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Gender dynamics in small-scale fish business in Mwanza Region, Tanzania

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Abstract

This study established the typology of gender dynamics within small-scale fish business in Mwanza Region, Tanzania. Data were collected using key informant interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), personal observations, and documentary reviews. The collected data was analyzed using content analysis, and ATLAS.ti computer software was used to transcribe the field notes before analysis. The study found that gender inequalities existed in all aspects of gender roles, gender relations, and access and control over productive assets in the small-scale fish business. Men dominated high economic valued activities, such as receiving and collecting fish from fishermen, while women had limited decision-making power over income, freedom of movement, access and control over productive assets, and participation in the fish business. The study concludes that these inequalities negatively affect women's active participation in the business as well as the business growth prospects. The government and non-governmental organizations are recommended to establish programs and policies that create awareness on gender issues for equitable and sustainable development of small-scale fish business in the study area, benefiting both men and women equally.

Keywords: Gender; Gender dynamics; Small-scale fish business; Experiences

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1. Introduction

The significant role played by small businesses in terms of job creation, poverty alleviation and local economic growth is well known. Small businesses act as the backbone and a driver of innovation of any advanced economy (Al-Khalifa, 2020). They represent about 90% of businesses and more than 50% in post-harvest activities worldwide (World Bank, 2022) and are often done by family members and friends (Qiu and Freel, 2019). In Tanzania, small-scale businesses became prominent from the 1980s as a result of the effects of globalization economy (Wilbard, 2015), that led to the country experiencing high emergency of women and men entrepreneurs engaging in small-scale such businesses (Mkuna and Baiyegunhi, 2021). Based on the perspectives of Inequality Theory by (UKEssays, 2018), gender inequality is a worldwide debate since the rise of modern feminism in the early 1960s. Thus, carrying out a study to understand gender differences is important. This is because social expectations on women's and men's roles differ, and it always puts men at a commanding and dominant position. Globally, scholars have acknowledged that, in the social context, women tend to face significant barriers in their business activities (Ngaga and Jeckoniah, 2019; Bastida, 2021). For this argument, this study was set to understand the existing gender dynamics embedded within small-scale fish business.

Currently, fish trading and marketing are among rapidly growing small-scale businesses in which the majority of women and men are self-employed URT (2017), Sambuo et al. (2018), TIC (2019), and are important economic activities for the world population (Sibeyo, 2020). Small-scale fish business provides jobs to both men and women as a major source of their livelihood as it requires affordable capital outlay and provides quick income for Coastal and Lake Zone communities (Ilemela Municipal Council, 2017; Agbontale et al., 2020; Thomas et al., 2021). About 100 million people are estimated to be involved in small-scale post-harvest activities which include fish trading and marketing (FAO, 2020). However, despite the importance of this sector, gender differences are generally reported in fishing and fisheries (Deb et al., 2014; Kwok, 2017; Cole, 2020).

Studies by Tagutanazvo et al. (2017) and Cole (2020) showed that although women are the majority in small-scale business and carry out different roles their actual decision making power is limited. In the same vein, Kwok (2017) observed that women's contributions in small-scale fisheries of Tonle Sap Lake were often overlooked due to socio-cultural expectations of roles and responsibilities. In the views of Quaidoo (2018) and Madaha (2020), women face multiple cultural, economic and political limitations while running their small-scale businesses. Such gender dynamics limit women's involvement, contribution, and active participation in fisheries as they receive little attention when compared to high valued activities dominated by men (Manyungwa-Pasani et al., 2017; Rohe et al., 2018; Tilley et al., 2021; Mangubhai and Lawless, 2021). As a result, such inequalities affect women's participation in decision-making processes with respect to fisheries planning and management (Mangubhai and Lawless, 2021).

In the view of Webb (2015), generalization of gender dynamics and gender stereotype is wrong; hence there is a need to carry out improved gender analysis to understand gender inequality in relation to any sector or activity that involves both women and men. For this case, understanding women's and men's roles, aspirations, access and control over resources was important as it has influence on decision making and plays important roles in determining social power relations, usually to the detriment of women's life.

