

"Basically, we women are the bosses."

A conversation with Dorcas Kilola Malogho about women's work and women's rights in artisanal fisheries in Kenya



CAOPA and CANCO meeting in Mombasa at World Fisheries Day 2022, Kenya

With only 15,000 fishermen and 180,000 tons of catch per year, artisanal fishing in Kenya clearly ranks behind its southern neighbour Tanzania in terms of socioeconomic relevance. Until a few years ago, Kenyans had little demand for a fresh catch from the Indian Ocean. This is different from the situation in the Lake Victoria region. There, fishing has always been an important economic factor for the 30 million people living on its shores in three countries: Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda. Export hits like the Victoria perch, which is also popular in Europe, is a foreign exchange generator.

Today, due to the Kenyan government's efforts to promote fish consumption through campaigns and fish farming projects, eating fish is popular in Kenya and is also gaining importance as an economic factor in view of the increasing demand for high-quality fish protein and the growing regional markets.

Women in particular are trying to provide for themselves and their families and create jobs for women through professionally improved artisanal fishing in coastal communities. One of these highly successful businesswomen is Dorcas Kilola Malogho. Born in Mombasa in 1994, she studied marketing but was unable to complete her studies. She then worked in an insurance company, but when marketing and raising children became difficult, she tried to find another profession. Today, she (along with Mercy Wasai Mghanga) represents *Coastal Women in Fisheries Entrepreneurship (CWIFE)*, a Kenyan organization, organized exclusively for and by women, that trades fish and trains women to better compete and fight for their rights in Kenyan fisheries.

The group consists of 10,000 women working in various Beach Management Units (BMUs) along the coastal region organized by the Kenyan government in the coastal Counties of Taita Taveta, Kilifi, Lamu, Tana River, Kwale and Mombasa respectively. In addition, there are still members in the umbrella organization of coastal BMUs, the Indian Ocean Water Body (IOWB) and the Tuna Fisheries Alliance of Kenya (TuFAK). They are all involved in the trade of fish and fishery products, especially artisanal fisheries. From the government, Coastal Women in Fisheries Entrepreneurship receives money to run publicized events as part of the "*Eat more fish*" campaign.

Dorcas Kilola Malogho is also active in CAOPA and represents externally the youth section, artisanal fisheries organizations in Africa since 2021. Recently participated in an advocacy training organized by [CFFA](#) the Coalition for Fair Fisheries Arrangements in Stockholm and Brussels, among others. What [changes](#) need to be made in EU policies to make them effective instruments of an EU-Africa partnership for the development of environmentally, socially and economically sustainable fisheries in Africa.



Fair Oceans Conference at the World Oceans Day in Berlin, 7.6.2023 (with Cornelia Wilß, Francisco Mari (BfdW) und Dorcas Malogho)

Dorcas Malogho was then a guest from Fair Oceans on an info tour on the Weser River. On June 7, 2023, she spoke at *World Oceans Day* in Berlin, organized by Fair Oceans, in collaboration with *Bread for the World*. The interview with her was conducted in Brussels, Bremen, and Berlin.

Cornelia Wilß: Dorcas, you are a professional fish trader and at the same time you are engaged as a volunteer in your organization, Coastal Women in Fisheries Entrepreneurship (CWIFE), whose objective is to improve the rights of women working in the fisheries sector on Kenya's coast. How do you manage to make that happen?

Dorcas Kilola Malogho: Yes, I have not been active in the fish trade for long, but I do have success. This is also due to my mentor, [Mercy Wasai Mghanga](#), the founder of our organization. However, I spent a large part of my time on training and educating organized women in our company. As for me, I add some value because I can process my fish in hygienic conditions and market it fresh to hotels and restaurants. Sometimes I have finished fish products transported from Mombasa to other regions, often to Nairobi. That's profitable. I hope that my success will help the other women emulate my outstanding achievements. We tried to convince them in workshops and at training sessions that it's worth investing time and knowledge in value addition to they could attract reasonable premium on their fish products. But this also requires innovation and investment on the part of the State and a change in the way society thinks.

