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Pathways out of Poverty: Women – the ‘forgotten gender’ – and the Artisanal Fisheries Sector of Sierra Leone

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ABSTRACT

In a number of low-income countries the fisheries sector has been shown to be instrumental in meeting key development goals, specifically in combating malnutrition, but the crucial contribution of women within this sector has been largely overlooked. This is particularly true in Sierra Leone, despite gender featuring prominently in the country's poverty reduction strategy. This article therefore examines the history of female involvement in the sector, how this involvement was transformed by the civil war, and assesses whether the various current initiatives to support women in the post-harvest sector offer a realistic 'pathway out of poverty'.¹

Keywords: Fish distribution chain, Food security, women, Poverty alleviation, Sierra Leone.

INTRODUCTION

Since the Millennium Summit established eight international development goals (the Millennium Development Goals – MDGs) in 2000, global progress towards these goals

1. **Acknowledgement** is made to the British Council (under the Delphe project 2.01 'Reducing Poverty and Enhancing Equity in the Artisanal Fisheries of Sierra Leone') for funding the research and training that have led to the realisation of this article.

has been surprisingly good, ‘especially for the poverty and gender parity goals’². However, despite strong regional growth (5.2 per cent over the period 2000–7, the highest levels recorded since the 1960s), there is relative unanimity that sub-Saharan Africa lags behind on most counts³. The economies most off-track to meet the MDGs, and where poverty is most endemic, are the ‘fragile states’ – so-called because governance, institutions and capacity are weak – which constitute 9 per cent of the developing world’s population, but over 25 per cent of those in extreme poverty⁴. Sierra Leone is perhaps the epitome of a fragile state. Ranked in the bottom decile (180th) of the Human Development Index, it has an average life expectancy of 48, an infant mortality rate of 119 per 1 000 live births, 66.42 per cent of the population live in poverty, and one in five children under five are underweight.⁵

Food security is crucial then if national levels of malnourishment and poverty are to be tackled. One crucial component in this strategy is likely to be the fisheries sector, a sector that accounts for 63.1 per cent of daily protein consumption and delivers 67.9 per cent of the foreign exchange revenues derived from agricultural exports in Sierra Leone⁶. However, while the sector is accorded attention within many African Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs), including that of Sierra Leone, such recognition by and large ignores the critical role played by women within the sector. This paper therefore picks up upon Thorpe’s plea that ‘further research could usefully be directed ... to linking the critical role women play within the fisheries supply chain in many regions of the developing world to the fisheries development discourse which feeds into national and donor support strategies – so as to ensure the more effective promotion of pro-poor, pro-gender policies’.⁷

The objective of this paper is therefore twofold. First to examine poverty and the importance of the fisheries sector within Sierra Leone, showing how it provides nutrition in both the country’s coastal communities and beyond (Section 2). Second, to highlight

2. Bourguignon, F., Bénassy-Quéré, A., Dercon, S., Estache, A., Gunning, J.W., Kanbur, R., Klasen, S., Maxwell, S., Platteau, J-P., and A. Spadaro, *Millennium Development Goals at Midpoint: Where do We Stand and Where do We need to Go* (Brussels, 2008), 6.
3. See UN, *Millennium Development Goals Report* (2007); Blair Commission, *Our Common Interest – Report of the Commission for Africa* (2005). W. Easterly, ‘How the Millennium Development Goals are Unfair to Africa’, *World Development*, 37, 1 (Jan. 2007), 32, for example, ascribes this parlous state of affairs to ‘arbitrary and arcane’ MDG design.
4. World Bank, *Global Monitoring Report – Sub-Saharan Africa* (Washington D.C, 2007), 2.
5. Data is available from the World Bank website at: http://databank.worldbank.org/ddp/editReport?REQUEST_SOURCE=search&CNO=2&country=SLE&series=&period=
6. Béné, C., and S. Heck, ‘Fish and Food Security in Africa’, *NAGA Worldfish Center Quarterly*, 28, 3/4 (Autumn 2002/2005), 8–13; A. Thorpe, *Mainstreaming Fisheries into National Development and Poverty Reduction Strategies: Current Situation and Opportunities*, FAO Fisheries Circular No.997 (Rome, 2005), 82.
7. Thorpe, *Mainstreaming Fisheries*, 67.

the important role women play in local fish chains, using income generated in the sector as a ‘pathway out of poverty’ (Section 3). A concluding section summarises our findings, making a case for a more detailed examination of post-harvest sector activities in order to support the development of more effective national livelihood-enhancing policies.

