

# The Republic of Sierra Leone

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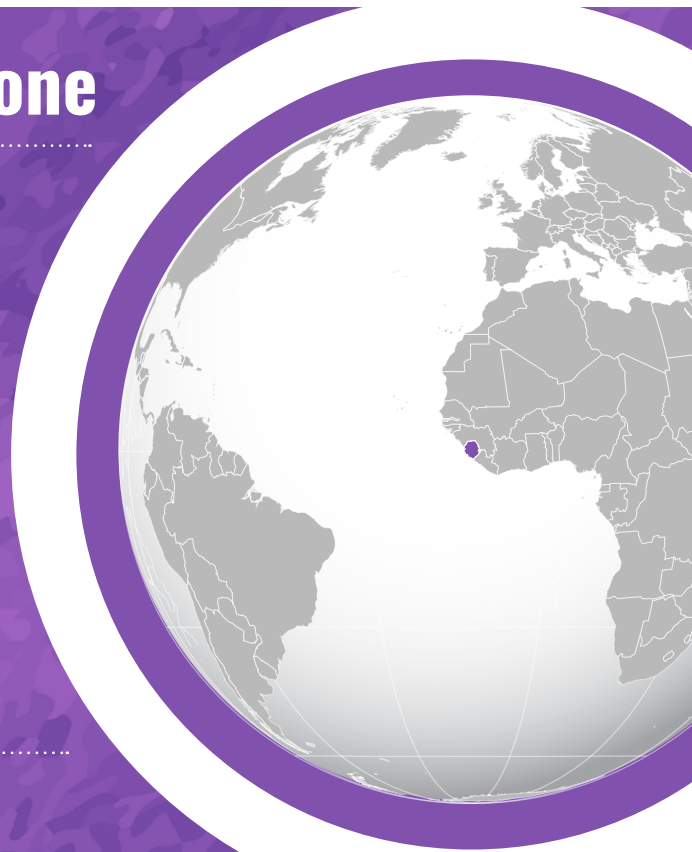
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Women play a vital role in the fisheries sector of Sierra Leone, contributing to all aspects of the value chain. 'Fish mammies' are essential to the running of post-harvest operations. Several traditional fish products developed by women are highly valued in local and regional markets. Despite women's contributions being critical to the socio-economic well-being of many coastal communities, they face several challenges. These include limited access to resources, such as fishing gear and credit, and limited participation in decision-making processes. Importantly, gender-based violence remains a systemic key concern in the country.

In January 2023, President Bio signed into law a landmark legislation, the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Act, which makes significant provisions in support of women's empowerment in public and

private spaces. However, with Sierra Leone ranking among countries with the lowest performance across key gender indices, significant efforts are still needed to achieve gender equality goals.

This fact sheet provides an overview of the role of seafood production in Sierra Leone, with a focus on gender dimensions, and is a starting point for conversations about how to support gender equity and equality in the sector and beyond. Our hope and intent is to update this document and incorporate new information and perspectives as they arise. It is part of a series meant to offer development agency employees, government agencies, NGOs, funders and researchers with a snapshot of gender and fisheries to inform the planning and delivery of relevant activities these actors might be involved in or are in the process of developing.

## Fisheries production

The Sea Around Us estimated total annual marine capture production for fleets from Sierra Leone as follows: <sup>1</sup>

- Marine subsistence (2019) – 9,955 tonnes
- Marine commercial (2019) – 286,434 tonnes (artisanal); 928 tonnes (industrial, all of which were caught in Sierra Leone's Exclusive Economic Zone. For that same year, total industrial catches in Sierra Leone's EEZ by foreign fleets were estimated at 145,675 tonnes, with Spain accounting for 88% of these catches and Senegal 9%).

Small pelagic fish species (Bonga (*Ethmalosa fimbriata*) and *Sardinella* spp) account for the vast majority of the artisanal catch.

National statistics put total production estimates for 2020 at 328,626 tonnes, with 12,000 tonnes of this exported. Fisheries maximum sustainable yields were estimated at 122,500 tonnes for the same year. National statistics also show Chinese vessels making up most of the industrial fleet.

The shared Bonga fish stock is currently considered overexploited. The implementation of seasonal closures is expected to rebuild declining fish stocks such as the Bonga Shad.

