

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 paper 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’.

Keywords: *Fish distribution chain, Food security, Gender parity, Poverty alleviation, Sierra Leone.*

1. Introduction.

Poverty alleviation in the developing world is a central developmental concern. Since 1999, the IMF and World Bank have made all concessional lending¹ – including eligibility for the entry into the Heavily-Indebted Poor Country (HIPC) debt-relief initiative – conditional upon recipient countries producing Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs). The Millennium Development Goals (MDG), launched to great fanfare by the 147 Heads of State and government in September 2000², expressly pledged to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, expecting the proportion of people subsisting on less than US\$1 a day to halve between 1990 and 2015 in all signatory countries. Civil society played its part. The Jubilee 2000 (to cancel developing country debt) and the ‘Make Poverty History’ (2005) campaigns kept poverty alleviation in the spotlight and were instrumental in prompting the IMF and World Bank to

¹ The Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility of the IMF offers ten year loans at an annual interest rate of 0.5 per cent p.a. (with repayments starting after 5.5 years) to 78 low-income countries. World Bank IDA credits are even more generous – charging no interest, offering a ten year grace period before repayments start and extending to 35-40 years.

² Within a year, 189 states had adopted the Declaration (UN, 2001:2).

cancel 100 per cent of the debts owed by certain countries³ following the G8 Gleneagles summit of 2005.

Since the Millennium, as Bourguignon *et al.* (2008:6) note, global progress has been surprisingly good, ‘especially for the poverty and gender parity goals’. However, there are marked regional differences – with the Asian countries forging ahead in terms of combating poverty (most notably China, where the numbers in poverty dropped from 374.3 million to 128.4 million between 1990 and 2004 according to Chen and Ravallion [2007]), while Latin America and the Middle East were ‘relative overachievers’ on the gender equity front (Bourguignon *et al.* 2008:7). There is relative unanimity however, that Sub-Saharan Africa lags behind on most counts (UN, 2007; Blair Commission, 2005), with Easterly (2009:32) ascribing this parlous state of affairs to ‘arbitrary and arcane’ MDG design. Yet despite strong regional growth – 5.2 per cent over the period 2000-7, the highest levels recorded since the 1960s - it is undeniable that Sub-Saharan Africa still finds itself with the highest percentage (41.1 per cent in 2004) of the population ensnared in poverty (Chen and Ravallion, 2007).

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 is weak – which constitute 9 per cent of the developing world’s population, but 25+ per cent of those in extreme poverty (GMR, 2007:2). Sierra Leone is perhaps the epitome of a fragile state. Ranked bottom (177th) of the Human Development Index, 70.2 per cent of the population are in poverty, 282 of every 1000 newly borns do not survive until the age of 5, and 51 per cent of the population were undernourished in 2002/4 – up from 46 per cent in 1990/2 (UNDP, 2007).

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 (Béné and Heck, 2005), 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 Leone (Thorpe, 2005:82). While the sector is accorded attention – even if insufficient in many instances– within national PRSPs, such recognition by and large ignores the critical

³ Eligibility is restricted to countries reaching the HIPC completion point and/or had a per capita income below US\$380 and outstanding debt at the IMF by end-2004. To date, 26 countries have benefited from the MDRI scheme, with a further 16 eligible (IMF, 2009).

role played by women within the sector (Thorpe, 2005:67). This finding is mirrored in the research of Choo *et al.* (2008:176) insofar as “the sector is erroneously perceived to be a ‘male only’ domain, apparently offering little opportunity to women”. 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 (2005:67)”.

Section Two of this paper reviews the extant literature on women in African fisheries, highlighting the relative paucity of literature in the field. Sections Three and Four pick up on one of the specific research lacuna identified – the lack of evidence on how structural change has impacted upon poverty in small-scale fishing communities, and for men and women therein – by providing an overview of poverty, PRSPs and fisheries within Sierra Leone (Section 3) and thence how female involvement within the sector has been affected by ‘markets and migration’ (Section 4). A fifth section concludes.