POVERTY, PRSPS AND FISHERIES IN SIERRA LEONE

Although Sierra Leone became independent on 27th April 1961, posting respectable rates of growth (3.5–4.0 per cent per annum) in the subsequent two decades, economic mismanagement and the international debt crisis saw growth rates stagnate in the 1980s. However, estimates of the prevalence of poverty in the country only date to 1976 when Lisk and Van Hoveen reported that ‘hawkers, unskilled labourers, vendors and artisans’ fell below the poverty line, going on to suggest there was little difference in absolute levels of poverty between urban and rural areas (65 per cent of urban population, 66 per cent of rural), although the intensity of poverty was much more pronounced in rural areas⁸. The scenario worsened during the 1980s, with the Interim PRSP estimating that around 75 per cent of the 4.6 million population lived in poverty (two-thirds of these in extreme poverty)⁹. While the 1990s did indeed see ‘structural changes affecting the pattern of production and the initial distribution of income and key productive assets’, these were not of the poverty-alleviating nature that Lisk and Van der Hoveen envisaged¹⁰. Instead, a brutal and prolonged armed conflict (March 1991 to January 2002) saw 20 000 killed and many more injured/maimed, over 2 million displaced, a halving of per capita GDP, increased poverty (82 per cent of the population), and a rising incidence of communicable diseases (tuberculosis, typhoid, HIV/AIDS and STDs among others) that went untreated during the decade.¹¹

8. Using National Household Budget Survey data from that year, Lisk, F., and R. van der Hoveen, ‘Measurement and Interpretation of Poverty in Sierra Leone’, *International Labour Review*, 118, 6, (1979) the same authors estimated the poverty gap as around 23 million Leones (8 per cent of total urban income) in the urban area – as opposed to 69 million Leones (27.3 per cent of total rural income) in the rural areas.
9. *Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper*, IMF (Washington D.C, 2001) – 1995 Poverty Profile (based on the 1989/90 Household Expenditure Survey).
10. Lisk and van der Hoveen, ‘Measurement ...’, 728.
11. Good synopses of the civil war and its impact upon agrarian issues, production and the population can be found in I. Abdullah, ‘Bush Path to Destruction: The Origin and Character of the Revolutionary United Front in Sierra Leone’, *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 36,2, (1998):203–35; M. Chege, ‘The State that Came Back from the Dead’, *The Washington Quarterly*, 25, 3, (2002), 147–60; Snyder, R. and R. Bhavnani, ‘Diamonds, Blood, and Taxes: A Revenue-Centred Framework for Explaining Political Order’, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 49, 4, (2005), 563–97; Chaveau, J-P. and P. Richards, ‘West African Insurgencies in Agrarian Perspective: Côte d’Ivoire and Sierra Leone Compared’, *Journal of Agrarian Change*, 8,4, (2008), 515–52.

Fisheries were not untouched by the civil war. Thorpe notes how the growing insurgency compounded the already extant problem of overfishing in the industrial fisheries sector – and led to the exit of many distant water fleets.¹² The conflict also caused substantive artisanal fleet relocation (from North and South into the Western/Freetown region and neighbouring Guinea – and thence back again after the Revolutionary United Front entered the capital in 1997). It also saw the cessation of a number of important livelihood-enhancing donor projects (most notably projects funded by FAO and the German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ)), the destruction of the Fisheries Office (1997), and the widespread destruction/theft of boats and gear. Despite this, artisanal fisheries landings appear to have been less severely affected by the war than livestock production for, as Table One shows, per capita fish consumption rose from 41 to 63 grams/person/day between 1990–92 and 2003–05, in contrast to meat and dairy products, where consumption declined from 35 to 30 grams.