## Fish consumption

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations estimated apparent fish consumption<sup>2</sup> at 26.3 kg per person per year<sup>3</sup>, with fish providing about 80% of animal-sourced protein intake in local diets.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, fish consumption varies widely across the country, with rates being especially high in coastal areas where fishing is a critically important economic activity<sup>5</sup>, and much lower figures estimated for inland districts such as Tonkolili, where supply of fish is inconsistent.<sup>6</sup>

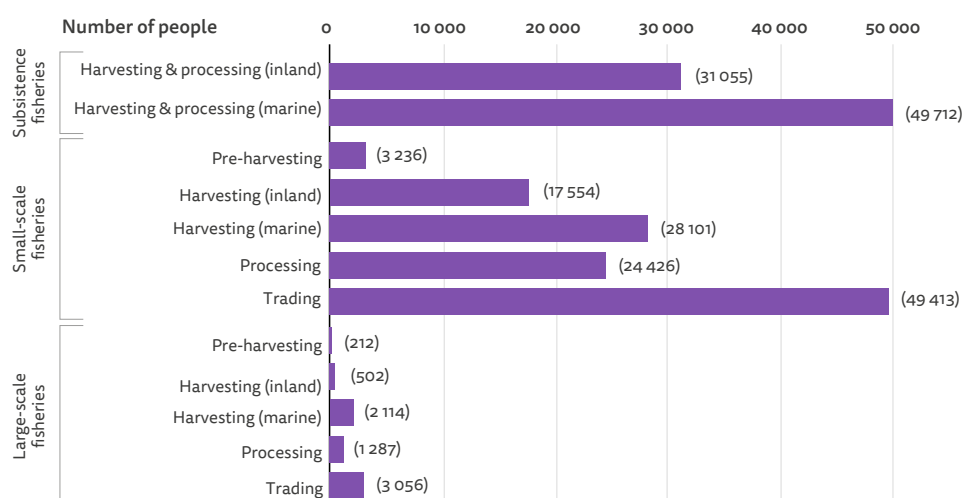
## Fisheries contribution to GDP

The fisheries sector was estimated to have contributed to about 12% of national GDP in 2018<sup>7</sup>, compared to 9.1% in 2010.<sup>8</sup>

## Employment (all)

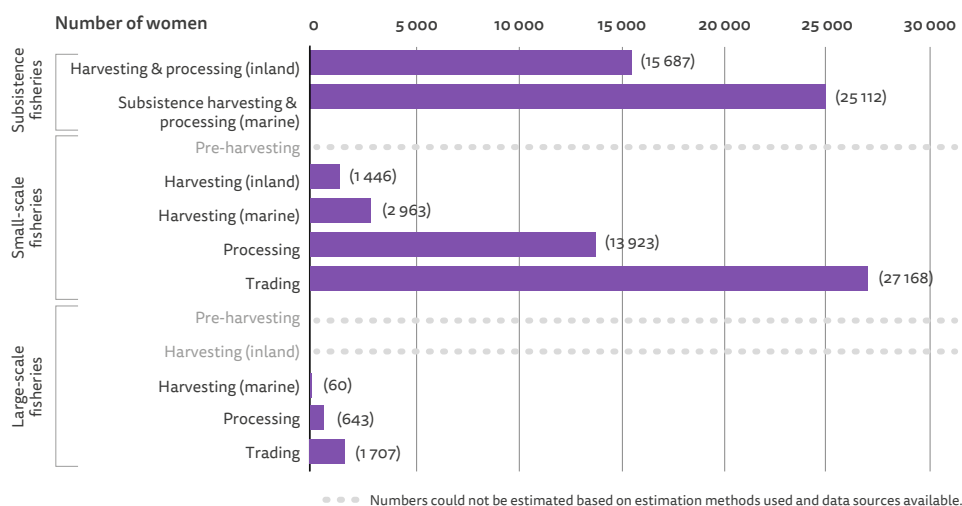
Previous estimates suggest that over 500,000 people across Sierra Leone engage in the fisheries sector - including as workers, fishers, processors and marketers and for livelihood purposes.<sup>9</sup>

The Illuminating Hidden Harvests (IHH)<sup>10,11</sup> Initiative estimated that a total of 210,668 individuals engage in the fishery sector (2022), spanning both inland and marine fisheries, including pre-and post-harvest as well as subsistence fishing activities. Most individuals were involved in the marine small-scale fisheries sub-sector (see graph below). The IHH also estimated that a total of approximately 902,557 people depend, at least partly, on fisheries or subsistence fishing: 569,967 in small-scale fisheries, 305,525 in subsistence fisheries and 14,028 in large scale fisheries.<sup>12</sup>



