

**A LIVELIHOODS ANALYSIS OF COASTAL FISHERIES COMMUNITIES
IN LIBERIA**



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A LIVELIHOODS ANALYSIS OF COASTAL FISHERIES COMMUNITIES IN LIBERIA

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PREPARATION OF THIS DOCUMENT

This FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Circular is based on a study carried out as a collaboration between the Fisheries and Aquaculture Department at the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the Bureau of National Fisheries (BNF), Ministry of Agriculture, Monrovia, Liberia.

The main aim of the study was to get relevant information on the livelihoods of the marine fisheries communities in Liberia to support the process of decision-making in the sector.

This circular was prepared by Moustapha Kebe (FAO Livelihoods expert), Petter Jern (Socio-Economist, FAO FishCode STF Project), Raphael Collins, Wisseh Kay and Eric Kekula (Ministry of Agriculture – Bureau of National Fisheries), Liberia.

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ABSTRACT

As part of the Fisheries Action Plan, a livelihood study was conducted using sustainable livelihoods approach (SLA) in Liberian fishing communities with the objective of getting relevant information on the livelihoods of the fisheries communities to support the process of decision-making in the sector.

FAO's main work was in the preparatory stage; the training and design of the livelihood survey. The field team consisted of Bureau of National Fisheries (BNF) staff and enumerators hired by BNF which was trained in SLA and participatory rapid appraisal (PRA). This holistic analysis of the livelihoods of the fisheries communities along the coast of Liberia highlighted the following:

- The main artisanal fisher group are the *Kru*. The migrant fishermen's (*Fanti* and *Popo*) presence contributes to the development of fishing gear and technical knowledge. Overall, the national *Kru* are smaller in scale.
- The vulnerability to poverty in fishing communities is considered to be high. This is caused by seasonality and absence of safety at sea; conflicts between industrial fisheries and between migrant and local fishermen; high prices of inputs and commodities and high prevalence of diseases are the cause of vulnerability of the fisherfolks.
- Weak livelihood capital assets and an unfavourable political and institutional environment contribute to exposure to poverty.

Two main entry points were identified for future interventions aimed at assisting fisheries communities. The improvement of human and social capital as well as the political and institutional environment could help to making physical, financial and natural capital more efficient. Better representation of communities leading to an active role in the preparation and implementation of policies would also reduce vulnerability through a better choice of strategies, permanent achievements, diversified and strong partnerships.

From a fishing perspective, access to fishing materials and improvement of surveillance are main concerns from a perception. Better housing facilities and access to microcredit are mentioned as priority actions from a socio-economic perception.

Considering the fisheries sector's large potential to contribute to socio-economic development, political and institutional environment should be improved.

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ADA	African Development Aid
BIN	Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization
BNF	Bureau of National Fisheries
CAAS-LIB	Comprehensive Assessment of the Agricultural Sector of Liberia
CCRF	Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries
CECAF	Fishery Committee for the Eastern Central Atlantic
CIFAA	Committee for Inland Fisheries and Aquaculture in Africa
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FCWC	Fishery Committee for the West Central Gulf of Guinea
GAFAL	Ghanaian Artisanal Fishermen Association
IPRS	Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy
LD	Liberian Dollar
LNP	Liberian National Police
MIA	Ministry of Internal Affairs
MOA	Ministry of Agriculture
MOC	Ministry of Commerce
MOF	Ministry of Finance
MOH	Ministry of Health
MOJ	Ministry of Justice
NGO	Non-Governmental organization
PIP	Policies, institutions and processes
PRA	participatory rapid appraisal
SFLP	Sustainable Fisheries Livelihoods Programme
SLA	sustainable livelihoods approach
USD	United States Dollar

1. INTRODUCTION

The fisheries sector, both marine and inland (including aquaculture), in Liberia, has a significant potential to make substantial contribution to national socio-economic development, economic revitalization and reduction of poverty in the short, medium and long term. Over 80 percent of the population depends on fish for animal protein and there is an urgent need to improve fish production, preservation and distribution. Unfortunately, the potential cannot be effectively harnessed without financial, physical and human assets, and institutional and political environment required to manage fisheries on a sustainable basis to benefit present and future generations of Liberians. Actually, as a result of the 14-year civil war, the legal fisheries instruments and institutions were often reduced to a symbolic presence. Human resources and enforcement capacity are almost non-existent. There has been no government fisheries policy for over a decade and the lame institutions and staffs were not able to guarantee resource conservation.

The Ministry of Agriculture (MOA) is committed to harnessing the potential and benefited from FAO support through the Bureau of National Fisheries (BNF). Through support from the FAO regular programme, The FAO Regional office in Ghana, the FAO FishCode-STF project, and the FAO Sustainable Fisheries Livelihood Programme; a Fisheries Action Plan was developed in 2007 with interventions to address major constraints in the fisheries sector. One of the priority actions was the conduction of a frame survey along the coast in August–September 2007. This work was complemented by a livelihoods survey in January–February 2008 in selected fisheries communities. The objective was to get relevant information on the livelihoods of the fisheries communities to support the process of decision-making in the sector. The information gathered in the process complemented that of the Comprehensive Assessment of the Agricultural Sector (CAAS-LIB) conducted in 2006. This information was a keystone for the formulation of the National Fisheries and Aquaculture Policy, the mainstreaming of the fisheries sector into the Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy (IPRS) and development of future activities in small-scale fisheries in Liberia. As a learning process the exercise also increased the capacities of the fisheries administration and the fisheries communities in strategic planning.

Participatory diagnoses of the livelihoods of selected fisheries communities, complemented by collection of socio-economic data, were undertaken during the livelihoods survey. The analysis of the livelihoods in the context of their vulnerability and capital assets, the available Policies, Institutions and Processes (PIPs), prevailing livelihoods strategies and outcomes/aspirations led to identification of appropriate entry points for future interventions in the communities to reduce poverty/vulnerability.

