

S15.3 - Towards improved livelihoods, food and nutrition security, and gender equality for small-scale actors in aquatic food systems: A Science-Policy Lab

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Abstract: Small-scale fisheries and small-scale aquaculture are vital to food and nutrition security, livelihoods, and poverty reduction, particularly in many low- and middle-income countries. Despite providing most global fisheries employment and a substantial share of aquaculture production, their contributions are often overlooked in data and policies. Particularly women and marginalized communities often face barriers in accessing resources, engaging in decision-making and benefitting from aquatic foods. To address these challenges, a Science-Policy Lab in Mombasa, Kenya, brought together 48 stakeholders from nine African countries. The Lab ensured diverse representation of women, youth, Indigenous people, and small-scale actors. Preparatory community visits informed the discussions by providing insights into local realities and supporting the subsequent participation of diverse community spokespersons in the Lab. A literature review guided the Lab's focus on the co-development of policy options within three broad areas: (1) improving availability and equitable access to aquatic foods, (2) enhancing their use for nutrition and health, and (3) reducing social and economic inequalities in aquatic food systems. A central insight was the recognition of key trade-offs. For example, increasing aquatic food availability through innovation and small-scale production may not necessarily improve consumption among disadvantaged groups, since economic pressures, social and gender norms often lead small-scale producers to sell rather than consume the aquatic foods. Combining production-focused strategies with efforts to ensure equitable access and promote local dietary use may help to resolve this trade-off. The Lab illustrated how participatory, evidence-informed multi-stakeholder processes can support the analysis of complex food system transformation challenges.



Participatory power-ladder exercise during the multi-stakeholder Science-Policy Lab in Mombasa, Kenya, 2024.



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