of education reduce economic opportunities and increase exposure to labor and sex trafficking. As shown in Gabon, children may be especially vulnerable. This underscores the importance of including diverse perspectives in policy making and maritime security practices.



RULE OF LAW

Gender Equality

Inclusion of women strengthens the rule of law

Equal treatment under the law regardless of ethnicity, socioeconomic status, religion, subnational region, or gender is the basis of inclusive governance. Levels of inclusion vary greatly along the sub-Saharan coastline, though many states have made notable progress in this area, especially with regard to greater inclusion of women.



GREATER LIKELIHOOD FOR
INTER- & INTRA-STATE
VIOLENCE

HIGHER LEVELS OF
PERCEIVED & ACTUAL
CORRUPTION



As of 2016, nineteen members¹¹ of the African Union had developed and adopted national action plans on women, peace, and security, including several of the top-ranking coastal states included in this analysis. The objective of these national action plans is the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325, which calls for increased participation and representation of women at all levels of decision-making in an effort to empower women to participate as equals in peacebuilding and the prevention of conflict. These agreements do not speak specifically to the role of women in improving maritime governance, but they are an important step toward formalizing women's inclusion.

Several countries have improved women's representation through new legislation and development-oriented partnerships with regional and global organizations. Senegal, for example, has been particularly successful at incorporating gender parity into its governance structures.

Following the 2010 adoption of a new law requiring gender parity for candidates for elected positions, women's participation in local government tripled from 15.9 percent



Deputy Prime Minister of Namibia Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah shakes hands with politician Penehupifo Pohamba. Photo: Benutzer Chtrede

in 2009 to 47.2 percent in 2015. Furthermore, 20 percent of ministerial-level positions were held by women as of 2015. According to the most recent data from the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the World Bank, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Namibia, and Nigeria have even higher proportions of women in high-level political positions.¹²

As Sierra Leone emphasized in its national security strategy following its devastating civil war, poverty and a lack of social cohesion are national security threats that require civilian engagement to counter. To this end, Somalia is promoting women's economic empowerment through a number of fisheries projects by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). These projects include training women boat-builders and adding value to post-harvest fish catches. One community organizer working with the project notes,

“It is important to have women involved in these activities since their contributions have a big influence on ensuring stronger household level financial management and food security that will directly benefit their families.”

— Ms. Shukri Ahmed Mohamed, community organizer with FAO Somalia¹³

Programs like this, when coupled with equal property and business rights for women, can greatly expand licit opportunities in coastal economies. Equal application of the rule of law across society is necessary for good governance. Whether gender equality is achieved through legislated parity or economic initiatives, the equal application of the rule of law can only help the region achieve peace and security and alleviate poverty.



COASTAL WELFARE

Women and Coastal Welfare
Secure coastlines for all

Women's active participation in coastal economies helps create more stable, secure, and profitable coastal areas for all.

However, there are many obstacles to their full participation in the economy, in maritime industries in particular.

Maritime industries are no exception to this overall trend. There are fewer female seafarers than male ones, fewer women serving in navies and marine authorities, and fewer female members of coast guards.¹⁵ Women's participation in fisheries value chains is often limited to roles in

processing and marketing, rather than fishing and resource management, which are considered to be traditionally male roles.¹⁶



A woman cooks in Youpwe fishing village, Cameroon. Photo: Jean-Pierre Larroque, OEF

These differences in outcomes between men and women in business and the job market largely stem from the legal systems of their respective states. In sub-Saharan Africa in particular, women face multiple obstacles to equal participation in the economy:¹⁷

“Women today represent about 50 percent of the world's population and, for the past two decades, about 50 percent of the labor force. Yet there are stark differences in the outcomes they achieve: women are only half as likely as men to have a full-time wage-earning job. The women who do have paid jobs earn as much as one-third less than men. Fewer women than men are involved in trade or own registered companies. And women are more likely to work in low-productivity activities or informal employment.”

— Cecile Fruman, Author
*Why Gender Equality in Doing Business Makes Good Economic Sense*¹⁴



Photo: Vince Gx/Unsplash

- In five out of thirty countries considered in the index, there are extra procedures for women to start a business compared to the procedures required for men.
- In seventeen out of thirty countries, equal remuneration for work of equal value is not legally mandated.
- In twenty-one out of thirty countries, nondiscrimination based on gender in hiring is not legally mandated.
- In eighteen out of thirty countries, women cannot work the same jobs as men.
- In two out of thirty countries, pregnant women may be dismissed from their occupations.
- In addition to unequal legal rights in terms of employment, women also face a lack of protection against different forms of violence:
- In seventeen out of thirty countries, there are no clear criminal penalties for domestic violence.
- In eight out of thirty countries, there is no legislation that addresses sexual harassment.
- In twenty out of thirty countries, marital rape is not criminalized.

