

Gender Justice in 2026: International Year of the Woman Farmer *“Setting the Agenda: Gender Priorities in Fisheries & Aquaculture for 2026”*

Purpose: The year 2026 has been designated the International Year of the Woman Farmer—a historic milestone to recognize the crucial, yet often overlooked, contributions of women farmers- including those in aquaculture and fisheries. This roundtable provides a space to reflect on what gender justice should look like and how to elevate women’s leadership, knowledge, and agency in both farming and fishing communities.

The special session on “Gender Justice in 2026: International Year of the Woman Farmer” will be the entry point for a series of webinars that will create participatory spaces for women engaged in fisheries and aquaculture to identify key target areas of work for achieving gender justice and tackle gender inequalities.

These areas of work will be discussed in tailored events in 2026 with the aim to drive momentum, build cross-cutting synergies and generate key message to be conveyed into a statement, or any other programmatic document based on what will be priorities identified by participants, that could be divulged during a final event recurring at the end of the Year of the Woman Farmer.

The session will therefore foster a dynamic dialogue among experts and audience members to explore how policy, grassroots efforts, and institutional commitments can converge to support transformative and inclusive change in 2026 and beyond.

Session Objectives:

- Celebrate the designation of 2026 as the **International Year of the Woman Farmer** and increase recognition of women’s contributions to aquaculture and fisheries.
- **To map and prioritize barriers:** Collaboratively identify and rank the most critical structural barriers hindering women’s participation and leadership in aquatic food systems, considering both persistent historical and newly emerging challenges.
- **To map the landscape of solutions:** Collaboratively brainstorm and share initial ideas for change, helping us identify which strategies (e.g., community-led, policy-focused, market-based) are seen as most critical for a deeper dive.

These contributions will directly shape the key themes, topics, and pressing questions that will form the agenda for a subsequent webinar series dedicated for the development of more inclusive and transformative aquatic food systems and for the support. This initiative aims to enable conditions towards gender justice in fisheries and aquaculture.

Moderator: Matteo Luzzi – FAO

Outline:

1. Welcome and Framing

- Introduction to the International Year of the Woman Farmer and its relevance to aquatic food systems
- Framing the moment: why now matters for gender justice in fisheries and aquaculture
- Reflections on existing gaps and the potential for collective action

2. Thematic consultation & Breakout Group Discussions

Participants will have the opportunity to share their experiences about gender-related issues and potential opportunities to dismantle inequalities which will lead to the identification of key themes and the creation of related breakout groups.

Participants will be split into small groups that will:

- Discuss **which themes resonate most** based on lived experience or regional context with regards to gender issues
- Identify **any missing themes or cross-cutting issues**
- **Rank the themes** that have been identified during consultation and discuss priorities for 2026

During the discussions, **facilitators will share key snapshots** that will be grounding the group with a real-world example or ongoing research/policy issue, such as:

- **Raising women's decision-making power:** Gender perspectives in policies, legal frameworks and planning
- **Tackling women's invisibility:** Developing robust gender data and development strategies
- **Accessing markets and resources:** facilitating gender-responsive financing and entrepreneurship
- **Equality and safety:** unrooting GBV and addressing social norms in value chains
- **Collective action for equitable value chains:** women's organizations and intersectional leadership as drivers for transformational change

3. Final Plenary Discussion

Following group work, participants will return to plenary for a final discussion that will **set the way forward for action points and priorities towards 2026**, with specific focus on:

- Share insights, priorities, or new angles based on the ranking of themes performed during the breakout discussion
- Capture agreement or divergence on key themes
- Suggest framing language or gaps to explore further

4. Closing & Next Steps

- Summary of common themes and new ideas/key messages raised
- Outline how this input will inform the design of the webinar series and final statement
- Call to stay engaged throughout the year and encourage sign-ups for further consultation

Contributors (with short bios):

Panellists/Facilitators:

Lovin Kobusingye – President, African Women Fish Processors and Traders Network (AWFishNet): Ms. Lovin Kobusingye is a Ugandan entrepreneur, advocate, and leader in the African fisheries sector. Ms. Kobusingye is currently President of the African Women Fish Processors and Traders Network. She is a vocal champion of women's empowerment, policy reform, and value chain equity in small-scale fisheries across the continent. Through her businesses, she has worked with over a thousand fish farmers on fish processing and value

addition. Ms Kobusingye is a passionate advocate for government support and enabling policies for women-led entrepreneurship in the fish farming sector in Uganda and throughout Africa, experiences which will be at the core of her activities as President of the AWFishNet.