2. METHODOLOGY

The approach used for the livelihoods survey in Liberia derived from the methodology developed by the Sustainable Fisheries Livelihoods Programme (SFLP).¹ It was based on the framework and principles of the sustainable livelihoods approach (SLA). The SLA is a holistic approach that attempts to comprehend and to provide a way of understanding the fundamental causes and dimensions of poverty. It also tries to define the relations that exist between the various aspects of poverty, in order to establish a hierarchy of actions to be taken.

The participatory learning process took place in four phases:

- Preparatory phase
- Exploratory research
- Training and design of the livelihoods survey
- Restitution and validation of the results

¹ The SFLP was a partnership among 25 participating countries in Western and Central Africa (Angola, Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo). SFLP was funded and executed by FAO and DFID. It was implemented from November 1999 to September 2007, and its overall goal was “to reduce poverty amongst coastal and inland communities in West Africa through the sustainable use of aquatic resources”.

2.1 Preparatory phase

The approach started with information/awareness of the main stakeholders at all levels including the Ministry of Agriculture (MOA), BNF, Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs), donors and fisherfolk on the objective and expected outcomes of the livelihoods survey, and the strategy to be developed for the design and the implementation. This was an opportunity to discuss appropriate information to be gathered during the exercise to facilitate the decision-making process in terms of reducing poverty and improving food security within fisheries communities.

To ensure ownership of the whole process a working group led by BNF was formed. The working group was opened to other ministries involved in the development of the fisheries sector, particularly the MOA and the Ministry of Health (MOH). Their involvement was to better understand the livelihoods of the fisheries communities and to take into account the multidimensional nature of poverty during the exercise. The role and the composition of the Livelihoods Working group were discussed and it was agreed that it should :

- participate in the design of the livelihoods survey;
- collect and analyse all relevant secondary data on the livelihoods of fisheries communities;
- supervise implementation of the livelihoods survey by participating in the different levels of the process;
- analyse information collected and prepare the reports;
- contribute to the livelihoods policy development.

2.2 Exploratory research

This stage consisted of the review of the available documents on the fisheries sector and the collection of secondary data to assess the policies, institutions and processes (PIPs) at macro (national) and meso (county) levels that impact on the fisheries communities' livelihoods (microlevel).

Discussions were held with the main institutions involved in the development of the fisheries sector such as MOA, MOH, Ministry of National Defence (MOD), Ministry of Finance (MOF), Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA), Ministry of Commerce (MOC), NGOs and donors.

The main objective of this work was to understand the way in which the PIPs affect the livelihoods of grass-roots fisheries communities in Liberia and to identify the strong points from which action could be taken to improve their sustainable livelihoods.

The working method was the following:

- mapping of those institutions involved in the drafting and implementation of policies through a number of processes, and which have an impact on the sustainable livelihoods of fisheries communities;
- analysis of the interface between PIPs and the fisheries communities' assets (natural, physical, social, financial and human assets);
- understanding of the phenomena of vulnerability;
- proposal of institutional or community improvements likely to reduce the communities' vulnerability, and, if possible, lead to the sustainability of their livelihoods.

2.3 Training and design of the livelihoods survey

Training sessions on the tools and methods to be used to analyze the livelihoods of fisheries communities (participatory diagnosis and planning) were organized. The field team, including members of the Livelihoods Working Group, and enumerators hired by the BNF was trained on SLA and participatory rapid appraisal (PRA). Two representatives of fisheries communities attended the training to facilitate the field work. Theoretical introduction to the main tools and methodologies used for the identification, formulation and implementation of initiatives of the poorest people that helped improve their sustainable livelihoods was complemented by a practical exercise; *Fanti* and *Kru* fisheries communities of West Point Beach (Montserrado County) were taught. During this practical session, a diagnosis of the livelihoods of the fisheries communities was conducted with the

participation of a group of men and women. This served to reinforce the understanding of the concepts and participatory mechanisms for the participants.

The various stages of the livelihoods survey were discussed during the training sessions and a draft of the outlines was prepared (Annex 1). Criteria for sampling the fisheries communities (assimilated to landing sites) were identified from information provided by the frame survey: (i) number of fishermen; (ii) ethnic group (Kru, Fanti and other minor groups); (iii) access to the landing site/village; and (iv) importance of other economic activities (livelihoods diversification). Based on this information and the number of active landing sites covered by the frame survey (89), a total of 23 fisheries communities were selected in the nine counties of the three coastal regions of Liberia (Figure 1).

