



Environment for Development

## RESEARCH BRIEF

May 2024

### Topic

*Based on the EFD Discussion Paper entitled “Fisheries Management for Food Security and Poverty Eradication: The case of small-scale fisheries in Vietnam” by Quach Thi Khanh Ngoc, Bui Bich Xuan & Pham Khanh Nam.*

Research questions:

What is the contribution of small-scale fisheries in Vietnam in promoting food security and alleviating poverty among fishing households?

What potential do fisheries management measures have to reduce poverty and improve of food security?

### Key Messages

- Small-scale fisheries in Vietnam have greatly contributed to the well-being of fishing households, increasing both income and food security. However, some fishing households still face challenges concerning food security and poverty.
- Fisheries may not improve the overall living standards of fishers substantially, due to over-fishing and resource degradation.
- Policies should be formulated to conserve fisheries resources, safeguard the fundamental human rights of vulnerable fishing households, and ensure the effective distribution of benefits from common pool resources, thereby promoting sustainable ecosystems and economically sound fisheries.

### Background and Methodology

Small-scale fishing is vital for the well-being of coastal communities in Vietnam. However, it has been undervalued and hence poorly managed for many years, resulting in severely decreased fish stocks, catches reduction, and habitat

degradation. The decrease in fish stocks and catches, which in turn may increase the vulnerability of coastal communities to the poverty and food insecurity, emphasizes the urgency for the governance of small-scale fishing for long-term ecosystem conservation and socio-economic well-being. The

objectives of this study are to assess the evidence of how and to what extent Vietnamese small-scale fisheries contribute to food security and reducing poverty, to categorize fisheries households based on dimensions of poverty and food security, and to examine the linkage between management measures and livelihood diversification with issues of food security and poverty.

The present study was conducted in the provinces of Phu Yen, Khanh Hoa, and Ninh Thuan, located on the Central Southern Coast. This area has highly productive marine ecosystems that provide various ecosystem services, including great fisheries resources. We classify fishing households according to attributes associated with poverty and food insecurity.

## **Results**

### ***Contribution of Vietnamese small-scale fisheries into food security and poverty eradication***

Overall, small-scale fisheries in Vietnam provide an average of 30 percent of a family's food needs, with 33 percent of the income generated from fisheries being used for family food expenses.

Furthermore, small-scale fisheries in Vietnam make a noteworthy contribution to both employment and income. They provide jobs for 67 percent of individuals contributing to household earnings, including men engaged in fishing and women involved in post-harvesting activities, and account for 83 percent of

the total income within these households. This indicates that small-scale fisheries in Vietnam serve as both a crucial "safety net" for fishers and their families, particularly those with limited skills, and as a pathway to enhance women's empowerment.

### ***Two latent profiles of fishers differentiating in the poverty and food insecurity dimensions***

Profile 1, with 35 percent of households in our sample, has a per capita income below the national average. This group primarily relies on fisheries-related activities, consisting of older fishers who may have limited opportunities for other livelihoods. They may risk falling into poverty if they don't get the right support to find alternative livelihoods.

The second profile, comprising 65 percent of our sample, shows a per capita income that surpasses the national average. They have higher per capita income levels and better food security compared to profile 1. The reason for this may be their pursuit of diversified livelihoods. Fishers in this profile are likely located in areas that are managed by limitation measures.

## **Policy Implications**

We draw three possible policy implications based on poverty–food security as well as poverty and natural environment nexus.

First, because the ongoing over-fishing may lead to fish becoming a luxury, out of reach for fishers in the future

(Mcclanahan et al., 2013), fisheries management policies should prioritize efforts to counteract the overuse of marine ecosystems and strengthen the contribution of small-scale fisheries to human well-being. Our study implies that the effectiveness of management measures depends on alternative livelihood opportunities for local fishing households. Alternative livelihood strategies may not mean completely replacing fishing, but combined with resource management they may support existing livelihoods and conserve the environment.

Second, the solution to the problem of poverty and resource degradation needs to consider the necessity to make small-scale fisheries more economically efficient while finding means to conserve fish stocks. A potential solution could involve regulating access by implementing an effective property rights system. The implementation of property rights is being considered as an approach that could potentially decrease the race to fish among fishers, as it encourages them to safeguard their

fishing resources by granting secure tenure.

Third, fisheries communities in Vietnam show how a collective effort, local competition for access and control of resources, and social distribution (MARD, 2021; Pomeroy, et al., 2009; Ngoc et al., 2009; Ngoc, 2018) call for achieving equity and sustainability in management to promote food security and alleviate poverty. Policies should be formulated to safeguard the fundamental human rights of vulnerable resource users and ensure the effective distribution of benefits from common pool resources, thereby promoting the sustainability of ecosystems and economically viable fisheries.

**The Environment for Development initiative is a capacity-building program in environmental economics focused on international research collaboration, policy advice, and academic training. It consists of centres in Central America, Chile, China, Colombia, Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, Sweden (University of Gothenburg), Tanzania, Vietnam, Uganda, and the US (Resources for the Future). Financial support is provided by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida).**