2. Women and African Fisheries – A Review of the Literature.

Williams (2008:180) notes that ‘[capture] fisheries have long been weak on a gender perspective’, while the consideration of gender issues in aquaculture has only been marginally better addressed. Yet, despite the sector having a (generally) highly pronounced gendered division of labour, the number of women – the ‘forgotten gender’ – involved either directly or indirectly in fisheries/aquaculture across the globe could amount to somewhere between 57 and 100 million⁴. Although the majority of these are concentrated in Asia, there are perhaps as many as 3.75 to 6.6 million women actively involved in African fisheries.

⁴ Thorpe *et al.* (2007:2) report FAO data indicating 38 million people are fishers or fish-farmers, while a further 114 million people are involved in fisheries associated occupations (principally trading and processing) – 152 million people globally (this figure excludes those who indulge in seasonal or occasional fishing activities). If, we were to accept that ‘women don’t fish’ (nor fish-farm), and there are identical numbers of each sex employed in fisheries associated occupations, 57 million women derive an income from the sector. Alternatively, if we accept; (i) women do fish, (ii) women do fish-farm, and (iii) they dominate in fishery-associated occupations [particularly on the distribution side], then there maybe as many as 100 million women active in the sector. If there are 10 million involved in the African fisheries sector (NEPAD, 2005:4), applying a similar calculation allows us to compute the likely universe of African women participating in the sector.

Despite this, women's role in the sector was traditionally overlooked, with Trottier (1987) commenting that fishing activities of women in West Africa suffer from 'invisibility'. Almost a decade later (1995), the IDAF programme convened a group of eleven scientists from West African coastal communities to 'reflect on the role of women and on questions related to gender in fishing communities', with regard to socio-cultural, technico-economic and institutional-legal issues. The findings, reported at a 1996 Workshop (FAO, 1997), recommended the strengthening of female fisheries groupings (Ghana, Gambia, Côte d'Ivoire), evaluating incomes generated and costs incurred by women within the sector (Nigeria, Benin, Guinea), and assessing the nutritional position of women and children (Cameroon and Senegal). Verstralen (1997) followed this up, undertaking a detailed cost, earnings and expenditure survey of 31 women deriving an income from fishing, processing and trading in Ogheye (Delta State, Nigeria). The study suggested fishing and fish-related activities was 'financially attractive' to those surveyed, allowed over two-thirds to be financially independent of their husbands/partners, and documented a number of different strategies being deployed by the women involved in trading and processing to obtain fish.

Unfortunately, further studies of this type were not replicated, causing Bennett to argue in her Marine Policy article (2005) almost a decade later that greater knowledge about gender roles in fisheries – particularly gender-disaggregated data at the community and national level (p.457) - was fundamental if policy interventions were to be effective. Gendered research completed under *The Sustainable Fisheries Livelihood Programme* (SFLP, 1999-2006) across 25 West African countries which culminated in the publication of a policy brief entitled *Gender Policies for Responsible Fisheries* (2007) also supported Bennett's call for more gender-disaggregated data within fisheries. It also bemoaned the failure to consult women on fisheries protection measures (case of DR Congo, 2005) - and concluded by demanding action from governments, NGOs, fishing communities and fishing households on the gender front. The most extensive local-level work on gender and fisheries in Africa relates to Lake Victoria. Research along the lake shore by Medard (2001:155) found income to be 'the principal driving force' for entering the trade, with Madanda (2003) providing a useful insight into the cultural beliefs and practices that inhibit female involvement in the sector⁵. Hence, as fishing on the lake remains largely a male occupation due to a combination

⁵ These include the beliefs that if a woman were to board a fishing boat, touch one of its oars or to undress/be naked on the lake, it would bring misfortune, bad luck or low catches notion that menstruating women should go nowhere near the lake. Thorpe (cited in Delphe 2009) provides a brief synopsis of cultural beliefs as they affect female involvement in fishing within the region.

of said beliefs (Madanda, 2003:31ff) and the risk and cost [in terms of time and energy] involved (Medard, 2001:158) - livelihood diversification is much more commonplace amongst lakeside women (Geheb *et al.*, 2008:93).