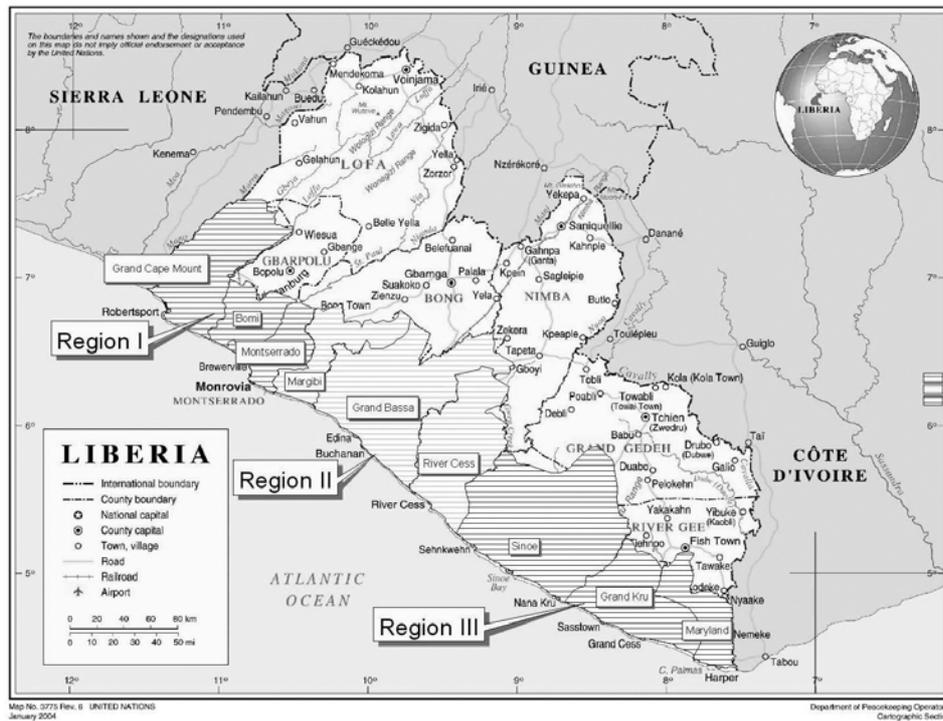


Figure 1: Coastal regions of Liberia

In each of the selected fisheries communities the participatory livelihoods diagnosis exercise was negotiated and a consensus on the approach and organization was established. During this negotiation phase, emphasis was put on the principles and framework of the SLA and the field team (4 persons including 3 enumerators and 1 supervisor) ensured that the community fully subscribed to the proposed procedure (Annex 2). The organization of semi-structured interviews through two focus groups (one for the men and one for the women, less than 20 persons for each group) made it possible to collect and analyse information on the livelihoods based on the outlines prepared. The entry point for the discussions with the community was the vulnerability context; the main concern was to better understand the factors which cause vulnerability to poverty. This facilitated the discussion on the other elements of the SL framework (capital assets, PIPs, livelihoods strategies and livelihoods outcomes/aspirations). Information was analysed with the community as soon as it was collected. The analysis of the five capital assets (natural, physical, financial, human and social) highlighted the strengths and weaknesses of each, and the links between them. The assessment of PIPs was done in terms of constraints (increase in taxes, disappearance of public service, social exclusion mechanism, lack of justice, corruption, weak links between research and development and authorized supervision) and opportunities (emergence of private sector and civil society, involvement in local decision-making processes, social consultation mechanisms and communication programmes for development) for the fisheries communities.

Table 1: Selected fisheries communities per region and county for the livelihoods survey

REGION I	REGION II	REGION III
Cape Mount County	Margibi County	Sinoe County
1. Robertsport Fanti Town Beach 2. Robertsport Kru Town Beach 3. Tailor Kru Beach	10. Marshall Beach	16. Greenville Down Town Beach 17. Greenville Fish Town Beach
Bormi County	Grand Bassa County	Grand Kru County
4. Toma Town Beach	11. Little Bassa Beach 12. Port Beach 13. Custom Port Beach	18. Grand Cess Beach 19. Sassatown 20. Garaway Beach 21. Pinicess Beach
Montserrado County	Rivercess County	Maryland County
5. Banjor Beach 6. King Gray Beach 7. Kru Town West Point Beach 8. Fanti Town West Point Beach 9. Popo Beach	14. Jackson Beach 15. Small Fanti Town Beach	22. Old Kru Town Beach 23. Hoffman Station Beach

This participatory diagnosis led to an identification of interventions to reduce vulnerability and poverty in the concerned fisheries communities on the basis of their strengths.

The focus groups were complemented by the collection of additional socio-economic data through a questionnaire. For each of the 23 sampled fisheries communities, 4 boat owners/captains, 4 crew members, 4 fish processors and 4 fish traders were selected for individual interviews. Information collected concerned the socio-economic characteristics of the sampled actors (age, ethnic group, gender, level of education, situation of the household, type of organization, other economic activities, etc.) and costs and earnings including access to credit and savings schemes. The recorded information was processed and analysed with the support of a specialist.

2.4 Restitution and validation of the results

To better assist the fisheries communities develop initiatives that could help them to improve their livelihoods, they were involved in the whole process of diagnosis. Relevant information on the community was gathered and analysed from the poverty angle. Feedback provided continuously to the community helped to correct the information (reduce bias) and was an opportunity to check the relevance, to validate and to promote ownership of the results at a wider level. This feedback session is particularly important because a drop in participation in the PRA exercise (participatory diagnosis) was unavoidable and it is necessary to ascertain, at each stage, whether the consensus and measures taken are still shared by the majority of the community.

The livelihoods survey is part of the whole process initiated by the MOA with support from FAO to inform policies at national level. In this regard, the results of the series of activities undertaken were validated during a 2-day stakeholders and donors' meeting. Information generated helped to solicit the support of Donor Community for addressing the constraints impacting the development of the fisheries sector of Liberia.

3. ASSESSMENT OF THE FISHERIES COMMUNITIES' LIVELIHOODS

The holistic analysis of the livelihoods of the fisheries communities along the coast of Liberia highlighted the following issues.

3.1 Coexistence of various national and foreign migrant fisheries communities

Artisanal fisheries operators along the coast of Liberia are mainly Kru fishers and their families, and the Fanti and Popo fishers and their families who migrated to Liberia from Benin, Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire respectively. These fisheries communities are present in most of the fish landing sites identified in the various counties. A recent development is the presence of fishermen from the Gambia and Senegal in Cape Mount County.

The presence of migrant fishermen and their contribution to the development of coastal small-scale fisheries through the wide dissemination of fishing nets, canoes and outboard motors along the Liberian coast were noted. They also transferred technical knowledge to local fisheries communities and increased yield and supply of domestic fish products for food security. As told by fishermen, and confirmed by literature, the Fanti fisheries communities resided in Liberia since the 1920s and operated bigger motorized fishing units. Migrant fishermen also caught more fish and had higher revenue from fishing than the local fishers. They employ more sophisticated fishing nets and fishing techniques with crews as large as 15.

Traditional fishers have operated at the subsistence level along the Liberian coast for centuries. They caught fish to feed their families and excess catches were bartered for other essential commodities and goods. The fishing activity for Liberian nationals (Kru and other minor ethnic groups) became commercial with the support of migrant fishermen but the fishing units owned and operated were and still are smaller in size and almost all of them are non-motorized (with 1–3-person crew). The fishing nets used have small meshes that invariably catch many juvenile fish that threaten resource sustainability.