We have almost 10,000 women in the fisheries sector, and most of them have not been able to further their education. They just go about their business every day. And they are not held in high esteem. They are at the bottom of the fishing industry chain. Neither do they have their own boats, nor have the equipment to pay men who hire them as fishermen – as is quite common in other African countries – for fishing trips and to make their own decisions about the catch they bring ashore. When the government takes measures to support the fishing sector, male fishermen are the beneficiaries. Women are traditionally prohibited from fishing. They usually go away empty-handed when funds or better equipment are distributed. So, we are trying to convince Kenya's government and the relevant institutions in charge of the fisheries sector that women are critical players in the fisheries sector, keeping the whole trade and processing for consumption alive. Basically, we are the bosses, but trying to bring that to people's awareness! It's not an easy task.

Cornelia Wilß: Please describe what tasks the women take on in fish processing? Where do the women get the fish from? How is the fish processed and transported?

Dorcas Kilola Malogho: The women buy the fish directly from the fishermen at the landing sites. But there is often the problem that the fishermen are looking for customers who will pay in cash the agreed price especially by wholesalers. Women who can survive for the day may only buy two or five kilos of fish, just enough for them to process under the difficult conditions. They don't have any preservation or cold storage facilities. And why is that? Quite simply, the facilities are very expensive for them compared to minimal profit they get. Equally this minimal profit some used for housing keeping purposes such as feeding, school fees including other needs. But they also can't buy products on credit or get loans from the fishermen. Never! A Kenyan fisherman will never do that. The big catch is made by the wealthy people in society. Poorer people don't have a chance. So CWIFE gives the women a loan, and when they sell their products, they take the profit and gradually give us the money back.



Women on their way home, Kenya

Fish in Kenya – depending on the region – is processed dried, salted, boiled, and fried. They usually fry the fish in small pans at home using an open fire. Unfortunately, they often use mangroves as firewood. But we know mangroves are important breeding grounds and in the fight against climate change. Therefore, we try to convince the women to stop cutting down the mangroves.

Most women sell their fish along highways and streets, thus serving the local demand. They usually store the fried fish in simple wooden boxes, but of course, this is not sterile. They would need other storage options to be able to ensure responsible fish hygiene and quality practices. We are also training them to further improve good manufacturing practices and improved transport facilitates considering the perishable nature of fish. This is a prerequisite for increasing the value addition.

We also benefit from tourism in Kenya. Sometimes we get Orders from hotels or from supermarkets; then we fillet the fish and package it for sale. Some women dream of exporting valuable seafood products such as Squid, oysters, catfish, and tilapia for good money. Preservation is a huge challenge within the fish processing domain. Hardly any woman can afford to buy a freezer. So they have to process the fish immediately. If the fish can be preserved fresh for a longer period of time, the women can purchase huge quantities, between 20 and 50 kilograms, and process the frozen fish as needed.



Visit to Shimoni village, Kenya

Transporting the fish is also always a challenge. We often have poor infrastructure in coastal communities. Most women use motorbikes to get to the landing site in the morning and back home later. But the rides are not free, of course. The driver expects his money, too. The women use plastic buckets to transport the fish, and they have to buy ice cubes to preserve the products. Such expenses cut into profits. Many women wonder when they will ever make profit, so they don't have to live from hand-to-mouth. It is very difficult for

women to get ahead in this way. They are just stuck, day in and day out; there is no progress for them.



Presentation the "Eat mor fish" Campaign at World Fisheris Day at the fishing port of Shimoni, Kwalé County, Mombasa Region, Kenya, on 21 November 2022.

Cornelia Wilß: So, what role does fish play in healthy nutrition in Kenya?

Dorcias Kilola Malogho: Initially, most people in Kenya thought fish was something for rich people because fish was an expensive product. The result of our "Eat more fish" campaign, the attitude is gradually changing. Now we are creating awareness on the fact that fish is a healthy food for everyone, and that fish is an important source of essential macro- and micronutrients such as omega 3, which are very important for maintaining health and healthy nutrition.

If we currently compare the prices of fish and meat in Kenya, we can say that the price of meat in Kenya is very high and fish on the other hand is cheap. Everyone can afford fish because a kilogram fish costs about 400 shillings. But the equivalent amount of meat costs 580 shillings. If you buy the fish in the local markets, for example octopus, it is the cheapest, but of course it depends on what kind of fish it is. Even lobster you can get cheap. As for tourists' price for lobster at the hotel is exorbitant. But as a local consumer, buying directly

from fishermen costs somewhere 1000 shillings. In short, fish is easily and more affordable than meat by the larger population. Fish is healthy. Fish is easy to prepare favourably with other vegetable sources of protein.

