*22nd Dec 2024*

Dear *PNAS* Editorial Board,

We wish to submit our manuscript “*Dried fish provide widespread access to critical nutrients across sub-Saharan Africa*”to be considered for publication as a Research Report in *PNAS*. Dried small fish are affordable and nutritious foods, caught in large quantities by small-scale fisheries, and distributed widely through informal networks. Yet data scarcity on nutrient content and consumption rates has meant that **the contribution of dried fish to diets has remained hidden**, limiting understanding of how dried fish contribute to food security and nutrition.

To address this gap, we analysed dried fish collected from markets in Africa and Asia, and modelled dietary data from surveys conducted in 38,918 households across sub-Saharan Africa. A typical portion (9 g) of sun-dried or smoked fish, such as *Sardinella*, contributed significantly to recommended intakes of essential nutrients (calcium, iodine, iron, selenium, zinc, vitamins B12 and D, omega-3 fatty acids) for young children and women. We modelled drivers of fish consumption, finding **dried fish consumption was higher than fresh fish**, and highest in rural and poor households that were near to marine and inland water, or had short travel times to urban centres. Collectively, **dried fish were consumed weekly by one-third of households (145 million people)**, underlining their essential contributions to closing nutrient gaps in low- and middle-income countries.

Our study finds that many vitamins and minerals deficient in diets are concentrated in dried small fish. With more people eating dried than fresh fish, our findings underline the potential for enhancing dried fish supply to address nutrient gaps and help eliminate ‘hidden hunger’ by 2030. We believe that these findings are well-suited to *PNAS’s* focus on social and environmental sustainability, building on seminal studies uncovering hidden harvests from freshwater fisheries (Fluet-Chuinard et al. 2018 *PNAS*), the role of animal-source foods in healthy diets (Beal et al. 2024 *PNAS*), and pathways of tropical seafood access (Seto et al. 2024 *PNAS*).

Our manuscript is not under consideration elsewhere.

Yours sincerely,

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