“The extent of the damage to the ocean is many decades shy of the impact of industrialisation on land, and there is still time, if we act now, to get the principles and the framework for the development of the ocean economy right. Business as usual is clearly not an option.”

— *The Economist Intelligence Unit Limited, 2015*

Removing obstacles to women’s participation in the economy and establishing functioning regulatory frameworks to protect women from violence are key steps toward having inclusive, sustainable, and secure coastal economies and welfare.



Women play a key role in the fisheries value chain. Photo: Jean-Pierre Larroque, OEF



Photo: Selim Yigi/Unsplash



BLUE ECONOMY

The Invisible Fishers

The overlooked role of women in fisheries supply chains

Imagine a person who makes their living from fisheries. The picture is likely of a “fisherman” traveling out to sea in a boat to catch fish. However, the fisheries value chain consists of many important links, from the mending of nets to the drying of fish for sale, and women make up a large and vital portion of this sector. In fisheries, women comprise the majority of processing and post-harvest workers worldwide; the FAO estimates over 90 percent of workers in this sector are women.²⁰

Despite the vital roles women play in the fisheries value chain, fishing is most often perceived to be men’s work. Women’s work in the fisheries sector often goes unrecognized in research and by creditors, policy makers, and development programs, resulting in a lack of support for their work, lack of access to markets, and exclusion from fisheries management and policy decisions. This is problematic for women’s livelihoods and empowerment, and it distorts fisheries data and results in misinformed management measures. Women’s work in the fisheries sector must be understood and supported in order to advance gender equity, food security, and effective fisheries management.

In Sierra Leone, the fisheries sector provides substantial revenue and employment, supporting over 500,000 people.²¹ Around 85 percent of those employed in fisheries processing in the country are women.²² Women and men generally occupy complementary roles in the value chain. Men catch fish from canoes or work from shore in groups to pull in nets of fish.²³ Once they come into port, they sell their catch to



Port-Gentil in Gabon. Photo: Justin Tallis/AFP/Getty Images

women who then perform the post-harvest activities, such as cleaning and drying the fish or bringing it directly to markets for sale. Much of the fish is obtained from family members, and most of the processing work is conducted within the home rather than in formal facilities.

Beyond post-harvest work, some women also catch fish directly, using nets to catch small fish in rivers and other small water bodies. Some women even lease boats and own fishing companies.²⁴ The fisheries sector and processing in particular provide important livelihood opportunities for women. However, their incomes are still much lower than those of their male counterparts,²⁵ and many women report struggling with other restrictive factors.



MIXED MIGRATION

Minors for Sale

How trafficking affects the most vulnerable victims

UNICEF estimates that 24 percent of global trafficking victims are children, but for sub-Saharan Africa this estimate rises to 64 percent.²⁶ Children are often vulnerable following negotiations to transport them for work, education, or formal training in another city

or country. Their parents are sometimes aware of the circumstances involved. Additionally, porous borders and lax regulatory environments allow for the trafficking of children to flourish.²⁷

In oil-rich Gabon and Equatorial Guinea, children are trafficked into the oil industry, domestic servitude, or the commercial sex trade.²⁸ Many of these victims arrive by cramped boat from southern Nigeria. These migrations take several days, and there is a high risk of boats' capsizing.²⁹ Due to limited monitoring services, few statistics are available to prove exactly how many children begin and complete this journey.

In Gabon, girls are trafficked through middlepersons, including women called "aunties," who facilitate opportunities for girls to work for wealthy African or European families.³⁰ The risks of sexual abuse and forced child labor are severe. Often, girls fleeing situations of forced domestic labor fall into prostitution and pedophilia networks.³¹ Young girls from neighboring countries also run the risk of becoming child brides in Gabon. Boys who come to Gabon seeking work can be lured into unpaid and unsafe jobs or forced into street begging.³² Others are trafficked in the fishing sector, forced into dangerous jobs on the open sea.³³

Notes

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ONE EARTH FUTURE

oneearthfuture.org    

One Earth Future (OEF) is a self-funded, private operating foundation seeking to create a more peaceful world through collaborative, data-driven initiatives. OEF focuses on enhancing maritime cooperation, creating sustainable jobs in fragile economies and research which actively contributes to thought leadership on global issues. As an operating foundation, OEF provides strategic, financial and administrative support allowing its programs to focus deeply on complex problems and to create constructive alternatives to violent conflict.


STABLE SEAS

stableseas.org

Stable Seas, a project of One Earth Future, engages the international security community with novel research on illicit maritime activities such as piracy and armed robbery, trafficking and smuggling in persons, IUU (illegal/unregulated/unreported) fishing, and illicit trades in weapons, drugs, and other contraband. These activities perpetuate organized political violence and reinforce each other to threaten economic development and the welfare of coastal populations.

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