We observe International Commemorative days such as “World Oceans Day” on June 8 and other events in order to display or showcase our processed fish products from the Indian Ocean. The former Prime Minister, Uhuru Muigai Kenyatta, helped us get people excited about eating fish; under his administration, the fisheries sector was promoted as part of the Blue Economy. Basically, we can say that we still have enough fish in our waters. The Indian Ocean is rich in fish stocks, but small-scale fisheries suffer because fish are almost overfished near shore/coast. Therefore, the small-scale fisheries fish in breeding grounds closed to the coast and this very bad for the future of the fish. Efforts are in place to address the issue. If we small scale and industrial fisheries can stop this kind of illegal fishing, fish stocks will regenerate substantially, thus guarantee fish availability, affordability, accessibility and stability that would benefit present and future generations.

Cornelia Wilß: How can or must things change?

Dorcas Kilola Malogho: Our self-managed organization Coastal Women in Fisheries

Entrepreneurship (CWIFE), is trying to propose new ways of doing things. We have asked the government to look at whether it would not be more sustainable to have a stand-alone, self-managed market area where fishermen could take their catch and be paid at a fixed price by each customer. This would also solve the major problem of women being able to keep fish germ-free for an extended period if they could share a cold storage facility in such a controlled market area.

In some regions, women dry the fish in sand beds under the sun by spreading nets – These nets are simply mosquito types. This is not a hygienic practice. In the rainy season, there are high post-harvest losses. Many women often stay at home in the rainy season and wait for the rains to stop. During this time, food security is often a problem because there is not enough fish for either home consumption or for sale. The women would need solar panels and solar dryers to help them become more independent.

Of course, as is the practice in other countries, the women hope at some point to be able to purchase their own boats. Then they could hire and pay the fishermen and decide for themselves what to do with the catch. Ultimately, we encourage the women during

workshops and training courses, which we offer free of charge and organize on a voluntary basis, to professionalize their work to be able to skim off more profit. The demand for fish is increasing!



Sardines are laid out to dry.

I see on a daily basis the difficulties women undergo, and in my opinion, we need go the extra mile to make women's voices heard more loudly and be included in the decision-making processes. Many women don't know their rights, so we tried to create awareness about their rights to participation in all national development endeavours. - Whether it's at the national level, regional level, or in communities. The important thing is to realize that you can defend yourself.

Here in the coastal region, the traditional belief is still common that men are the ones in control and women must take care of their children and cook for their husbands. So we are trying to create awareness of feminist believes and ask the government, to ensure equity and an all-inclusive policy, particularly women.

Even in the fisheries sector, men form the majority in leadership. But if the government wants to be gender-sensitive, for example, there is need for more women occupying leadership positions in the Beach Management Units (BMUs), that will pave way for easy and reasonable access to credit and microfinance services. Currently, about 20 percent of the members are women in the BMUs.



CFFA Steering Committee CAPE in Mombasa, November 2022

Cornelia Wilß: As a lobbying and advocacy organization, you are also in direct dialogue with the government? What do you expect from the authorities?

Dorcas Kilola Malogho: We attach great importance to transparency and fight for better conditions for our communities. We are trying to get the government to be more transparent with the communities concerned. For example, we want to be informed whenever new projects are planned in the blue economy sector that could affect traditional rights and the protection of small-scale fisheries. Especially when it comes to investments in this sector of the economy, there is almost no transparency and corruption is commonplace. So, we are fighting this and lobbying to at least reduce corruption, and we are asking the government to be accountable for its policy-making process.

As you know, 2022 was celebrated as *the [International Year of Artisanal Fisheries](#)*. And we, the representatives inside of CAOPA, of which I am also a member, formulated 2022 a [Call to Action from small-scale fisheries](#).

We presented the document to the public at the [Lisbon Ocean Conference](#) in June 2022. In the paper, we call on our governments to take action to ensure that small-scale fisheries are protected and restored, and that they contribute to the economy, health, culture and well-being in every CAOPA member country. That is the reason why we as Africans and also in Kenya are calling on our government to be transparent and accountable in everything that happens that is meant to protect small-scale fishers in any way. Then we also need the government to understand the difficult situation of many youth, to support them to take their lives in their own hands and give them a future. Maybe also in fishing!

The interview was conducted by Cornelia Wilß for Bread for the World and Fair Oceans.