## Employment (women)

The Illuminating Hidden Harvests (IHH) Initiative estimated that 88,709 women are active in fisheries, with the small-scale sector providing the greatest source of livelihoods for women.<sup>13</sup> Women are more likely than men to engage in subsistence fishing, representing 51% of the total number of people engaged in subsistence fisheries. They also play a key role in the processing and trading of fish, accounting for 57% and 55% of individuals active in these small-scale fisheries sub-sectors, respectively, across SSF value chains. In the large-scale sub-sector, women make up 50% of those in processing and 56% of those in trading activities.



“88,709 women are active in fisheries, with the small-scale sector providing the greatest source of livelihoods for women”

Most women are small-scale operators involved across the value chain, from bait collection and net mending, to fishing as well as processing, transporting, and trading. Women’s contributions to fisheries vary across regions and communities and depend on cultural norms, societal expectations, and economic opportunities. For instance, women’s participation in fisheries in the Western Area is higher than in other regions of Sierra Leone, with many women owning fishing boats and gear. In south-eastern and southern regions, women fish for shrimps, crabs, lobsters, oysters, and a variety of finfish, especially at low tides and sometimes in mud flats and mangrove areas. Much of this catch is destined for human consumption. Most women, however, are engaged in processing and trading activities.<sup>14</sup> This is especially true in the Western Area where the percentage of women engaged in the fisheries sector is especially high.

“Products processed by women are an essential aspect of the country’s food culture and contribute significantly to the local economy. Processed fish are also popular export products to neighbouring countries”

Women engaged in fisheries-related activities tend to rely on the artisanal sector for supplies. Most of the fish is purchased upon landing with women often having negotiated arrangements with specific fishers.<sup>15</sup> The fish is then typically processed through a combination of smoking, salting and (sun)drying. Smoking is still often done in mud ovens overlaid with metal or wire racks, locally known as bandas, using locally sourced wood such as coconut shells, mangrove and other forest wood as fuel.<sup>16</sup> At major landing sites around Goderich, Tombo, and Konakrydee, some fish processors are now using improved Altona ovens and Icelandic kilns for smoking. The fish species commonly processed by women often include smaller or lower-value species such as tilapia, sardines, and mackerel, among others. Smoked fish is often used as flavouring in local dishes. In addition to the traditional methods of processing fish, women in Sierra Leone also make fish powder and fish paste. These products are an essential aspect of the country’s food culture and contribute significantly to the local economy. Processed fish are also popular export products to neighbouring countries. For example, in Pujehun District, women traders supply local markets and sell fish to traders from neighboring countries such as Liberia and

**“Women processors, also called ‘fish mummies’, play a central role in the fish marketing system”**

Guinea.<sup>17</sup> Women surveyed in the two largest fish landing communities in Sierra Leone, Goderich and Tombo, indicated that fisheries have increased their income, helping to support with the care of the home and payment of children school fees as well as reduced their expenditure on food supply.<sup>14</sup>

Women processors, also called ‘fish mummies’, play a central role in the fish marketing system.<sup>16</sup> In Sierra Leone, they consolidate their collective power through economic organizations and institutions such as *osusus*, a rotating savings/credit and labor support organization. Each member pays a fee that is put towards the financing of special occasions, to solve unexpected problems or as social support.<sup>18</sup> Through this organization some women finance fishing operations and also mobilize to protest against activities that might diminish their incomes.<sup>18</sup> While some women in the fisheries sector may generate wealth from their activities, women own less than 10% of fishing assets and 40% of their income goes towards family expenditure.<sup>16</sup> Women consider lack of credit and cold storage facilities to improve their business activities as well as lack of access to better markets, in part hindered by poor transport infrastructure, as key livelihood concerns.<sup>19</sup>

Women are increasingly diversifying their roles, shifting from selling fish to owning boats and gear (e.g., handlines, baskets, traps and nets), financing fishing operations through money advances for fuel, food, ice, and other inputs and costs, in part to secure access to the resulting fish catch.<sup>19</sup> Women also often supplement fisheries-derived income with small-scale farming or running a small business, but also through some household sharing of resources and incomes.