Table 1: Consumption of animal food products in Sierra Leone (grams per person per day)

Food item	1990-92	1995-97	2003-05
Bovine meat	4	4	3
Mutton and goat meat	1	1	1
Pig meat	2	1	1
Poultry meat	6	6	8
Other meat and offal	2	2	2
Milk	17	13	11
Eggs	3	4	4
Total meat and dairy	35	31	30
Freshwater fish	10	11	9
Demersal fish	7	8	13
Pelagic fish	21	17	35
Other marine fish	0	0	5
Cephalopods	3	0	1
Total fish	41	36	63

Source: FAO: FAOSTAT.

12. Thorpe, A., Whitmarsh, D., Ndomahina, E., Baio, A. and M. Kemokai, ‘Fisheries and Failing States: The Case of Sierra Leone’, *Marine Policy*, 33, (2009), 393–400.

Barely a month after the civil war ended, a Truth and Reconciliation Commission was established and the government formulated a 74-page Interim PRSP, which met with IMF/World Bank approval the same month (June 2001). While recognising that ‘poverty was endemic and pervasive’, the main policy focus of the I-PRSP was understandably on restoring national security and good governance, with poverty alleviation initiatives directed initially to dealing with the needs of the internally displaced, the returnees, the maimed and other immediately vulnerable groupings. Fisheries featured – although the sectoral priority was more on the rehabilitation of outstations so as to ‘increase the supply of fish for domestic consumption, [and] enhance the availability of fish protein and exportable marine products’¹³.

The National Recovery Strategy, which produced detailed local assessments the following year (October 2002), was more nuanced. Shifting the emphasis away from the economic stability pledge of the I-PRSP to economic recovery, its people-centred approach was subsequently reflected in the 2004 Local Government Act, which created nineteen district councils as a check on the excesses of central government. A more comprehensive PRSP followed in June 2005¹⁴. Acknowledging the country’s long-term development strategy (Vision 2025) and the medium-term 2015 MDG goal it also noted, using newly available data from the 2003/4 Integrated Household Survey, that poverty levels had begun to decline. The survey also indicated that poverty was essentially a ‘non-Freetown’ problem – with just 15 per cent of the capital’s residents (compared with 79 per cent in rural areas and 70 per cent in other urban areas) construed to be poor (Table 2).¹⁵

Table 2: Poverty in Sierra Leone 2003/4, by District (by percentage of the population)

	Rural		Urban		Total Poor (District)
	Food Poor	Total Poor	Food Poor	Total Poor	
Bo	24.3	67.8	27.3	59.9	64.0
Bonthe	33.1	83.5	39.9	88.7	85.0
Moyamba	17.4	69.1	11.1	59.0	68.0
Pujehun	16.3	59.6	7.7	59.5	59.0
Kailahun	54.9	94.6	25.7	86.2	92.0

13. *Sierra Leone: Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper*, IMF (Washington D.C., 2001), see especially p.37.

14. Although the country has produced PSRP Annual Progress Reports since 2005, no new PRSP has been introduced to replace the 2005 one.

15. See *Sierra Leone: Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper*, IMF (Washington D.C., 2005).

Kenema	52.4	95.0	19.5	77.5	88.0
Kono	35.2	79.6	9.2	56.3	66.0
Bombali	69.6	90.0	25.1	83.4	89.0
Kambia	11.6	67.7	-	75.6	69.0
Koinadugu	29.2	76.3	28.6	81.1	77.0
Port Loko	22.6	85.0	12.7	71.9	82.0
Tonkolili	31.0	84.2	36.4	87.7	84.0
Western Urban	*	*	3.2	17.1	15.0
Western Rural	26.3	70.1	*	*	45.0
Total	32.8	78.9	14.7	54.3	70.0

Source: PRSP (2005, 26-8, coastal districts are shown in italics)

Poverty was most acute in the Eastern district of Kailahun, the Central Northern districts of Bombali and Tonkolili and the coastal districts of Port Loko (immediately to the North of Freetown) and Bonthe (encompassing Sherbro Island and Shenge to the South). The low relative incidence of food poverty in the coastal districts (11.6–33.1 per cent) compared with the inland regions (24.3–69.6 per cent), however, highlights how the growing trend in per capita fish consumption (as indicated in Table 1), helped tackle food poverty in the immediate coastal vicinity given the integral role fish plays in the dietary needs of the poor.