3.2 High vulnerability of the fisheries communities

The coastal fisheries communities of Liberia are considered as very vulnerable to poverty. Four main factors make them vulnerable:

1. *Seasonality of fishing activities and absence of safety at sea.* The periods from January–May and October–December are considered good for fishing because during that time the ocean is calm and the sea breeze is relatively gentle. During the good fishing season, fishers' average total production/catch is estimated at 3 tonnes per week and per fisherman. Fishers use gears such as gillnets, setnets, hooks and lines, and species targeted are both pelagic and demersal, such as *Ilisha africana* (West African ilisha), *Selene dorsalis* (African moonfish), *Galeoides decadactylus* (Lesser African threadfin), *Pteroscion peli* (boe drum), flying fish and other mixed species. Also during the bad season, gears such as gillnets are used and most species targeted are demersal, such as *Pseudotolithus elongatus* (Bobo croaker), *Pseudotolithus senegalensis* (casava croaker), crabs and lobsters, etc. The months of May through September, corresponding to rainy season, are considered bad fishing season because of rough sea and heavy sea breeze. This condition forces fishers to abandon their livelihoods activities for weeks. The absence of safety at sea makes the situation more difficult. Fishers do not wear life jackets and do not carry on board other sea safety equipment. Even if they decide to fish during that bad season, the level of catch drops significantly to a weekly total average catch of 0–0.5 tonnes. During this period the ocean becomes clear and fish stocks migrate to other areas (Figure 2).
2. *Conflicts with industrial fishing, and between migrants and local fishermen.* Industrial fishing vessels habitually encroach on the 3 nautical miles artisanal fishing zone destroying fishing nets of artisanal fishermen and disrupting artisanal fishing operations. The encroachments cause economic losses to fishers (loss of fishing gears, loss of earnings) and reductions in catch landings of fish for the domestic market. It was confirmed by the fishermen that the low

Months	Bad season characterized by bad fishing, scarcity of food and low income	Good season (good fishing, availability of food and very high income)
January February March April May June July August September October November December		

Figure 2: Vulnerability/risk analysis table

level of catch in recent time compared to some four years ago is due to the industrial vessels which are fishing within the artisanal zone. There are also conflicts between Fanti and Kru at sea due to differences in fishing technologies and gears used. Those of the Fanti are considered as more profitable.

3. *Economic shocks.* The national economy was ruined by the 14-year civil war; and that caused high cost of fishing inputs (fishing nets, related equipments and materials, outboard motors, supplies, fuel, oil, etc.) and expensive base commodities as a result of high import duties. The official usage of two currencies in the country in general and in the fisheries communities in particular is a problem. The fishers sell fish in Liberian dollars (LD) and buy fishing inputs in United States dollars (USD). The LD is usually devalued when converted to USD at black market.
4. *Existence of three preventing diseases affecting the community (malaria, pneumonia and diarrhoea).* Malaria prevalence stems from two factors: the presence of a swamp and the lack of bed nets which are unaffordable for most community members. Pneumonia is caused by extreme cold conditions around December to March and during the rainy season. Diarrhoea is caused by the total lack of safe and clean drinking water in most fisheries communities. These diseases are having huge adverse impact on the health of the communities, leaving some 40–45 percent of inhabitants affected during severe outbreaks. This health problem can be addressed by the provision of bed nets, blankets and safe drinking water.

3.3 Weak livelihoods capital assets

The fisheries communities are characterized by weak of capital assets, particularly natural, financial, human and physical resources. Only social capital can be considered as strong in some cases and it is possible to build on it to improve the other assets and reduce vulnerability.

3.3.1 Human capital

The fisheries communities along the Liberian coast are characterized by low level of literacy and general lack of knowledge of modern fishing techniques and fish processing technologies giving rise to high degree of post-harvest losses. Only few improved clay chorkor smoking ovens are in use in Margibi and Grand Bassa counties. Lack of knowledge of livelihoods diversification and of financial capital for fisherfolk makes it difficult to develop innovative strategies to improve livelihoods. However, the existing traditional knowledge in managing resources and fishers can determine the fishing zone by checking the fathom. This method consists of attaching a piece of rock to the end of a rope to determine the depth of their location, in order to know how far they have travelled offshore.

There are few persons in selected fisheries communities with skills in construction, pit digging, net mending, fish processing, boat repairing and fishing gear technology.

In general there is no discrimination between boys and girls in education. However many boys do not attend school due to the lack of financial support from parents and they prefer to be crew members on board family canoes to benefit directly from incomes generated.

3.3.2 Social capital

The major problem associated with fisherfolk is lack of functional organizations. The reasons include complete lack of trust among fisherfolk, lack of interest in community affairs by some members, and lack of common goal and community support.

There are informal groups in each community based on ethnic groups (Kru, Fanti, etc.). These groups do not have adequate organizational structure for local development action. However, they have chiefs that assist in resolving problems within the community. These chiefs are selected according to experience in activities in the community.

Most fisheries communities have a political structure with: (i) the town chief who, as overall head, reports to clan chief; (ii) the deputy chief – next in command; (iii) a 5-member council of elders. Its roles include assisting the chief in setting up dispute resolution regulations governing the community, and giving advice in the decision-making process; (iv) the sea chief who deals directly with fishers on regulating fishing activities and guiding fishing zone at sea. Leaders are elected democratically.

The women fisherfolk are marginalized and are not often involved in the planning and decision-making process even though most of them are household heads. They rarely benefit from credit if and when credit is available. But in some fisheries communities, particularly among the Fanti people, gender relationships of community members are very cordial and harmonious. This is due to a number of contributing factors such as the high level of understanding amongst men and women, and the need to work together especially during difficult times for mutual support. Woman heads of household are given some form of assistance from community members in terms of sell-pay basis (fish is given to such women who sell and pay back by instalment).