Livelihoods are also the focus of the World Bank (2008) module on *Gender in Fisheries and Aquaculture* which proposes four gender-sensitive development investments to ‘address livelihood problems arising from the ongoing changes in production systems, marketing, and technology’ across the sector⁶. The most recent, and undoubtedly the most comprehensive, literature survey of gendered employment in the sector is that of Weeratunge and Snyder (2009), who employ four analytic entry points to help identify a ‘number of noteworthy research priorities’ so as to ensure more effective future policy formulation. One of these, ‘markets and migration’⁷, notes that “adequate empirical evidence is missing on whether the overall impact of market changes has been an increase or decrease in poverty in small-scale fishing/aquaculture communities, and for women and men in the last decades” and provides our entry point for seeking to understand the gendered dynamics of poverty in the Sierra Leone fisheries context.

3. Poverty, PRSPs and Fisheries in Sierra Leone.

Although Sierra Leone became independent on 27th April 1961, posting respectable rates of growth in the subsequent two decades (3.5-4.0 per cent p.a) before economic mismanagement and the international debt crisis saw growth rates stagnate in the 1980s, estimates of the prevalence of poverty in the country only date back to the 1976. Using National Household Budget Survey data from that year, Lisk and van der Hoeven (1979) found that - on average - all urban ‘hawkers, unskilled labourers, vendors and artisans’ fell below the poverty line, with urban poverty levels (65 per cent of urban population) being remarkably similar to rural poverty levels (66 per cent), even if the intensity of poverty was much more pronounced in rural areas⁸. The scenario worsened during the 1980s, with the Interim PRSP reporting that the 1995 Poverty Profile (itself based on the 1989/90 Household Expenditure Survey) now estimated that around 75 per cent of the 4.6 million population lived in poverty (two-thirds of these in extreme poverty). While the 1990s did indeed see ‘structural changes affecting the

⁶ These being; formation of gender-responsive community level resource management bodies, provision of gender-responsive advisory services, action to enable marginalised groups to access new external markets, support in identifying and developing new livelihood opportunities for such marginalised groups.

⁷ The others are; Capabilities and wellbeing, networks and identities, and governance and rights.

⁸ 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.

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 Hoeven (1979:728) envisaged. Instead, a brutal and prolonged armed conflict (March 1991- January 2002) saw 20,000 killed, many more injured/maimed and over 2 million displaced, negative growth rates (averaging -4.5 per cent p.a.), 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) which went untreated during the decade⁹.

Fisheries were not untouched by the civil war. Thorpe *et al.* (2009) note 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. 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), the cessation of a number of important livelihood-enhancing donor projects (most notably the AFCOD, FAO and GTZ projects), 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 about here.

Barely a month after the final disarmament/demobilisation phase ending the civil war got under way, 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 (I-PRSP, 2001). Fisheries featured – although the sectoral priority was more upon the rehabilitation of outstations so as to 'increase the supply of fish for domestic

⁹ Good synopses of the civil war and its impact upon agrarian issues, production and the population can be found in Abdullah (1998); Chege (2002), Synder and Bhavnani (2005), Mitchell (2005) and Chaveau and Richards (2008).

consumption, [and] enhance the availability of fish protein and exportable marine products' (p.37).

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-centric approach was subsequently reflected in the 2004 Local Government Act – which promoted the formation of district councils (19) as a check on the excesses of central government. A more comprehensive (and currently operative) PRSP followed in June 2005. Acknowledging the country's long-term development strategy (Vision 2025) and the medium-term 2015 MDG goal, it also suggested (using newly available 2003/4 Integrated Household Survey data) that poverty levels had begun to decline. The new data indicated that poverty was essentially a 'non-Freetown' problem (Table 2) – with just 15 per cent of the capital's residents, compared to 79 per cent in rural areas and 70 per cent in other urban areas – construed to be poor¹⁰ (PRSP, 2005:25).

Table 2 about here.

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 to the inland regions (24.3-69.6 per cent) highlights the integral role fish plays in the dietary needs of the poor and, while the PRSP goes on to note that data suggests that 'some of the poorest communities' live in the coastal districts of Kambia, Moyamba, Bonthe and Pujehun (2005:34), it nevertheless fails to acknowledge whether these are actually fisher communities.