Gender dynamics in this study refers to the socio-cultural ideas about gender and the power relationships that define them. It is important to note that these gender dynamics tend to change over time as women and men have different roles in their lives, including being spouses, siblings, co-workers, and parents. Depending on their own concerns, women and men may act together or separately for each role. Jones et al. (2019) documented that women constitute the majority of social work educators and practitioners, while men disproportionately dominate positions of power and prestige in society. In a study on gender dynamics in a polio eradication program, Kalbarczyk et al. (2021) found that male polio workers were not allowed to enter many households in conservative communities, creating a demand for female vaccinators. Furthermore, Ngaga and Jeckoniah (2019) examined gender dynamics in family businesses and found that men dominated gender roles such as ownership, decision-making, and control of businesses, while women were found to dominate selling and record-keeping.

Kwok (2017) studied perceptions of gender dynamics in small-scale fisheries and conservation areas in Cambodia and found that men more frequently acknowledged unequal power dynamics, access to, and control over fishing resources than women. Cole (2020) studied gender dynamics in small-scale fisheries and aquaculture and found that cultural constructed roles prohibited women from access to market and marketing, access and control over assets and resources, and these dynamics restricted them from taking place in some fisheries activities.

The general objective of this study was to determine gender dynamics existing within small-scale fish business. The results of this study inform government, researchers and other stakeholders on typologies of gender dynamics existing in small-scale fish businesses. By understanding these dynamics, it will be easy to take into account how they are likely to cause greater differential and complex gender relations and power imbalances. This will help to avoid creation of gender inequalities or conflicts between women and men within fishing communities in Nyamagana and Ilemela Districts, Mwanza Region, and probably elsewhere in Tanzania.

Specifically, the study answered the following research questions: (i) What are the common roles for women and men in small-scale fish business (SSFB)? (ii) What is the nature of access and control over fish products between women and men in SSFB? (iii) What kinds of gender power relationships exist between women and men in the SSFB? The study was guided by the inequality theory that was founded by Milner (1987) that views the origin of gender inequality between men and women as one of the most intellectual debates after the rise of modern feminism. This is because, feminists consider the ideological implication of female subordination over centuries to have caused high superior prevalence of male status across time, space and social circumstances that are beyond denial especially in sub-Saharan Africa (UKEssays, 2018).

The origin of the inequality theory is built on three key assumptions. First, the biological difference between men and women is inescapable amongst races, classes, cultures and traditions irrespective of being developed or underdeveloped. Second, tracing back from history to date, most of the hardest and most commanding jobs are carried out by men. Therefore, inequality is bound to exist between sexes. Third, biological differences that are sufficient and necessary to persist are likely to cause inequality between sexes and puts men at a commanding and dominant position. According to Anthropologists, the most common biological differences that have received much attention by the inequality view include reproduction by females, physical capacity and predisposition to violence.

The general agreement is that women have rarely occupied positions of higher status or political power than men in any society, anywhere, and at any time (Butler et al., 2006; Magnusson et al., 2008). Although the

theory has faced many critiques, it is argued that inequalities persist in many societies, regardless of the changing times. In the context of this study, the inequality theory was used to understand the gender dynamics that perpetuate inequalities in the small-scale fish business in Mwanza Region, particularly in Nyamagana and Ilemela Districts. This involved examining women's and men's roles, gender power relationships, and the nature of access and control over fish products between women and men.

2. Methodology

2.1. The study areas and scope

The study was conducted in the Ilemela and Nyamagana Districts of the Mwanza Region, which was purposively selected due to its significant relevance to the small-scale fish business. This region is home to Lake Victoria, the world's largest tropical lake with over 500 fish species, supporting more than 90% of the world's capture fishers and fish workers, with approximately half being women (EMDO, 2017). Furthermore, the study aimed to understand the gender dynamics of small-scale fish businesses, and the region was known to have a high concentration of such businesses. The fishing sector plays an essential role in the study area, and women make up a significant proportion of the workforce, representing 70% to 80% in fish post-harvest and related activities (URT, 2020). Therefore, Mwanza Region was a relevant and suitable study area for understanding the small-scale fish business and gender dynamics in the region.