The role of fisheries in ameliorating food poverty, most particularly in coastal areas, lends weight to Weeratunge and Snyder’s call¹⁶ for further research into ‘who is moving in and out of fisheries-related livelihoods, and how livelihood portfolios are changing’. As growing male involvement within the sector has already been reviewed elsewhere,¹⁷ this article examines historic evidence relating to female involvement in the fish trade of Sierra Leone and assesses the extent to which it does (and could) contribute to poverty reduction.

16. N. Weeratunge, and K. Snyder, ‘Gleaner, Fisher, Trader, Processor: Understanding Gendered Employment in the Fisheries and Aquaculture Sector’, Paper presented at the *FAO-IFAD-ILO Workshop on Gaps, Trends and Current Research in Gender Dimensions of Agricultural and Rural Employment: Differentiated Pathways out of Poverty*, 31 Mar.-2 Apr. (Rome, 2009), 16.

17. See Thorpe et al. ‘Fisheries and Failing States’,

WOMEN AND THE ARTISANAL FISHERIES OF SIERRA LEONE

While there is an almost complete absence of literature on historic gender roles in Sierra Leone's artisanal fisheries, what information there is offers a strong rebuttal of Trottier's assertion that 'in Sierra Leone fishing is left to women as it is not worthy of a man's attention'.¹⁸ Although the Frame Surveys undertaken by the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources (MFMR) in 1974 and 1981 did not differentiate between respondents in terms of gender, one of the authors who was involved in both these and subsequent frame surveys (1990, 1994, 2003 and 2009) confirmed that while a few women did indeed own vessels, fishing was almost exclusively a male occupation. While reasons for this in the African context are largely cultural¹⁹, in Sierra Leone, as elsewhere, it is women who dominate in the processing and marketing domains. One of the first national field studies on women's roles in the rural development process, for example, reflected on how readily fisherwomen embraced technological developments in oven construction during the 1950s (and then again in the early 1980s), going on to note how 'women acted collectively ... in bargaining with shrewd fishermen'²⁰.

The decade-long civil war, which 'denied women of any genuine prospect of economic advancement', also converted many women into the sole bread-winner within the household, as male partners were conscripted, were murdered or fled²¹. The scenario was further exacerbated for those women involved in artisanal fish processing and distribution for, with much of the fleet migrating to Freetown and other safer zones, the main component of their traditional livelihood strategies was also removed. Women responded in a number of ways. Some had little alternative and were abducted, forcibly recruited or murdered by the armed groups involved in the conflict²². The more fortunate

18. B. Trottier, 'Women in Aquaculture Production in West Africa', In: *Proceedings of the ADCP/NORAD Workshop on Women in Aquaculture* 13-16 April 1987 (Rome, 1987), 2.
19. Research on Lake Victoria by A. Madanda, *Commercialisation and Gender Roles among Lake Victoria Shore Fishing Communities of Uganda*, Research Report (Kampala, 2003), for example, provides a useful insight into the cultural beliefs and practices that inhibit female involvement in the sector, noting how if a women were to board a fishing boat, touches one of its oars or undresses or is naked on the lake, it will bring misfortune, bad luck or low catches. Thorpe (cited in Delphe, *Proceedings of the Gender and Artisanal Fisheries in Sierra Leone Symposium*, British Council, Mimeo, (Freetown, 2009) provides a brief synopsis of cultural beliefs as they affect female involvement in fishing within the West African region.
20. F. Steady, 'Women's Work and Rural Cash Food Systems: The Tombo and Gloucester Development Projects, Sierra Leone', In Muntemba, S. (ed). *Rural Development and Women: Lessons from the Field* (Volume 2), International Labour Organisation (Geneva, 1985).
21. Others became *de facto* heads of household after the conflict when their husbands/partners rejected them due to the sexual violation they had endured, and/or their collaboration with rebel forces during the conflict. See Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Women and the Armed Conflict*, Volume 3b, (Freetown, 2009), Chapter 3 especially pages 60-77.
22. Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Women and the armed conflict*, 30ff.

sought out alternative livelihoods with salt production and petty trading (particularly of food products) among the most popular. However, prospects were limited as markets were circumscribed by road closures and restrictions over travel. Conversely, fleet relocation to Freetown offered a new livelihood option for underemployed urban women, who now had the opportunity to access fish for processing/re-sale, an option that could in part offset the loss of trading opportunities that resulted from curbs on the internal movement of both people and commodities.