Liberian fisherfolk are slowly coming together through associations and cooperative societies that have been established for the pursuit of common aspirations/interests, particularly the fishers as indicated in the Figure 3. They have realized the potential of their organizational strength, which could be utilized for rehabilitation and management of coastal fisheries resources and habitats to ensure sustained benefits. In this regard, migrant fisherfolk, particularly the Fanti, who are better organized and tend to cooperate better with the fisheries administration and district authorities, could play an important role in the process of accompanying fisherfolk in this process of developing professional organizations (Box 1). The Ghanaian Artisanal Fishermen Association (GAFAL) provides assistance to members in terms of moral, social and minimum financial support. It is organized at the community level and is comprised of members drawn from the community.

3.3.3 Natural capital

Fish resources are the main natural capital of the coastal fisheries communities but the exploitation cannot be considered as sustainable. Access to fisheries resources is open for all fishers. The general use of small meshes that catch many juvenile fish show the weakness of promotion of responsible fisheries and conservation of natural resources and habitat. It is increasingly realized that without the active participation of fisheries communities and other stakeholders, it is impossible to rehabilitate and sustain coastal/marine fisheries. The fisher-folk don't comprehend that most of the fisheries regulations, though appear to be anti-fishers in immediate and short-term, are in fact beneficial for them in the long term. No effort has been made to familiarise the stakeholders with FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (CCRF) to facilitate their participation in fisheries resources management. Moreover, lack of financial resources inhibits acquisition and use of appropriate fishing techniques.

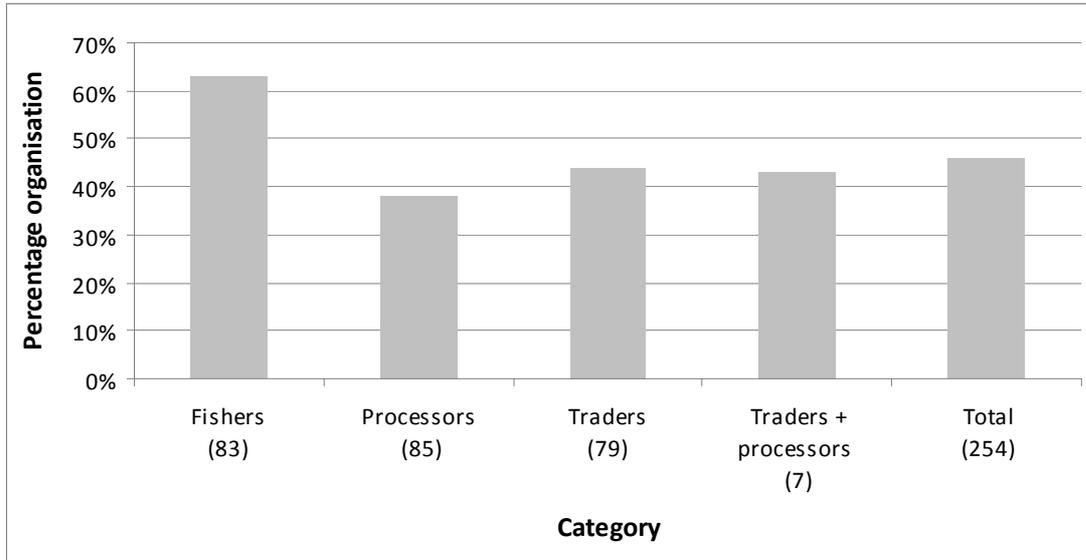


Figure 3: Proportion of actors who are members of an organization

Box 1. How the Fanti fisheries community in Liberia is organized.

Fanti Town as a fisheries community was established in the 1930s by the *Fanti* from Ghana and the *Popo* from Benin. The actual date and time could not be recalled but the area was a forest at the time they newly came to settle. As a small community at that time, they were headed by a chief fisherman who managed the affairs of the community. Since the 1930s, the community has increased in size and population. Instead of a chief fisherman as their leader, they now have a governor and his core of officers that are providing leadership to not only the Fanti in West Point, but to all of the communities where Fanti fishers are found. They are still maintaining the position of a chief fisherman. His duties are directed strictly for the fishing activities in the community, including fish processors and traders. He works with a small team of officers: the secretary for record keeping and the spokesman. The chief fisherman is elected based on several factors, for instance, his level of involvement in matters concerning the community.

The Governor is the overall leader of all the Fanti communities within Liberia. He is backed by an 8-man council of elders, a secretary, a linguist and the chief fisherman. The eight-man council does not include women. According to them they have invited women on several occasions but they failed to join them in the decision-making process, apparently because women find it uncomfortable sitting in the midst of men to make decisions. Another reason is that they believe that decision making is for men to do. The governor is appointed by a team of elders, chief fishermen, women heads and youth heads from every Fanti community around Liberia. He is there for as long as he enjoys the trust his people.

Access to other natural resources such as forestry, agriculture and livestock is limited for the fisheries communities. These resources are not available in most of the fisheries villages. When there is forest (Grand Cape Mount County for example), it is privately owned and restricted.

3.3.4 *Financial capital*

There are no credit schemes in Liberia to support the artisanal fisheries and related activities. As in many developing countries, fisheries communities are considered as the poorest groups in the rural society and as such they have hardly any surplus income for savings. Despite all these bottlenecks, the communities have promoted the development of traditional savings and credit systems. They have access to informal credit groups but the proportion of beneficiaries of credit is still weak as indicated in the Figure 4; the *susu* club, that is owned and operated by one person. The money is saved and periodically distributed proportionally among members. *Susu* clubs also lend out money (credit) to