2.2. Study design and data sources

The study used a cross-sectional research design to collect data from multiple cases at a single point in time. Purposive sampling was used to select participants for Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Key Informants (KIs) based on their personal experiences and positions in the fisheries sector. The study conducted eight FGDs, each comprising 8-10 participants. Four of the FGDs were conducted in the four wards with both women and men, based on the availability of small-scale fish markets. The other four FGDs were conducted in the two districts, with separate sessions for women and men to avoid sex bias and traditional customs that might restrict one sex from giving opinions before the other. Data collection tools included an FGD guide, a KIs interview guide, an observation checklist, and an audio recorder, which was used with the consent of the study participants. Participants were asked to provide their opinions on the common roles played by women and men in small-scale fish businesses, the types of gender power relationships that existed in the SSFB, and the nature of access and control over fish products by women and men in SSFB.

2.3. Data analysis

The study employed content analysis to examine data obtained from Key informants (KIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) in order to determine the gender dynamics in SSFB. Prior to analysis, the data were transcribed. The analysis process involved several steps. Firstly, the interviewee responses and opinions were coded. Secondly, the data were categorized according to the topics in the interview guide and in relation to the research objectives. A database was then prepared to aid in categorizing, sorting and retrieving data. Thirdly, the categorized data were analyzed in three stages: data reduction (selecting, simplifying and transferring raw

data to an analyzable format), displaying the data and drawing research conclusions (Taylor et al., 2011). Finally, the incident studies sets were documented in the form of qualitative descriptions and interpretations. The ATLAS.ti computer software was used to facilitate the analysis of the data gathered through KIs and FGDs.

3. Results and discussion

The study findings indicate that small-scale fish business, traditionally considered a male activity, is now predominantly pursued by women in the study area, although women and men perform different roles in the SSFB. This suggests that cultural norms surrounding gendered work can evolve over time, supporting the theory of inequality. However, the study also reveals the existence of gender inequalities in all aspects of the small-scale fish business, including gender roles, access to and control over productive assets, gender relations, and power differentials in decision making. The results are detailed below, drawing on data from FGDs, KIs, audio recordings, field notes, and themes identified using the ATLAS.ti computer software, as utilized by other scholars such as Njau et al. (2019) and Soratto et al. (2020).

3.1. Common roles for women and men in small-scale fish business

3.1.1. Gender roles in small-scale fish business

The study found that in the small-scale fish business, both women and men were actively involved in buying, processing, and selling fish. However, the study revealed that some inequalities existed regarding the types of fish products sold, such as fresh fish, fried and dried fish, and sardines (dagaa). Sardines were predominantly sold by women in all the market areas studied. Additionally, some tasks such as receiving fish at landing sites were done by women, while frying fish was dominated by men. Conversely, fish cleaning, packaging, and hawking activities were more performed by women than men. The study found that both men and women processed fish by cleaning, frying, and selling fresh fish depending on the customers' needs. A key informant interview revealed that:

“Women now have the right to participate in fish trading without exclusion, something which was impossible during our ancestors when traditional ways of life did not allow women's movement from the homestead. However, men were dominant in all activities that required strong muscles”
(KI, Nyamagana, January 2022).

The study found that gender roles in small-scale fish business were changing with the evolving world economic trend. During the FGDs, participants were asked whether traditionally women were allowed to participate in the fish business with men. The response was that cultural norms were shifting, and women were now taking up more prominent roles in the sector. Respondents expressed optimism that in the future, women engaged in small-scale fish business would take on different roles and be valued as equals. One participant commented:

...Today, due to global economic challenges, women are increasingly recognized as valuable contributors to their families and the business world. They are perceived as hardworking and effective in managing small-scale fish businesses (FGD, Kamanga Relini, January 2022).