Women’s small-scale fisheries groups in Sierra Leone are mostly newly formed (~3 years), work in both inland and marine fisheries, and generally have good governance structures and internal rules in place.<sup>20</sup> They are also characterized by strong rates of member participation, good internal communication, and high levels of trust and mutual support.<sup>20</sup> However, these groups currently lack access to equipment, processing infrastructure, training opportunities and financial resources – as well as continued government support – and would benefit from assistance to strengthen group administration, leadership and conflict resolution skills.<sup>20</sup>

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## **Social considerations**

**“Many women continue to suffer severe marginalisation and discrimination, despite their significant contributions to the economy and the sustenance of their households”**

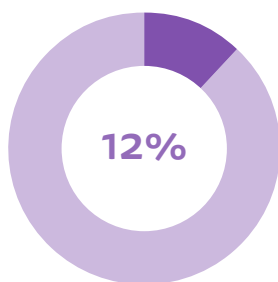
Sierra Leone is deeply rooted in traditional attitudes regarding the roles and responsibilities of women and men, with decision-making resting with men and under customary law, domestic work being the responsibility of women.<sup>21</sup> Patriarchal norms and cultural practices that reinforce male dominance and decision-making are especially widespread in rural communities. Often, because of cultural and religious norms, girls still face significant barriers to accessing education, including poverty, early marriage, discrimination, and the burden of having to perform a disproportionate share of household chores. Recent efforts in support of gender equality and women’s empowerment have led to a dramatic increase in gross primary school enrollment rates, reaching 159%<sup>22</sup> in 2021 – 6% higher than for boys that same year.<sup>23</sup> However, less than half (41%) of women in Sierra Leone have attained secondary education or higher, as compared with 57% of men, and 46% percent of women and 29% of men have no education.<sup>24</sup> These rates are much lower for teenage mothers. In 2019, a policy clarification lifted a directive preventing pregnant girls from taking exams, but reinforced the ban on pregnant girls from attending mainstream school.<sup>25</sup> In response to a recent judgment finding the ban discriminatory and a violation of rights, a new policy was developed<sup>25</sup>, The National Policy on Radical Inclusion in School, allowing all girls (especially pregnant girls) to fully access their education rights.<sup>25</sup>

In fisheries, women face significant challenges of unequal power within the value chain, given the important role women play as processors and traders.<sup>26</sup> Prevailing socio-cultural values and norms in Sierra Leone expect women to give moral and physical support to (fisher)men, and to be submissive to their husbands.<sup>16</sup> It is also a cultural taboo for women to be part of fishing crews.<sup>16</sup> In addition, inefficient, laborious and often hazardous processing methods, as well as poor means of storage and transportation, often result in high postharvest losses.<sup>26</sup> This has widespread social, ecological and economic implications, including direct impacts on the health of women processors.

Many women continue to suffer severe marginalisation and discrimination, despite their significant contributions to the economy and the sustenance of their households.<sup>27</sup> Many women lack access to resources, financial capital, as well as decision-making power.<sup>28,29,30</sup> In the fisheries sector in particular, as a consequence of fisheries management production bias, the role of fisherwomen has not only been largely overlooked, but women have been marginalised in access to resources and training opportunities.<sup>28</sup>

Women in Sierra Leone also face high risks of sexual and gender-based violence, including domestic violence, sexual assault, marital rape, school-related sexual abuse, and harmful customs and traditional practices (including female genital mutilation/cutting known as Bondo).<sup>31</sup> With the exception of Creole women who do not practice or engage in female genital mutilation, 90% of girls and women in Sierra Leone are estimated to have undergone the practice, often as part of a traditional initiation ceremony that ushers girls into womanhood.<sup>32</sup>

## Women's rights and political empowerment



Percentage of women in National Parliament as of December 2022

**“Women currently hold the key positions of Minister, Permanent Secretary and Director of the Fisheries and Marine Resources Ministry”**

The 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone prohibits discrimination on the basis of gender and other grounds, granting women legal rights equal to those of men, including the right to vote, own property, and access to education and employment. However, the plurality of the state's legal system (statutory law and customary law) means that, in practice, land rights are often unclear with women rarely having full access to land. However there is significant variation in how this is implemented across communities and ethnic groups.<sup>26</sup>