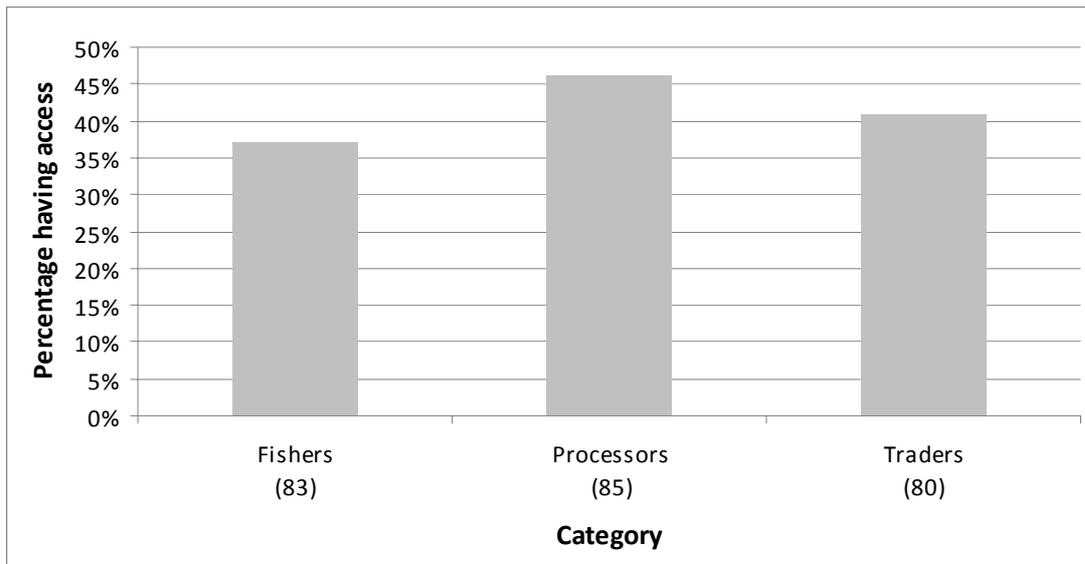


Figure 4: Access to credit for fisher-folk

their members at a high rate of between 20–25 percent for not more than three months. Fishers do individual daily savings known as *Nigerian susu* where drawings are made on capital savings with the person who keeps the money, deducting a day's money of whatever total the person saves per day for the month (1/30). In some cases fishers carry out mutual (collective) savings among themselves. The mutual savings and trust scheme has between 15 and 20 members where each person saves 100 LD every Sunday. Savings is shared at the end of the year, and credit is granted to members only on emergency and no interest is charged on such credit.

3.3.5 Physical capital

The artisanal fish landing sites are devoid of basic fisheries infrastructure, such as fish handling and processing areas, storage facilities for processed products, and ice and chill storage facilities. Potable water supply systems and sanitary facilities are also not available and consequently environmental hygiene and beach sanitation are major problems. Schools are absent in the fisheries communities or poorly equipped. The fish landing sites are widely dispersed and isolated from the main communities. The poor road conditions explain the very poor fish distribution and marketing system in the country.

The fishing equipment and processing material are obsolete in many fisheries communities. They are difficult to replace because of their high prices, made worse by weak financial resources. Fishers give out fishing materials from fellow fishers or proprietors who trade in fishing gears/materials mostly imported from Ghana as credit. An interest rate of 25 percent is added when such purchases are made, and a 3-month instalment is required in most cases. Moreover, these imported fishing nets are not controlled to ensure that they comply with fisheries regulations in Liberia. This means that any programme of replacement of fishing gears should be part of a broad programme of fisheries resource management. There is also a need to promote the private sector to take charge of the supply of fishing equipment.

All the vessels operating in the fisheries communities have hulls made of wood. During the frame survey conducted in August–September 2007, 2 261 canoes and 6 921 fishers were counted along the Liberian coast (Table 2). Unfortunately, due to inaccessibility of some sites, not all active landing sites were covered during this frame survey; out of the 120 landing sites, 89 were covered (74 percent). There is a sensation that some of the sites not covered could harbour as high numbers of canoes as the ones covered (BNF, 2008a).

Fisherfolk have no possibilities to develop strong linkages with existing institutions intervening at local level such as for example a relation with NGOs to develop physical capital. Moreover, the issue

Table 2: Number of canoes and fishers along the Liberian coast in 2007

County	Number of active landing sites identified during the frame survey	Number of active landing sites covered during the frame survey	Number of canoes counted	Number of fishers counted	Number of landing sites covered by the livelihoods survey
Montserrado	8	8	444	1 792	5
Grand Bassa	33	32	412	1 171	3
Sinoe	23	12	308	797	2
Maryland	8	8	296	827	2
Grand Kru	19	10	275	710	4
Grand Cape Mount	4	4	204	744	3
River Cess	17	9	163	418	2
Margibi	6	4	104	331	1
Bomi	2	2	55	131	1
Total	120	89	2 261	6 921	23

Source: BNF, 2008a

Note: major landing sites not covered.

of land ownership in most of the fisheries communities is a real problem. Land is privately owned, fisher-folk are only given squatter right and pay rental fees to owners of the land (between 200 and 300 LD per month).

Most of the fisher-folk do not own their own houses. In many cases, houses were damaged or destroyed during the civil war. Some fishers were able to develop and renovate their houses through enhanced family incomes. But most of them rent rooms and the cost varies between 125 LD (mud-walled house) and 300 LD (concrete walled house).

3.4 Unfavourable political and institutional environment

3.4.1 *Weak institutional framework to guarantee sustainable fisheries management and development*

The institutional framework for the management of fisheries and aquaculture is within the purview of MOA through the BNF. The MOA is the highest Government institution responsible for the management and development of the agriculture sector of Liberia. It is supposed to make policy pronouncements on fisheries and aquaculture and the BNF to implement Government policy.

The BNF was created by an Act of the National Legislature under the Natural Resources Laws of 1956 and charged with the responsibility of managing and developing fisheries and aquaculture in Liberia. Its role is to implement fisheries policy; formulate guidelines, rules and regulations to govern national fisheries and aquaculture for its planning, development and management. The situation in the country and institutions including BNF were devastated after two decades of instability and civil war. Government institutions are slowly starting to work again since the peace accords of 2004 and the subsequent stabilization of the country. Impressive efforts were undertaken since 2005 to re-establish BNF (FAO, 2007a).