In a similar vein, during FGD sessions, participants were asked whether women were traditionally allowed to participate in small-scale fish business. Zhu and Chang's (2019) study reported similar arguments, as respondents confirmed that gender roles were rapidly changing, with more women taking on the role of heads of households. The study found that women and men had different experiences and roles in the small-scale fish business, including the products they sold, business opportunities, and cultural setups. Although both women and men engage in the small-scale business, women faced challenges in balancing their time between business and household chores due to gender division of labor at the family and community levels. This was explained by one key informant during an interview.

“Women face various constraints, one of which is the lack of time due to their heavy responsibility of managing household work”. (KI, Kamanga Relini, January 2022).

In both men and women's FGDs, participants expressed concerns about how traditional socio-cultural interpretations of gender roles perpetuate gender disparities in fish marketing activities. The persistence of such inequalities can be attributed to the reluctance of some communities to accept change due to illiteracy and poverty, as explained by the inequality theory. The study's findings are relevant to this theory, which posits that male domination in the biological distinction of sexes will continue to persist within labor division because of physical differences between men and women that make men feel dominant. Heise et al. (2019) support this argument, stating that individuals born biologically male, or female develop into gendered beings that face gender inequality and restrictive gender norms that affect their well-being.

3.1.2. Gender roles at the household level

The study findings revealed that women engaging in the small-scale fish business, not only carry out the role of financial contribution to the household, but also they carry out other roles such as food provision, paying for health services, as well as children's school needs which traditionally are assigned to men. In such situations women's effective participation and confidence in the small-scale fish business are hampered by the triple roles as women are socially expected to perform other traditional and biological roles like productive roles, reproduction of society members and household responsibilities, sometimes in the absence or presence of their husbands and sons at home. Literally and theoretically, it is the mother who provides crucial social reproduction roles for the boys and girls, and transmits down the ideological discourses, cultural attributes, and gendered knowledge to the society.

The study's literature has recognized the crucial role of women's involvement in small-scale fish businesses in promoting their economic development and empowerment (Ilemela Municipal Council, 2017; Agbontale et al., 2020). Similarly, the study found that women's participation in small-scale fish businesses had a positive impact on their household's economic capacity, allowing them to contribute to financial expenditures. This financial freedom, coupled with the sense of achievement and enhanced status at the household level, has improved their self-esteem. These findings were reinforced by a key informant interviewee who stated,

"Women's participation in small-scale fish business leads to significant improvements in households' asset quality and overall development" (KI, Kamanga, 26th January 2022).

However, research has shown that men have different perspectives on the changes experienced due to women's financial contributions in households. For men, the participation of women in the fish business is one of the main reasons leading to marriage dissolution because as women become financially independent, they start to behave differently towards their husbands. They no longer show respect, which men cannot tolerate, so they choose to leave their families and start new ones. During men's focus group discussions (FGDs), the participants explained that:

...Most married women who gain financial freedom tend to become arrogant towards their husbands since they no longer depend on their husbands' provisions. Men are not ready to accept such behavior, and as a result, marriages fail. The male FGD participants further elaborated that among ten households where both husbands and wives participate in small-scale fish businesses, only two can maintain peace in their marriage, especially when men start demanding that women's income be part of the family income. In such a situation, conflicts occur, and they often lead to divorce (FGD, Nyamagana, 28th January 2022).

The study found that such gender perspectives existing among men continue to place women into gender-based norms regarding appropriate behavior and what is right or wrong. This has negative impact on women's networks by limiting their network to social ties while men's networks remain much wide on one hand while on the other hand women do not have access to skills, information, credit, and knowledge, and hold low self-confidence when compared with their male counterparts in the household and business sphere. At the same time, the gender inequality theory holds that norms primarily are a mechanism that ruling groups use to dominate others and perpetuate their interests.