Migration as a rural livelihood response, although not quite in the way Weeratunge and Synder intended²³, was both spontaneous and measured. Spontaneous, in the sense that in some instances households fled (often overnight) to escape the advance of armed groups, with livelihood considerations very much a secondary concern to survival itself. Those who fled inland found themselves subsequently forsaking fish processing in favour of cultivating cassava, rice, potatoes or marketing charcoal in order to sustain their family. Measured, in the sense that in some instances the migration destination was chosen as it offered an immediate means of ameliorating poverty and destitution, as in the case of the (older) fish mammies who moved into the centre of Freetown to beg, and the young fisherwomen who relocated from the Eastern wharf of Freetown so as to engage in prostitution on the Western beaches of Lumley, Aberdeen and Tokeh²⁴. The severe dislocation of fleet, fisherfolk and markets undoubtedly contributed to an increased incidence of poverty among fishing communities in the period, although concrete data is not available.²⁵

While addressing the curtailment of sectoral livelihood opportunities (female or male) was not realistically an option until the war ended in January 2002, the National Fisheries Policy released the following year did pledge to ‘enhance the socio-economic status of people in the fisheries sector *with emphasis on women*’.²⁶ This line of thinking was developed in the full PRSP of 2005 which promised to ‘*support fishermen and women engaged in both the artisanal and aquaculture sub-sectors with essential inputs and skills training in processing*’.²⁷ However, the Poverty Reduction Gender Action Plan (PRGAP)

23. N. Weeratunge, and K. Snyder, ‘Gleaner. Fisher.’

24. Metzger, cited in Delphe, ‘Proceedings ...’, 6.

25. Data collection was an understandably redundant exercise during the conflict period. The Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission, ‘*Women ...*’ as well as acknowledging that women and children were ‘hardest hit’, also provide graphic accounts of systemic rape and sexual violation, and the post-war stigmatisation and ostracism of women that has – and continues – to take place.

26. Government of Sierra Leone, *Fisheries Policy of Sierra Leone*, Mimeo (Freetown, 2003), 10 (the italics are ours).

27. *Sierra Leone: Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper*, 98 (the italics are ours)

released the following year²⁸ remained silent *vis-a-vis* the fisheries sector, and it was left to the Proposed Fisheries Sector Strategy paper to acknowledge that ‘fish trade at the retail level in Sierra Leone is almost exclusively the domain of women, *implying if women are empowered to undertake this venture, family income could rise easily, thereby ensuring household food security, and possibly poverty reduction*’²⁹.

This view undoubtedly informed the decision of the African Development Bank to launch the Artisanal Fisheries Development Project (AFDEP) in 2002. A key component of the project was a microfinance scheme, which offered credit to 3 897 women (56.1 per cent of beneficiaries), with a subsequent evaluation suggesting the desirability of refocusing the programme more towards women processors/distributors given their ‘greater reliability’ in terms of repayment in the future³⁰. Improved facilities at major artisanal landing sites, also to be funded by the same project, will both enhance food safety and go some way to adding value across the market supply chain³¹. This is welcome as field research³² undertaken at the four main artisanal landing sites in Sierra Leone (Konakrdee, Tombo, Goderich and Shenge) found that women involved in the sector derive a substantive proportion of their livelihoods from fish processing/marketing activities (Table 3).