Gender and fisheries issues **were**, however, accorded a central role in the full PRSP. Not only did the document (perhaps surprisingly) highlight that the incidence, intensity and severity of poverty was greater for male than female-headed households, gender mainstreaming was promised and a Poverty Reduction Gender Action Plan (PRGAP) subsequently produced¹¹. However, beyond a pledge "to *support* fishermen *and* women engaged in both the artisanal

¹⁰ Those in extreme poverty (the food-poor) numbered 33 per cent in rural areas – against 20 per cent in other urban areas and just 3.2 per cent in Freetown.

¹¹ The Sierra Leone Women's Forum (In PRSP-AR, 2008:105/6) were 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.

and aquaculture sub-sectors *with essential inputs and skills training in processing* (PRSP, 2005:98, the italics are ours) the PRSP and the ensuing PRGAP were silent upon the [strategic] role women play within the sector . This is symptomatic of the rather sparse literature that exists nationally at the sectoral level - women remain largely ‘forgotten’ or ‘ignored’. Indeed, while the 2003 National Fisheries Policy highlighted its intent to “enhance the socio-economic status of people in the fisheries sector *with emphasis on women*” (2003:10, the italics are ours), no explicit gendered strategy was proposed to fulfil this particular objective (pages 13ff) – even though the latest Proposed Fisheries Sector Strategy paper (DfID, 2007:13, the italics are ours once more) acknowledges 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.*”

This acknowledgement of the role of (fish) marketing as a female-centric pathway out of poverty in Sierra Leone reinforces Weeratunge and Snyder’s (2008:16) call for further research into ‘markets and migration’, and in particular “who is moving in and out of fisheries-related livelihoods, and how livelihood portfolios are changing”. The following section therefore examines historic evidence relating to female involvement in the fish trade of Sierra Leone and assesses the extent to which it could indeed contribute (via increased family income generation), as DfID suggest, to poverty reduction.

4. Gender, Fish Markets and Migration in 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 (1987:2) assertion that ‘...in Sierra Leone fishing is left to women as it is not worthy of a man’s attention.’ 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, a senior scientist involved in both these and subsequent surveys¹² confirmed that while a few women did indeed own vessels, fishing was almost exclusively a male occupation. However, women – as elsewhere – dominated the processing and marketing domains, with one of the first national field studies on women’s roles in the rural

¹² Subsequent surveys were undertaken in 1990, 1994, 2003 and 2009.

development process reflecting upon how readily fisherwomen embraced technological developments in oven construction during the 1950s (and then again in the early 1980s)¹³, before going on to note how ‘women acted collectively in bargaining with shrewd fishermen...’ (Steady, 1985).

The decade-long civil war, which ‘denied women of any genuine prospect of economic advancement (SLT&RC, 2009:77)’, also converted many women into the sole bread-winner within the household as male partners were conscripted, murdered or fled¹⁴. 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 conflict (SLT&RC, 2009:30ff). The more fortunate 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 livelihood response, although not quite in the way Weeratunge and Synder (2009) intended, was both spontaneous and measured. Spontaneous, in the sense that 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 mummies who moved into the centre of Freetown to beg, and the young fisherwomen who relocated from the

¹³ In the 1950s Ghanaian fishers introduced new smoking techniques into the country, in the 1980s it was the government which introduced a safer, more efficient [in terms of reduced fuel and repair costs] oven. In both instances, local women swiftly switched to using the new techniques/technologies.

¹⁴ 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 (SLT&RC, 2009:60/67).

Eastern wharf of Freetown so as to engage in prostitution on the Western beaches of Lumley, Aberdeen and Tokeh (Metzger, cited in Delphe, 2009:6).