Discussions held through FGDs and KIIs have revealed that men hold the belief that sustainable family life is only possible when women remain at home to take care of the household chores, while men go out to search for family income. Participants in the FGDs emphasized those families where women spend more time on business than on family responsibilities experience a high level of moral decay. Children, who are left without proper guidance for an extended period, are increasingly becoming parents themselves and are unwilling to accept their parents' instructions. This, in turn, can contribute to an increase in street children in one way or another. (FGD, Busweru market, 27th January 2022).

The nature of small-scale fish businesses and the time required to achieve good performance in the business have a significant impact on the sustainability of women's marriages. Women have reported that small-scale fish businesses require individuals to wake up earlier and go to bed late, leading to conflicts in marriage. Men often complain about missing their marital rights on time and are jealous of women's potential to engage in sexual activities with fishermen. This view emerged during an FGD with women, where they agreed that:

...To obtain good quality fish products, they sometimes have to go to distant places of Lake Islands or wake up early in the morning to arrive at fish selling points on time (FGD participants, Mwaloni, 29th January 2022).

The study findings obtained through FGD and KI interviews suggest that despite global economic challenges that have forced men to accept their spouses' engagement in economic activities, women are still viewed, according to socio-cultural constructions, as individuals who are born to do domestic chores and serve men, so long as they are physically capable. This implies that women are often entrusted with more responsibilities and burdens than men, including caring for and sustaining familial well-being and meeting social and emotional needs. However, as the inequality theory explains, socio-cultural constructs change slowly, depending on social set-ups. FGD participants also highlighted that restricting women from doing business in the current century denies them opportunities to earn additional income and minimizes poverty in households.

3.2. Nature of access and control over productive assets in small-scale fish business

The study revealed that women are more disadvantaged than men in terms of information, knowledge, financial resources, storage facilities, access to infrastructure, and social capital, which limits their ability to expand their businesses. This often leads to product spoilage and prevents women from meeting market demands. For example, women's failure to access capital and resources reduces their business potential due to social barriers. The discussion highlights that ownership and control over productive assets provide cultural capital by enabling commercial exchange, and women's ability to achieve efficiency and safety in their business operations is influenced by various factors, including discriminatory perceptions and access to assets. Community perceptions reflect a strong gender bias that men should own productive assets, despite women working harder for their families, while cultural barriers limit their access to such assets. Both male and female FGD participants explained that:

...Although women have weaker access to financial resources than men, they are still expected to manage household finances and are held responsible when household finances are insufficient or poorly managed (FGD, Igoma market, 26th January 2022).

The study found that women in the fish business face multiple challenges, including limited access to infrastructure such as cold storage, electricity, and transportation, which hinders their ability to manage their businesses effectively. Additionally, they have limited access to credit due to availability, tough credit conditions, and inadequate collateral, making it difficult for them to invest in their businesses. The low access to financial resources has led to women fish traders engaging in transactional sex to access quality fish. Women reported leaving their homes as early as 3:00 AM to purchase fish at landing sites to process and sell, and they could only sell small quantities due to transportation constraints. This underscores the need for women to receive support from their husbands and other men in terms of physical, financial, technical, and moral assistance to achieve equitable access to and control over productive assets. This can help address the gender-based discrimination and barriers that women in the fish business face.

3.3. Kinds of gender power relationships exist in small-scale fish business

3.3.1. Gender relations among women and men in SSFB

The study discovered that women's participation in the fish business posed a challenge for men because fishermen always favored women over men during purchasing competitions. Some fishermen received

transactional sex as payment from women, which was evident from male respondents who revealed that even if men offered a higher price for buying fish, women would still win the offer even at a lower price for the same fish products. Male participants explained this phenomenon as follows:

...Women are given first priority by fishermen because the latter use those transactions to win transactional sexual relationships with the women (FGD, Busweru market, January 27th, 2022).