To meet its global obligations with respect to the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women, Sierra Leone has enacted several legislative reforms to support opportunities to promote gender equality and women's empowerment such as the Domestic Violence Act 2007, the Sexual Offences Act 2012, and the Government's Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper III “Agenda for Prosperity” (2013-2018), which mainstreamed gender issues across its seven pillars, and included a stand-alone pillar focused on gender. In 2018, the government also launched the National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security, which aims to promote the participation of women in all aspects of decision-making and peacebuilding. However, despite several international human rights conventions of which Sierra Leone is a member recognising female genital mutilation as a violation of human rights, there is currently no prohibition or any explicit law against the practice in Sierra Leone.<sup>33</sup>

Despite legislative changes that have increased women's legal protection, women continue to experience discriminatory practices, with their rights and position largely contingent on customary law<sup>34</sup> and the ethnic group to which they belong. As of December 2022, only 19% of local politicians were women and women occupied only 12% of elected seats in national parliament<sup>35</sup>. Current women ministers include: Emma Kowa-Jalloh



**“In January 2023, Sierra Leone signed into law the landmark Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment Act”**

(Fisheries and Marine Resources), Baindu Dassama Kamara (Social Welfare), Manty Tarawalli (Gender and Children’s Affairs), Nabeela Tunis (Western Region), Memunatu Pratt (Tourism and Cultural Affairs), and Frances Alghali (State office to the Vice President). Importantly, women currently also hold the post of Permanent Secretary and Director, in addition to Minister, in the Fisheries and Marine Resources Ministry. Furthermore, women serve at senior management levels to deliver fisheries research, value addition, fisheries compliance and fisheries management programmes across the civil service and within academia in Sierra Leone.

Present challenges to women’s rights and political empowerment include political violence and reprisals, the absence of progressive laws that protect and promote participation for women, and the lack of confidence to vie for public positions.<sup>31</sup> However, there is optimism for change as the so called ‘gender equality and women’s empowerment bill’<sup>36</sup>, approved in 2021, seeks to ensure that 30% of top leadership positions, including parliamentary seats and cabinet positions, are held by women.<sup>37</sup> This bill was passed as the landmark new Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment Act, in January 2023. As part of the Act, women will benefit from at least 14-weeks of maternity leave, equal access to bank credit, as well as training opportunities.<sup>38,39</sup> The law also mandates gender mainstreaming across government offices and gender-responsive budgeting.

In July 2022, Sierra Leone’s president Julius Maada Bio announced the approval of the ‘Safe Motherhood Bill’ that seeks to ensure the safety of women of reproductive age and decriminalize women who seek to have choices over their bodies.<sup>40</sup>

## Key frameworks promoting gender equality and their ratification status<sup>41</sup>

- ✓ Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) ratified in 1988. Sierra Leone submitted its sixth periodic report in 2014 but has yet to provide information on the steps undertaken to implement the relevant recommendations emerging from the Committee’s sixty-fourth session held in July 2016.<sup>42</sup>
- ✗ Sierra Leone has not ratified CEDAW’s Optional Protocol.<sup>43</sup>
- ✓ Beijing Platform for Action (1995) with national review submitted in 2019.<sup>44</sup>
- ✓ Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the Rights of Women (Maputo Protocol) ratified in 2015.<sup>45</sup>

## Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI)

Higher SIGI values indicate higher inequality and ranges from 0 for no discrimination to 1 for very high discrimination. With an aggregated index value of 0.48 in 2023, Sierra Leone was ranked as having overall high levels of gender discrimination in social institutions.

Year	Total aggregated index value (Category) <sup>46</sup>	Discrimination in the family	Restricted physical integrity	Restricted access to productive & financial resources	Restricted civil liberties
2014 <sup>47</sup>	0.3720 (v. High)	0.3309 (Med.)	0.8550 (v. High)	0.8044 (v. High)	0.6093 (High)
2019	0.48 (High)	0.54 (High)	0.50 (High)	0.45 (Med.)	0.41 (Med.)
2023	0.48	0.419	0.478	0.51	0.511

## Africa Gender Index (AGI)

Value (2019)<sup>48</sup>

0.328

(on a scale from 0 to 1, with a score of 1 representing parity between women and men)

Rank (2019)

46

(out of 51 countries)

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## Gender Inequality Index (GII)

Value (2021)<sup>49</sup>

0.633

(on a scale from 0, where women and men fare equally, to 1, where one gender fares as poorly as possible in all measured dimensions)

Rank (2021)

162

(out of 170 countries)

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## Gender in fisheries governance

Most reviewed legislative texts do not mention women or gender.