The severe dislocation of fleet, fisherfolk and markets undoubtedly contributed to an increased incidence of poverty among fishing communities, with women disproportionately affected¹⁵. However, female empowerment/advancement was not realistically an option until the war ended in January 2002. Since then, greater emphasis has been given over to supporting the post-harvest fisheries sector in which women are dominant. The 2002 Artisanal Fisheries Development Project (AFDEP) funded by the African Development Bank, has offered credit to 3,897 women (56.1 per cent of beneficiaries) under its micro-finance scheme to date, and is likely to refocus the programme towards women processors/distributors given their ‘greater reliability’ in terms of repayment in the future (Dabor, cited by Delphe, 2009:9). 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 chain (Robbie, cited by Delphe, 2009). This is welcome as research (Delphe 2009a) undertaken at the four main artisanal landing sites in Sierra Leone (Konakridee, Tombo, Goderich and Shenge) suggests that women involved in the sector derive a substantive proportion of their livelihoods from fish processing/marketing activities (Table 3).

Table 3 about here.

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 (Delphe, 2009). Moreover, the same study provides prefatory evidence to corroborate 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

¹⁵ While concrete information is not available as data collection was an understandably redundant exercise during the conflict period, the SLT&RC (2009), 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 ostracisation of women that has – and continues – to take place.

been attracted into the activity by the profitable opportunities on offer (Delphe, 2009a). Whether fish processing/marketing is quite so lucrative/attractive in 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), or can be a sustained source of household income for an increasing number of female participants as DfID appear to propose – particularly when there is evidence to suggest fisher incomes are falling (CNN, 2008) and/or some local stocks, most notably in the Western region, are overfished (Thorpe *et al.*, 2009:398), are questions that merit further consideration.

5. 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 (Thorpe, 2005). Moreover, there were 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’ (Zuckerman, 2002:ii; Kabeer, 2003:204). Fortunately, things are improving on both fronts. Thorpe (2009:18) suggests the second generation of PRSPs better reflect 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 (UNIFEM, 2005:33; Chiwara and Karadenizli, 2008)¹⁶.

However, there has been rather less progress in understanding the nature of gender relations within the fisheries sector – and fisherwomen remain largely invisible in national PRSPs and donor support strategies¹⁷. Despite Thorpe (2005: 67) 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 (2009:1) bemoan 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 prescriptive (a point borne out by our review of the literature in section 2 of this paper). One welcome exception is the text by Neis *et al.*

¹⁶ 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 dating from the following year.

¹⁷ Thorpe’s (2005) survey of 281 such documents only uncovered five which even acknowledged that women played a role within the sector.

(2005), 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” (paraphrased from Neis and Maneschy, 2005:248 – who in turn paraphrased McMahon, 2002:2004).

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 – in line with DfID’s wishes (2007:13) – no census of participants in the post-harvest sector (unlike the vessel Frame Surveys) has yet to take place [but see Footnote 12]. 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 play in ensuring national (and household) food security.

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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: compiled from data obtained from the FAOSTAT database (Food security).

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
<i>Bonthe</i>	<i>33.1</i>	<i>83.5</i>	<i>39.9</i>	<i>88.7</i>	<i>85.0</i>
<i>Moyamba</i>	<i>17.4</i>	<i>69.1</i>	<i>11.1</i>	<i>59.0</i>	<i>68.0</i>
<i>Pujehun</i>	<i>16.3</i>	<i>59.6</i>	<i>7.7</i>	<i>59.5</i>	<i>59.0</i>
Kailahun	54.9	94.6	25.7	86.2	92.0
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
<i>Kambia</i>	<i>11.6</i>	<i>67.7</i>	-	<i>75.6</i>	<i>69.0</i>
Koinadugu	29.2	76.3	28.6	81.1	77.0
<i>Port Loko</i>	<i>22.6</i>	<i>85.0</i>	<i>12.7</i>	<i>71.9</i>	<i>82.0</i>
Tonkolili	31.0	84.2	36.4	87.7	84.0
<i>Western Urban</i>	<i>*</i>	<i>*</i>	<i>3.2</i>	<i>17.1</i>	<i>15.0</i>
<i>Western Rural</i>	<i>26.3</i>	<i>70.1</i>	<i>*</i>	<i>*</i>	<i>45.0</i>
Total	32.8	78.9	14.7	54.3	70.0

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

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.