This perspective creates business conflicts between women and men at the fish landing sites and market centers; while on the other hand, conflicts arise between fishermen and businessmen for the same reasons. Male FGD participants insisted that even if they offered a good price for buying fish from fishermen, women would always buy the fish at a lower price from the same sellers. It goes beyond selling and buying between fishermen and women, and men complain about it (FGD, Nyamagana, 28th January 2022).

The study reveals that women's participation in the fish business is hindered by the conflicts that arise between men and women, and between fishermen and business men. This leads to married women being restricted by their husbands from participating in the business, as they are seen as a source of community conflicts rather than business partners with men. If this continues, the patriarchal system gains strength, and women are forced to stay at home and depend on their male partners to provide for them. Deb et al. (2014) share a similar view, arguing that women face threefold obstacles stemming from patriarchal, patrilineal, and patrilocal socio-cultural constructs, religious traditions, and limited control over economic resources and decision-making processes. These socio-cultural factors have deep roots and shape power relations, influencing the ways individuals perform their responsibilities according to gender norms and expectations within their communities.

According to FAO et al. (2022), the gender division of labor is a result of gendered social construction. This perception was reflected in an FGD where participants stated that fish products are obtained late at night on the lake island, a time when married women are expected to be at home fulfilling parental responsibilities. Consequently, men find it challenging to allow their wives to participate in the small-scale fish business (FGD, Kamanga Ferry market, January 2022).

3.3.2. Gender relations at the household level

The study indicated that cultural norms frequently affect women's control over their earned income and the degree to which it is reinvested in their business or used to cover general household expenses. During the focus group discussion, participants were asked about the reasons why men still functioned as the main providers for their households. One FGD group expressed this concern in the following manner:

...the husband is traditionally regarded as the president of the household and holds the position of overall overseer of all day-to-day household responsibilities and basic needs. This societal construct expects the woman to be submissive to her husband until the man's death, at which point the woman becomes the head of the household (FGD, Kamanga market, 28th January 2022).

Similarly, the participants emphasized that Holy books have granted power and authority to men as the heads of the household. As a result, campaigns promoting gender equality and a 50:50 distribution of power and responsibilities between men and women are perceived as being against God's instructions. They added

that when women go against these instructions, it becomes impossible for them to live harmoniously with their husbands. The FGD participants unanimously agreed and stated:

...A woman needs to always be submissive to the husband. If she disrespects her husband, there is no marriage in our communities (FGD1, Busweru, 27th January, 2022).

Despite the arguments presented earlier, female participants in the focus group discussions acknowledged that gender relations at the household level have undergone changes in recent years. They explained that this shift is largely due to men's inability to fulfill their responsibilities as family providers, resulting in abandonment. Women shared that in response to this, they have taken up income-generating activities that were traditionally perceived as men's roles, to support their families, particularly to meet their own and their children's needs.

In this study, from both women and men FGD participants, KIs as well as researcher's observations, it is true that within communities engaged in small-scale fish business there is high marriage break-ups, and the majority of fish business workers are women. For women who remain in their marriages, husbands are there pretending to be family needs providers, but in reality, they sometimes do or don't provide any thing for the family. Such a practice puts both sexes in vulnerability, especially when there are limited opportunities for income and for fish purchase, food insecurity and poverty. It was, however, found that women are likely to be more affected than men because the vulnerability trauma tends to reduce their self-esteem, something which potentially affects their ability to advocate for their needs, and they fail to participate well in businesses. Women FGD participants concluded that:

...The burden of financial management and household budgets often leads to mental and physical abuse by men towards women. In situations where income is low, women are forced to take loans to meet various needs but are often blamed if there is any loss incurred (FGD, Busweru, January 27th 2022).

