



**MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY  
OF THE CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY  
DR. CRISTIANA PAȘCA PALMER**

**on the occasion of  
World Oceans Day  
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*“Gender and the Ocean”*

Oceans are among the greatest sources of biodiversity in the world, and their health is critical to the future of our planet and the future of all species, including humankind. It is up to all of us to protect them.

This year’s theme for World Oceans Day, gender and the ocean, brings attention to a significant and largely overlooked issue for the management of marine and coastal biodiversity – the role of women and the gender inequalities that shape our impact on the ocean. From fishing to mangrove restoration to marine protected area management, women play a critical role, but their efforts are often not compensated or valued to the same extent as those of men. And in many parts of the world, the impacts of degraded marine ecosystems are disproportionately felt by women.

Small scale fisheries contribute 70 per cent of the global fish catch and employ nearly 90 per cent of fishers and fish workers worldwide. According to the World Bank, 47 per cent of the 120 million people involved in small-scale fisheries, whether in harvesting, processing or sales, are women. In aquaculture, or fish farming, women are more than 70 per cent of the workforce.

Yet women’s participation is often unrecognized and undervalued in management and policy, and very few women hold leadership positions. Little say in decision-making also means that women in this field of work have limited opportunity to balance the scales, with women workers typically receiving lower wages than their male counterparts and subject to more difficult working conditions.

Despite these constraints, women in small-scale fisheries play an essential role in ensuring food and nutrition security for families and communities worldwide, using their catches to feed their families and to earn much needed income. Women-led work often adds additional value to products and services from marine ecosystems. In some communities, women take the lead in



developing secondary products from fish catch and other forms of marine biodiversity harvest that may be either used in the home, in communities or sold in markets.

Accounting for women's roles in the small-scale fisheries sector benefits gender equality and the oceans. Women fishers often harvest different species than men and tend to use distinct fishing gear, methods and habitats. These are largely inland and shallow water areas, which are critical nursery grounds for invertebrates and small fish. Lack of data on women's fish catch may also lead to an underestimation of human pressures on marine ecosystems, which is even more significant in areas important for young fish. The exclusion of women's fish catch also contributes to a lack of data on the diversity of animals and habitats targeted by fishers, which can jeopardize conservation and ecosystem management efforts.

For marine conservation and ecosystem management to be effective, we need to have a complete understanding of the full range of small-scale fishing practices undertaken by women and men. And we need women's full and active engagement in decision-making, to ensure their distinct knowledge of aquatic species and habitats are applied to inform efficient management plans and monitor the status of these species and their habitats. Empowering women to play an equal role in decision-making contributes to better resource governance and conservation outcomes, which can also support climate change mitigation and adaptation.

In the TRY oyster project in The Gambia, 500 female oyster harvesters from 15 villages came together to share knowledge and complete small-scale enterprise training. Working with the Department of Parks and Wildlife Management, women played a key role in monitoring and reporting on illegal mangrove harvesting, leading to an increase in local mangrove forests. They also shared lessons with their communities on the benefits of responsible resource management.

Studies in the Philippines show that community-based marine protected areas management was more successful when women were involved, as they succeeded in gaining broader community support. Women were also more constant in keeping guard and monitoring marine protected areas.

We have the knowledge of what it takes to improve the management of our oceans and how engaging women as equal partners can help make this happen. Let's work together to ensure we can make a difference for women, our communities and our oceans.

I wish you all a happy World Oceans Day.