Hellen Guebama – African Union Inter-African Bureau for Animal Resources (AU-IBAR): Ms. Hellen Guebama works in the African Union Inter-African Bureau for Animal Resources (AU-IBAR) as a Fisheries and Aquaculture Officer and Coordinator of the Animal Production Unit. She holds a Master's in Aquaculture Biology (University of Bergen, Norway) and has 15 years of experience in Aquaculture Development and Fisheries Management. She works to embed inclusive practices across African Union Member states and specialized regional fisheries institutions to promote women's leadership and equitable livelihoods in line with the Policy Framework and Reform Strategy for fisheries and Aquaculture in Africa (PFRS) and Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP). Previously, she worked with the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries in South Africa and Lerøy Seafood Group in Norway.

Stephanie Achieng – African Union Inter-African Bureau for Animal Resources (AU-IBAR), Gender Policy and Strategy Expert : Ms. Stephanie Achieng is a Gender Policy and Strategy Expert at AU-IBAR with over 8 years' experience, specializes in integrating gender into aquatic biodiversity conservation and environmental management for inclusive blue economy development. With expertise in environmental management, policy development, and capacity building, she supports programs that strengthen ecosystem resilience and nature-based solutions. She engages stakeholders across Africa to advance reforms in the Blue Economy and biodiversity sectors. She holds an MSc in Environmental Management from the University of Cape Town, South Africa.

Lilian J. Ibengwe – Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries, United Republic of Tanzania: Ms. Lilian J. Ibengwe is a Principal Fisheries Officer at the Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries, Tanzania. Ms. Ibengwe's holds a MSc. in Environmental Management and a PhD in Fisheries from the University of Dar Es Salaam. She began her career in Fisheries Management within the Ministry 18 years ago, during which she worked in policy and planning to develop small-scale fisheries management strategies. In 2012, she won Yamamoto Prize from the Japan International Fisheries Research Society (JIFRS) for her work in developing strategies for responsible fishery management in Tanzania. Ms. Ibengwe has made stride in ensuring gender issues are considered in the Tanzania Fisheries Sector through her key contribution to the establishment of the Fisheries Gender Desk in the Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries.

Angela Lentisco – FAORAP: Ms. Angela Lentisco is a Fishery and Aquaculture Officer in the FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (FAORAP). Ms. Lentisco has more than 19 years of experience working with international development organizations, with a focus on the identification of climate-smart solutions supporting women's empowerment, community strengthening and the implementation of an ecosystem-approach to fisheries and aquaculture.

Erika Valerio – FAO: Ms. Erika Valerio is a gender and agri-food systems specialist currently working with FAO, with a strong interest in gender equality, women's empowerment and rural development. Dr. Valerio has been appointed as focal point for fisheries and aquaculture in the ESP division. She holds a PhD in Rural Development from Newcastle University and has previously worked with the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), before joining the University of New England as a Research Fellow.

Moderator:

Matteo Luzzi – FAO: Mr. Matteo Luzzi is a Gender Consultant working in NFISG based in the Headquarters of FAO. After graduating in International Relations, Matteo obtained a master's degree in International Cooperation and Development, with a specific focus on Economics for Development. After several experiences in international NGOs, he joined the Fisheries and Aquaculture (NFI) Division of FAO in March 2021 as a part of NFISG and has been contributing to the team's effort to mainstream gender and strive for gender equality in all NFI Division's technical and normative work.

Facilitators:

Mercy Kambulu – Circus Zambia

Jennifer Gee – FAO

Rachel Matheson - FAO