The **Sierra Leone Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan** proposes actions to “encourage co-management of protected area resources and seeks to involve important local institutions with adequate gender balance,” regarding parks and wildlife management. Within marine biodiversity and fisheries, proposed actions include to “analyze gender issues and support women in the artisanal fishing industry,” with outputs including “women provided (with) appropriate support services,” and actors involving women’s groups and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs).

The **Environmental and Social Management Framework** for Sierra Leone sets an objective to, “strengthen the capacity of Sierra Leone to manage the nation’s fisheries, reduce illegal fishing and increase local value added to fish products.” The project recognizes the importance of relationships as a way of relaying information and highlights The Association of Fish Marketers in particular for its involvement of women in the post-harvest sector and its offer of “avenues to pursue Millennium Development Goals of gender equity and women empowerment.” Fisheries Sector Policy Goals and Objectives in the Fisheries Development Programmes are laid out, with six goals in total, one of which centers on women and is stated as, “to raise socio-economic status of the people in the fisheries sector including the women with an adequate surveillance capability and improvement of fisheries infrastructure for value addition.” The program supports an “incentives-for-change program,” and communities undertaking sustainable changes in fishing practices are offered support. The incentive aimed directly at women is “technical training for micro-enterprise management and growth.” Meetings and workshops will be held with communities prior and during the programs. Specifically, “women will be enlightened on the mitigation of gender-based violence and sexual harassment and exploitation and the degree of commitment of the Fisheries Project to protect gender rights and entitlements.”

The **Sierra Leone Food and Nutrition Security Policy Implementation Plan**’s overall goal is to, “contribute to improved health, social and economic well-being for all the people in Sierra Leone, especially women, children and other nutritionally vulnerable groups.” Two notable steps the government has taken include the Basic Package of Essential Health

Services and the Free Health Care Initiative, which is geared for pregnant women, lactating mothers, and children under five years of age. The document acknowledges that women often have to go through men to access land and negotiate prices, deals, and use of technology inputs. The response to such norms in the Plan suggests largely gender-accommodative approaches, including access to affordable labor to cultivate more land, seeds, marketing, and education. Promotion of livelihood activities includes establishing livestock/fisheries Agro Business Centres for increased production and consumption of animal products. No direct mention is made regarding the role/contribution of women in fisheries and livestock.

The Food and Feed Safety Authority Act, Environmental Protection Agency Act, and National Water Resources Management Agency Act all mention women in the context of representation on boards and committees, vested with authorities and supervision of the Act. To address women's empowerment, several approaches are being used. This includes, "the roll out of the three gender acts by the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender, and Children's Affairs (MSWGCA) in order to highlight and minimize the socio-cultural and economic threats to the wellbeing of women, and mass sensitization and mobilization of women to ensure that they are better organized to receive support (livelihoods, inputs, training, etc.)." Note that the MSWGCA now consists of the Ministry of Gender and Children Affairs and the Ministry of Social Welfare. Additionally, "advocacy at the community level targeting the Paramount Chiefs, other local authorities, local councils and secret societies will be conducted to address cultural barriers," and promote the "delay (of) girl circumcision, and early marriage, and encourage the education of girl children."

<b>Legislative Text</b>	<b>Year</b>
<i>Sierra Leone Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan</i>	2003
<i>Merchant Shipping Act</i>	2003
<i>Maritime Administration Act of 2000, as amended</i>	2007
<i>National Protected Area Authority and Conservation Trust Fund Act</i>	2012
<i>Sierra Leone Food and Nutrition Security Policy Implementation Plan</i>	2012
<i>National Water Resources Management Agency Act</i>	2017
<i>The Food and Feed Safety Authority Act</i>	2017
<i>Fisheries and Aquaculture Act</i>	2018
<i>Fisheries Fees Regulation</i>	2019
<i>National AGOA Response Strategy (2019-2025)</i>	2019
<i>Fisheries and Aquaculture Regulations</i>	2019
<i>Environmental and Social Management Framework for the West Africa Regional Fisheries Program, Project in Sierra Leone (WARFP)</i>	2020
<i>Environment Protection Agency Act</i>	2022
<i>Wildlife Conservation Act, amended</i>	2022



## Threats and drivers of change in fisheries

“Regional estimates indicate that Sierra Leone is losing between USD29 and USD50 million to IUU fishing annually”

“Sierra Leone is among the 10% of countries globally most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change”

Several key threats to and drivers of change in Sierra Leone's coastal ecosystems and encouraging examples of how these may be addressed are outlined below. While threats and drivers of change to fisheries may (or may not) have specific gender dimensions associated with them, gender integration is necessary in efforts to improve adaptation, and foster resilience in the face of change.

