

# Blue Justice for Small-Scale Fisheries: What, why and how



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Small-scale fisheries provide livelihoods and food security to millions of women and men around the world. They make an important contribution to the local and national economy, as well as represent diverse value, cultural identity and heritage of many coastal communities. As commitments are being made to achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), small-scale fisheries have even more prominent roles to play, given their connection to land and sea and their intersection with all goals. Unfortunately, in the framing of the oceans as the new economic and development frontier, many development initiatives, promoted through Blue Growth and Blue Economy agendas, tend to ignore small-scale fisheries, excluding them from the discussion and putting them in disadvantaged situations.

More needs to be done to encourage sustainable development initiatives that fully support the current and potential contributions of small-scale fisheries in achieving all SDGs. Pushing towards a more equitable and just space for small-scale fisheries requires, first and foremost, an understanding of the current situations, looking at the kind of injustices and inequity that may be happening and affecting women and men involved in small-scale fisheries, their families and their communities.

Photo: *Researcher interviewing local small-scale fishers, Kuakata Sea Beach. 202019*  
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## WHAT IS BLUE JUSTICE?

A critical examination of how small-scale fisheries and their communities may be affected by Blue Economy and Blue Growth initiatives that promote sustainable ocean development but neglect small-scale fisheries and their contribution to ocean sustainability. We extend the concept to inland fisheries, which are similarly affected by land-based development that puts them at risk and disadvantages them.

See also:  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blue\\_justice](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blue_justice)

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” ... Blue Justice for small-scale fisheries in the blue economy agenda means inclusion of small-scale fishers and community members as stakeholders with an eye towards power imbalances and equity. The basic tenets of social justice address who has a stake in the issue, and focus on what needs to be done to restore justice for past wrongs in the marginalization of small-scale fisheries....(Jentoft, 2019. Life Above Water)

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## Justice in context

### Types of justice:

- **Distributive**
  - **Social**
  - **Economic**
  - **Market**
  - **Infrastructure/wellbeing**
  - **Regulatory**
  - **Procedural**
  - **Environmental**
  - **COVID-19 related**
- Distributive justice - restriction of access to space and resources due, for instance, to other ocean uses like tourism, aquaculture, mining, shipping, MPAs, for instance.
  - Social justice - imbalanced power and relationship due, for instance, to systems that favours certain sectors and discriminate others in the society.
  - Economic justice - inequitable opportunities for growth due, for instance, to unfair distribution of subsidies, credit restriction, product certification schemes, and limited access to land, productive assets, and livelihood options.
  - Market justice - limited access to trade and markets, due to market certification schemes, or product standards developed without due consideration to small-scale fisheries context.
  - Infrastructure/wellbeing justice - exclusion from access to health, education, judicial services, safe drinking water, and sanitation, poor roads, transportation, and lack of access to information technology and communication links.
  - Regulatory justice - regulations that lead to unfair competition, including those related to quota allocation, gear use control, legal status, and resource ownership.
  - Procedural justice - restricted access to decision-making due, for instance, to the process that designs without due consideration to the small-scale fisheries context.
  - Environmental justice - disproportionate effects of industrial pollutant, hazard or waste disposal on low-income, and marginalized communities, compromising the health and wellbeing of their members.
  - COVID-19 related justice - disproportionate effects of COVID-19 pandemic on small-scale fisheries, insufficient attention to examine the impacts on small-scale fishing communities, inadequate funding or support to mitigate impacts.

### Definition of small-scale fisheries

Small-scale fisheries are known for their diverse nature, characteristics, and values. They also vary from one place to the next and thus difficult to capture with a single definition. Many countries define small-scale fisheries for regulatory purposes, mostly based on some measures, but other aspects are also noteworthy and should be better recognized, like the family orientation, community embeddedness, women contribution, along with the fact that some small-scale fisheries are seasonal and are part of an informal economy. Check FAO (20105) for a good overview about what defines and characterizes small-scale fisheries.

” ... Blue Justice has at its core a social justice principle that recognizes the need for small-scale fisheries to have equity, access, participation and rights within the blue economy. The Blue Justice approach for small-scale fisheries, therefore, is to “critically examine the political, economic and ecological processes of blue economy development initiatives...” (Moenieba Isaacs, PLAAS, 2019)

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## Dealing with justice

Dealing with injustices is not easy, and certainly not something that can be done at an individual level. Fishers, civil society organization, governments, environmental organizations, and academia all have a role to play in promoting Blue Justice for SSF.

Here are some stating points:

1. Support the implementation of the SSF Guidelines
2. Illustrate small-scale fisheries as a key for sustainable ocean development, especially post Covid-19
3. Include small-scale fisheries in the discussion about all SDGs
4. Encourage governance reform to recognize small-scale fisheries rights and help realize their potentials
5. Promote coordinated application of policies and legislation that support small-scale fisheries
6. Enhance cross-sectoral collaboration and strengthen small-scale fisheries networks
7. Build broad awareness about the values and importance of small-scale fisheries

This e-book is part of the first steps in unpacking what happens at sea, on land, and in inland areas that disadvantage and marginalize SSF and make them vulnerable. The stories about social injustice and inequity in SSF from around the world offer insights and lessons that can be shared, as well as invite us to think and act individually and collectively about what we can do to bring Blue Justice for SSF.

### References:

- FAO (2015). Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Rome, Italy.
- Jentoft, S. (2019). Life above water: Essays on human experiences of small-scale fisheries. St. John's: TBTI Global.



### How to cite

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