28. The Sierra Leone Women’s Forum (see PRSP-Annual Report, IMF (Washington D.C., 2008), 105/6) were also somewhat critical of the extent to which gender mainstreaming actually occurred within the final PRSP – suggesting that there was ‘insufficient disaggregation of data in terms of women’s incomes, livelihoods and constraints’, a factor which made it difficult to apply gendered poverty analysis and design policy solutions.
29. A.E. Neiland, Arbuckle, M., Bodiguel, C., Bostock, T., Campbell, J. and L. Gronnevet, *Sierra Leone: A Proposed Fisheries Sector Strategy Paper (FSSP)*, DfID/World Bank/FAO, Mimeo (Freetown, 2007), 13, the italics are ours once more).
30. Dabor, cited by Delphe, *Proceedings*, 9.
31. Robbie, cited by Delphe, *Proceedings*.
32. A short questionnaire was completed by the project’s research assistant (who has had extensive experience working with women’s groups in the country) on behalf of 100 respondents drawn from the country’s three fishing regions during 2008/9. Although fishing activity takes place all along the coast, the majority of landings occur on four main beaches (Shenge in the South, Konakrdee in the North and Goderich and Tombo in Western region – where the capital, Freetown, is also located) and interviewing was concentrated in these sites, with the local fisher unions advising on the selection of twenty representative respondents at each site. As Freetown is surrounded by a number of much smaller fishing beaches, the research assistant visited five of these sites (Portee, Rukupa, Old Wharf, Moa Wharf and Magazine Wharf) and interviewed a sample of fisherwomen there so as to capture local livelihood data. Subsequent focus group meetings with women at each of the four major landing sites and a National Symposium on gender equity in the sector held in the capital on 19 June 2009, supplemented the information obtained via the questionnaires.

Table 3: Source and Importance of Fisherwomen Livelihoods, Sierra Leone (2009).

Landing Sites	Number of Respondents	Source from which Livelihood Income is Derived (%).			
		Post-Harvest	Petty trading (not fish)	Sowing	Other
Tombo	20	90	10	0	0
Goderich	20	80	5	15	0
Konakridee	20	95	5	0	0
Shenge	20	100	0	0	0
Smaller Sites (5)	20	60	30	5	5
Totals/ (Average)	100	(85)	(10)	(4)	(1)

Source: Delphe Field Survey.

At all four major landing sites, fish-trading and processing dominated the livelihood strategies of those fisherwomen surveyed. In Shenge, the most geographically isolated of the sites, women derived their income exclusively from fish-related activities. At the smaller landing sites (Portee, Rukupa, Old Wharf, Moa Wharf and Magazine Wharf) income sources were somewhat more diversified – reflecting the limited local market for such products and the logistical difficulties of transporting a highly perishable product even short distances over poor roads.³³ Moreover, the same study provides prefatory evidence to corroborate UK development agency DfID’s assertion that female participation in the post-harvest fish chain can provide a pathway out of poverty, with all respondents reporting profit margins of 50 per cent or more on their daily activities – and 14 per cent of respondents announcing that they had been attracted into the activity by the profitable opportunities on offer.³⁴ Whether fish processing/marketing is quite so lucrative/attractive for women in other more isolated regional landing sites – such as Shengebole, Bendu Wharf, Bumpetoke or Katta (in the Moyamba District) and Potopotoh, Waima, Bullon, Snad Point or Gbap (in the Bonthe District) of Southern Sierra Leone (or indeed in the inland fisheries of Sierra Leone eg. at Gbondapy) – is a question that merits further research. Equally, research needs to ask whether fisheries can be a sustained source of household income for an increasing number of female participants (as the UKs Department for International Development [DfID] appear to propose), particularly when there is evidence to suggest fisher incomes are falling, and/or some local stocks, most notably in the Western region, are overfished.³⁵

33. Delphe, *Proceedings*.

34. Delphe, *Proceedings*.

35. Thorpe et al. ‘Fisheries and Failing States’, 398; and CNN ‘Inside Africa’ (2008).

CONCLUSION

While fisheries is the principal source of daily protein and foreign exchange revenues derived from agricultural exports for many developing countries, this has historically not been reflected in the importance accorded to the activity in many national development plans and/or PRSPs.³⁶ Moreover, there are concerns that PRSPs have ‘hardly mainstreamed gender’ and in this regard ‘a review of the PRSP papers produced so far thus makes for depressing reading’.³⁷ Fortunately, things are improving on both fronts. Thorpe suggests the second generation of PRSPs better reflects the contribution the sector can and does make to national development, while the diagnosis of gender inequalities and the embedding of gender-sensitive policies is more evident within contemporary PRSPs.³⁸