- **Illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing** has been identified as a critical challenge to the socio-economic sustainability of the fisheries sector in Sierra Leone. Regional estimates indicate that Sierra Leone is losing between USD29<sup>50</sup> and USD50 million<sup>51</sup> to IUU fishing annually. Foreign industrial fishing and widespread use of illegal gears, in part introduced to Sierra Leone during the civil war (1991-2002), by artisanal fishers are the two main causes of the problem.<sup>52</sup> In April 2017, two Chinese and one Korean vessel were arrested for infringements of Sierra Leone fishing legislation, including possession or the use of illegal fishing nets.<sup>51</sup> A recent study found that while Sierra Leone's Fisheries Act prohibits issuance of a fishing license to vessels with a record of a previous offense, nearly a third of all vessels licensed to fish in Sierra Leone have at least one recorded offense, mostly within Sierra Leone's EEZ.<sup>53</sup> In 2020, the fishing license of a vessel that had committed the same infraction twice within two months was maintained - yet was charged \$30,000.<sup>53</sup> Recent work further indicates that among the Chinese distant water fleet's recorded IUU fishing incidents worldwide, Sierra Leone was the second-most common location in West Africa after Ghana.<sup>54</sup> The use of illegal fishing gears and the widespread use of banned nets by artisanal fishers further contributes to IUU challenges.<sup>55</sup> Limited capacity for and effectiveness of fisheries management, including a lack of stock assessments to inform management, as well as poor monitoring, control and surveillance, contribute to high levels of IUU fishing. However, the fact that Sierra Leone, together with the Gambia, was found to have the highest scoring Monitoring, Control, and Surveillance system in West Africa, and one of two countries where the most offenders are caught and charged with the highest fines, is an encouraging sign of increased efforts to combat illegal fishing.<sup>56</sup>
- **Climate change** is affecting the distribution and abundance of fish species within Sierra Leone's waters, leading to changes in the fishing patterns and catch sizes of artisanal fishers. In addition, coastal communities are already being affected by severe inundation and coastal erosion because of climate change. In areas such as Konakridie, Lakka, Hamilton and Plantain Island the coastline is shifting by about 4 to 6 meters a year.<sup>57</sup> Climate change is also affecting the productivity of coastal mangrove forests, leading to the loss of important habitat for juvenile fish species. Mangroves are an ecosystem already under tremendous pressure due to deforestation as many local communities rely on mangrove wood to build houses and smoke-dry fish.<sup>58</sup> As processors, women contribute to this problem, with field studies indicating that 46% of women smoking fish use mangrove wood to do so.<sup>16</sup> Mangrove deforestation in turn makes local communities more vulnerable to the impacts of sea level rise. Sierra Leone was found to be “among the 10% of countries in the world most vulnerable to the adverse consequences of climate change, and presently one of the least able to cope with the effects.”<sup>59</sup> The implementation of climate-smart fish processing techniques, including the construction of improved fish smoke houses that use minimal fuel wood (with Klins), and piloting the use of solar powered cold rooms are among innovative practices to reduce GHG emissions in coastal communities. The creation of woodlots among mangrove forests under severe exploitation for fuel wood are also expected to reduce GHG emissions in coastal communities. Mangroves

can sequester four times as much CO<sub>2</sub> compared to other plants and are an important ecosystem in Sierra Leone's current exploration of carbon credit trade potential under climate change mitigation and adaptation programmes.