Interventions of the institutions in charge of the development of the sector are still limited. Links between fisher-folk and national and international institutions intervening in the fisheries sector are weak in terms of policies and strategies. The donor agencies and NGOs are mainly active in small-scale aquaculture development. Donor intervention is channelled through international and local NGOs. Only four out of fourteen NGOs are involved in artisanal fisheries development in selected counties (Drammeh, 2007). Moreover, these NGOs intervene in the various fisheries communities without the knowledge and involvement of the MOA and the BNF. The NGOs are registered with the

Ministry of Planning but not with the MOA. It is often the case that neither the latter nor the BNF are aware of the activities and scope of operations of the NGOs in the fisheries communities. This lack of coordination between governmental institutions is a major constraint for the development of the fisheries sector. There are several governmental and non-governmental organizations and agencies operating at national and county level which provide various services to fisher-folk. The relationships between these institutions and fisheries communities are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3: Relationships between main institutions at national and county level and fisheries communities

Institutions at national and county level		Relationships with fisheries communities
Ministry of Justice (MOJ)	Liberian National Police (LNP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Handles civil unrest or criminal cases • Ensures maximum protection of residents • Enforces laws
	Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization (BIN)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inspects and ensures regularization of residence permit of aliens.
	Fire service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advices on storage of gas and usage of fire related material to avoid fire destruction
	Magistrate Court	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Handles and settles legal matters
Ministry of Health (MOH)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conducts sensitization campaigns on hygiene and disease prevention • Conducts vaccination on polio chickenpox etc.
Ministry of Finance (MOF)	Bureau of Revenue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reviews all tax related documents and ensures that taxes are paid into government accounts
Ministry of Agriculture (MOA)	Bureau of National Fisheries (BNF)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensures that fishers operate in accordance with the fisheries laws of Liberia by monitoring and regulating fishing activities; setting policies on fishing methods and mesh sizes during various seasons; enforcing regulations • Issues licenses upon fees payment to MOF: Kru canoe 1 000 LD per year; outboard canoe (Fanti) 1 500 per year.
Ministry of Commerce (MOC)	Custom Office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regulates prices of every commodity including fish and fish products. The fishmongers complained bitterly on this “arm” of government on the ground that MOC focuses much attention on them, force to reduce the price of fish at the detriment of the fish sellers.
Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conducts local governance in the counties through its representatives (Chiefs)
Local government	Townships Commissioners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organize and mobilize fisherfolk on clean-up campaigns • Impose taxes on local projects; these revenues do not benefit community directly which puts a strain on meagre financial resources of community.
Aid Organizations	NGOs: African Development Aid (ADA), Oxfam, Merlin, Concern, Buccaba/LCIP/UK, and CRS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carries out specific interventions in fisheries communities at different levels for vulnerable families including construction of houses, provision of basic social services (health, water and sanitation, education, etc.)

The main institutions present in the fisheries communities are:

- Formal and informal organizations of fisherfolk (political structure, traditional chiefs, fishing ethnic groups, etc.)
- Religious bodies, represented by churches and mosques, that provide spiritual support and family counselling to fisherfolk.

The Venn Diagram of Jackson Beach fisheries community in River Cess County (Figure 5) highlights the central role of the Community Fishing Chief (element of the political structure), the main