However, there has been rather less progress in understanding the role of women within the fisheries sector, and fisherwomen remain largely invisible in national PRSPs and donor support strategies³⁹. Despite Thorpe highlighting the need for a better understanding of the critical role played by women within the fisheries supply chain, four years on Weeratunge and Snyder bemoaned the fact that a good proportion of the recent literature – like much of the earlier material – upon ‘women in fisheries’ remains essentially descriptive, as opposed to analytic or prescriptive⁴⁰. One welcome exception is the text by Neis⁴¹, which explored – from a gendered perspective – the increasing commodification of fish due to globalisation processes. However:

A fish isn’t just a fish, it carries in it, and into us when we eat it, a host of social relationships such as those with the people who farm, harvest, or trade the fish and also with Nature Fish embodies the relationships that organise and produce it.⁴²

36. Thorpe, ‘Mainstreaming..’, 2005.

37. E. Zuckerman, *Evaluation of Gender Mainstreaming in Advocacy Work on Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs): Synthesis Report* (Oxford, 2002), ii; N. Kabeer, *Gender Mainstreaming in Poverty Eradication and the Millennium Development Goals: A Handbook for Policy-Makers and Other Stakeholders* (London, 2003), 204.

38. The latter is, no doubt, in large part attributable to the adoption of a Gender Mainstreaming Strategy Paper by the World Bank in 2001 and the publication of Annual Gender Monitoring reports from the following year. See Thorpe *et al.*, ‘Fisheries and Failing States’, 18; UNIFEM, *Resource Guide for Gender Theme Groups*, (New York, 2005), 33; L. Chiwara and M. Karadenizli, *Mapping Aid Effectiveness and Gender Equality: Global Findings and Key Messages* (New York, 2008).

39. Thorpe, *Mainstreaming*, surveyed 281 such documents and only uncovered five which even acknowledged that women played a role within the sector.

40. Thorpe, *Mainstreaming*, 67; Weeratunge and Snyder, ‘Gleaner, Fisher’, 1.

41. B. Neis, Binkley, M. Gerrard, S and M.C. Maneschy (eds), *Changing Tides: Gender, Fisheries and Globalization* (Fernwood Publishing, Halifax, 2005).

42. Paraphrased from Neis and Maneschy, *Changing Tides*, 248.

In the Sierra Leone case, women play an integral role in the artisanal fish chain, purchasing the *bonga*, *Lati* and *herring* from the large Ghana boats that beach on the shore, processing the fish on *pin-pin* (support sticks) on *banda* (raised platforms) nearby, and then selling the fish in the local marketplace or to traders for distribution further inland. Yet, little research into the lives and livelihoods of such women, their social relationships, and how policy might be directed to enhance their socio-economic status exists. How, for example, do these relationships help or hinder the attainment of household food security and thereby prevent nutrition? How can (and what types of) policy might best redress female invisibility?

This paper seeks to help redress this lacuna – and shows how, in the Sierra Leone case, the lives and livelihoods of fisherwomen were not placed in jeopardy by the phenomena of globalisation, but by the decade-long civil war. Murder, conscription, abduction and fleet relocation all combined to effect a more profound structural change upon fishing communities and the women therein than market relations and globalisation could ever have done. Women migrated, and in many instances switched livelihoods, so as to simply survive. The restoration of peace re-opened markets and market channels, although the road infrastructure is poor and Shenge, one of the principal landing centres, is often cut off from the hinterland during the monsoon season. Yet while credit provision and the profitability of the activity has attracted new entrants no detailed census of participants in the post-harvest sector has yet to take place. This is long overdue given the importance of the artisanal sector to nutritional needs, particularly in the coastal districts (Table 2), and the perceived importance of such post-harvest revenues to aggregate household income (Table 3). Such data would also be instrumental in helping to raise the profile of the post-harvest sector in both fisheries policy documents and (future) PRSPs, and specifically in highlighting the critical role that fisherwomen can play in ensuring national (and household) food security.

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