- ▶ **Overfishing** as a result of too many fishers chasing too few fish, the open access nature of fisheries, the considerable increase in foreign trawlers exploiting local fish catches and unsustainable fishing practices, such as the use of illegal or unselective fishing gears, are having a significant impact on Sierra Leone's fisheries sector.<sup>52,60</sup> Most of the country's fish stocks are deemed "already fully exploited" or over-exploited. Overfishing has led to loss of income, increased poverty, and food insecurity.
- ▶ **The lack of effective governance and management** – e.g., lack of monitoring, control and surveillance, and insufficient enforcement of regulations – in part because of inadequate resources, but also political will and corruption<sup>52</sup> by the government, exacerbate the impact of threats such as IUU fishing and overfishing. The two main fishers' organizations - Sierra Leone Artisanal Fishers Union and Sierra Leone Amalgamated Fishers Union - also lack the capacity to take part in a co-management system.<sup>9</sup>

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## Gender in ODA allocation for fisheries

Between 2010 and 2019, Sierra Leone received a total of USD0.6 million in fisheries Official Development Assistance (ODA), USD0.1 million (18%) of which was earmarked to support gender equality-focused fisheries projects (i.e., tagged with gender markers 1 or 2<sup>61</sup>).<sup>62,63</sup> This latter sum represents 0.1% of gender equality-focused fisheries allocations to Sub-Saharan Africa. For the period under consideration, all gender focused financing was provided by Iceland. The aim of the funded activities is to "support fishmongers/ fish processors to acquire fuel efficient fish smoke ovens and better quality of smoked fish with less health hazards associated with smoking fish in their traditional bandas and to improve the access to safe drinking Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) in five communities at Tombo."

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## Programmes or initiatives aiming to advance gender equality in fisheries

The Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation-funded FAO (NORAD-FAO) project "Empowering women in small-scale fisheries for sustainable food systems" (2020-2021) placed focus on strengthening women's roles in post-harvest processing and trade. The initiative facilitated activities along three axes: improving the capacity of women fishers and processors, strengthening women's entrepreneurship and business skills, and promoting gender-responsive governance in the fisheries sector.<sup>64,65</sup> Under the first component, the project provided training and technical assistance to women fishers and processors on topics such as fishing techniques, post-harvest handling, and value addition. Under the second component the project provided women with training in financial management, marketing, and product development. The project's third component focused on promoting gender-responsive governance in the fisheries sector by supporting the development of policies and strategies that recognize and address gender inequalities. The project also promoted the establishment of women's groups and networks, which provide a platform for women to share knowledge, exchange experiences, and access resources, enabling them to advocate for their rights and interests in the fisheries sector. The NORAD-FAO project also mapped women's organizations and assessed their present capacities and needs in the small-scale fisheries sector across five districts (Kambia, Port Loko, Moyamba, Bonthe and Pujehun).<sup>66</sup>

Similarly, to support the implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries, in 2019, Japan financed

a project to support several activities, including the development and adoption of policies and laws consistent with the provisions of the Agreement on Port States Measures, enhancement of fish processing infrastructure, and technical capacity building of women groups in isolated fishing communities.<sup>67</sup>

The establishment of a Sierra Leone chapter for African Women Fish Processors and Fish Traders Network (AWFishNet) is expected to improve the role of women across the fish value chain. There is an emergence of women entrepreneurs in the fisheries and aquaculture industry in Sierra Leone with women serving as agents (managing directors) for the large scale shrimp and tuna fishing industry in the Western Area and as entrepreneurs for fish farming in the Southern Province.

The Icelandic Government is implementing a fisheries support program in Sierra Leone that focuses on gender empowerment in value chain fish processing, and also includes the implementation of climate-smart fish processing systems in coastal communities.

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Mariama Sorie selling her smoked-dried fish at Fonkia Market, Godrich.  
Photo: © M. Alie Khan



Fatmata Kamara selling a diversity of just landed fresh fish at Fonkia market, Godrich. Photo: © M. Alie Khan



## Endnotes and references

- Marine fisheries statistics are derived from catch reconstruction under the Sea Around Us. <http://www.seaaroundus.org/data/#/eez> The approach utilized builds on national statistics and accounts for discards as well as sectoral catch data that often is not included in official datasets (e.g., artisanal or recreational catches). The Sea Around Us data is also utilized here as a consistent frame of reference for and to facilitate comparison across the set of countries for which fact sheets were developed as part of this project. Sea Around Us data are distinguished according to the following categories: large-scale (i.e., industrial) and small-scale (i.e., artisanal, subsistence and recreational) fisheries catches. Recreational catches were not considered here.
- The term "apparent" refers to the average food available for consumption, which for several reasons (for example, waste at the household level), is not equal to average food intake or average food consumption. The amount is calculated as production + imports – exports – non-food uses, +/- stocks variations and divided by number of people partaking of it.
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