3.3.3. Power differences in decision making

It was found that women had limited decision-making power in fish business. It was reported that women's and men's decision-making powers differed based on the types of decision they made; women's decisions were limited when compared to men's. Many women did not have decision-making power at the household level and over all household resources; they were also not be able to keep or manage their own earnings. On this aspect, the inequality theory concurs with the findings due to the fact that men have always been involved in all critical traditional decisions that involve sacrifices. For that case, the implication of women's participation in small-scale fish business does not guarantee their position when it comes to making decisions that affect their aspirations in business. In the same line, Kwok (2017) found that participation does not lead to having power in decision making, and women participating in these spaces may face challenges that are not typically addressed in household level analyses.

Further, it was reported that women have more decision-making power if they contribute to the family income. In such a situation FGD participants reported that both husband and wife will always seat together to discuss about children's education, health services, how much money to save, type of productive activities to

do, and purchasing of household appliances as the woman has own income obtained from business. Women FGD narrated the following:

...We suffer a lot here. If a woman doesn't have money, her husband won't even disclose his income to her. Consequently, it's possible to witness how the money is being spent without being consulted on how to spend it (FGD, Busweru, 27th January, 2022).

Generally, socio-cultural values (both the social attitudes and institutions) have impact on decision making whereby men largely control decision-making. The inadequate decision-making power of women especially on income constrains their business capacity. However, some who obtain more/bigger loans increase their income and hence sometimes disappear (to enjoy the money and come back home when they are broke), leaving the family with burden to repay the loans. Women are reported to have good ability to plan well and optimize the amount of income they have to meet family and business needs.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

Based on the study's findings, it is evident that small-scale fish businesswomen and men in the study area are assigned socially constructed roles that differ between genders. These results align with the gender inequality theory, which posits that inequality between the sexes is inevitable. The study found that gender inequalities are prevalent in all aspects of small-scale fish business, such as gender roles, access and control over productive assets, gender relations, and power differences in decision-making. Men tend to dominate high-value economic activities, such as collecting fish from far distances in the lake and receiving fish at landing sites, while women concentrate more on cleaning and selling fish. Therefore, the study recommends that the government, in collaboration with non-governmental organizations and community-based organizations operating in Mwanza Region, should develop programs that increase community awareness of gender issues, including gender roles. Additionally, the government should create gender strategies and programs that meet the strategic and practical gender needs of women, enabling them to fulfill both household and business roles within the fisheries sector effectively.

The study also concludes that, despite women being the majority of people engaged in small-scale fish business, the existence of deep-rooted gendered socio-cultural constructions of the motherly myth, family teachings, and relations has continued to impact women's ability to engage in small-scale fish businesses. Women are more disadvantaged than men in terms of access to information, knowledge, financial resources, storage facilities and infrastructure, as well as social capital, which limits their means to expand businesses. The society perceives women's as well as men's participation and growth in small-scale fish businesses in view of their socio-cultural set-ups. For example, married women do not enjoy the same business environment as their male counterparts and single or widowed women due to mobility restrictions from their husbands. Therefore, the study recommends that policymakers should include gender equity in policies and create a favorable environment for both women and men engaged in SSFB. These policies should promote women's participation in small-scale fish business to improve their livelihoods at the household level, communities, and the country at large.

Furthermore, the study concludes that, although women are the majority in the small-scale fish business, their actual decision-making power over income accrued from the business is limited, which affects their business growth prospects. Women's engagement in small-scale fish business and their financial freedom are often understood by men as a means of women engaging in sexual relationships with fishermen, leading to arrogant behavior towards their husbands, resulting in marital conflicts and divorce among SSFB practitioners in the study area. The inequality theory states that social inequality starts with initial differences in power, and that due to natural inequality, someone is able to do, control, and decide on how others should follow the laid down norms. Therefore, in addition to the aforementioned findings, it is recommended that gender activists, traditional and religious leaders should emphasize and facilitate gender equality and equity education in the communities through public meetings, speeches, and seminars to ensure inclusive participation within small-scale fish business activities. Moreover, intra-household communication and cooperation should be promoted to encourage equitable participation of women and men in decision-making at the household level.

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