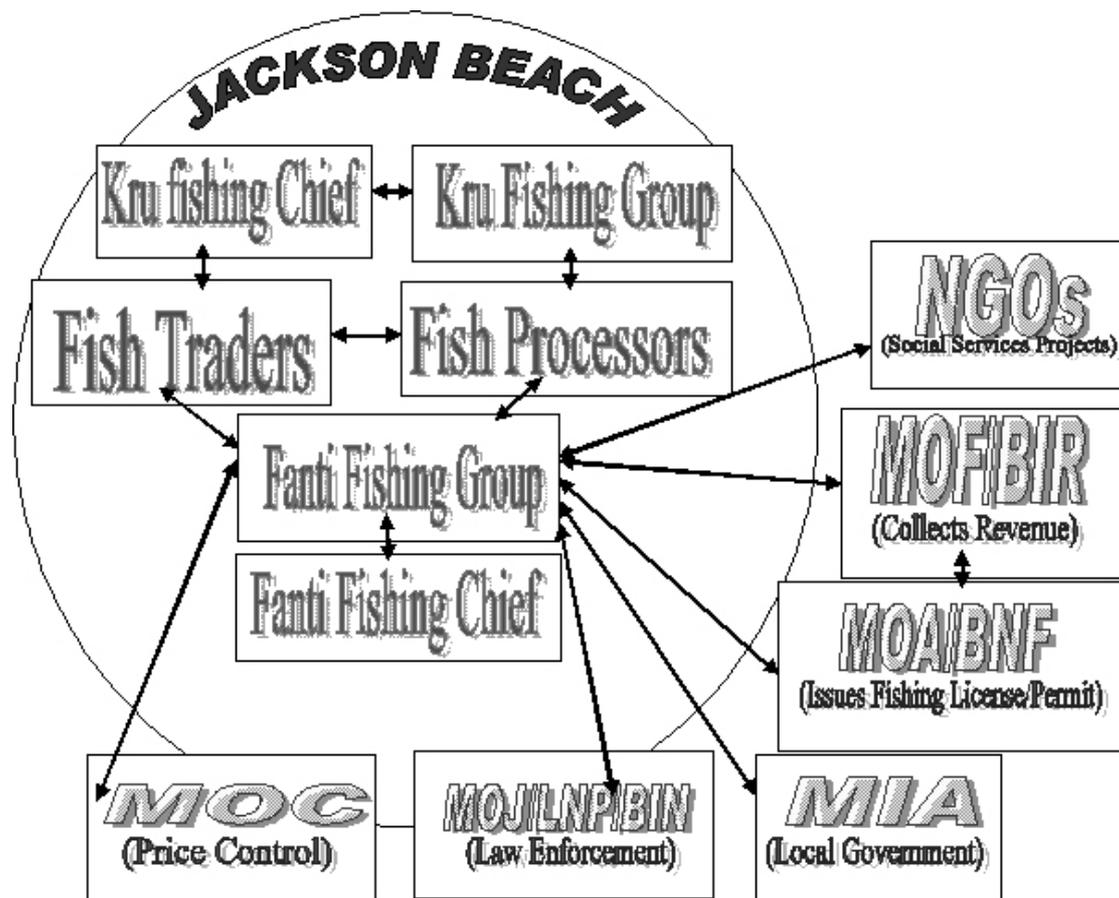


Figure 5: Venn diagram of Jackson Beach Fisheries Community

institutions within and outside of the community are connected to this structure. This reflects the same situation in the other fishing communities along the Liberian coast.

3.4.2 *Absence of appropriate policies to reduce poverty and improve food security within fisheries communities*

Government policies and interventions over a decade have not been adequate because of fourteen years of civil war. These elements are required for a better management of fisheries resources to contribute to achieving national development priority objectives such as poverty reduction and food security. MOA, with FAO support, recently formulated a National Fisheries Policy with the involvement of the main stakeholders of the fisheries sector, including artisanal fisherfolk. This Policy is being finalized for submission to Government and it will be complemented by a legal framework that is in the draft stage. The national Fisheries Legislation which will replace the Natural Resources Laws of 1956 (revised in 1961 and 1973) that are still in force in Liberia is being circulated to the relevant ministries for collaborative comments and observations.

The objectives of the National Fisheries Policy (Drammeh, 2007) include:

- Increase the contribution of the fisheries sector to national food security and improvement of nutritional standards.
- Create employment opportunities and reduce poverty in rural communities.
- Improve incomes and quality of life of fisherfolk and their dependents, and increase revenue and foreign exchange earnings for the country to support socio-economic development.

Moreover, weak links between microlevel (fisheries communities) and meso/macrolevels (county and national) do not facilitate the mainstreaming of the fisheries sector in national plans and programmes when they exist.

The process of decentralization in Liberia is not strong enough to encourage the inclusion of fisheries communities in local development. Fisherfolk are considered as occupying the lowest social status in their communities and are hence not involved in planning community activities and in decision-making.

At micro level, the poor organization of the fisherfolk, as a consequence of weak human capital, does not facilitate participation in the process of resources management and local development. It was noted that the fisherfolk were not involved in the management of the mini-cold rooms set up by Government for use by the artisanal community in Robertsport, Grand Cape Mount County in the mid 1970s.

The analysis of the fisheries communities' livelihoods reveals weak links between the three levels (national, county and fisheries community). Fisherfolk are not aware of the national institutional and political framework, including the fisheries regulation (most of them continue to use inappropriate and illegal fishing gear) and the opportunities to improve their livelihoods at the county level through the District development plans are therefore weak. They have an indirect say in the policies that are meant to improve their living conditions. Their views are expressed to development partners and agencies through their leaders. Discussions are organized with community leadership who in turn hold meetings with members of the community to have a say in plans and decisions. Consequently development policies are designed and implemented without effective participation of the people concerned.

3.5 Opportunities for livelihood diversification

The consequence of weak capital assets and unfavourable political and institutional environment are the causes of the limited opportunities available for livelihoods diversification and development of initiatives for fisher-folk to reduce vulnerabilities (Figure 6).

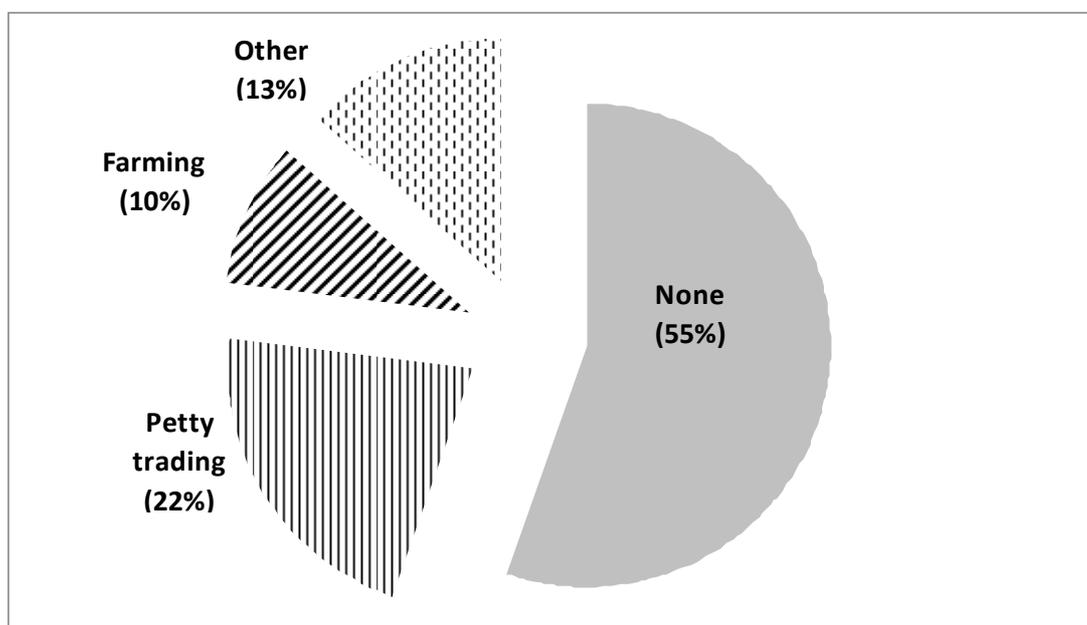


Figure 6: Livelihoods diversification opportunities for fisherfolk

When food is extremely scarce, women engage in small ventures in the trading of consumer commodities and the sale of fish given by their husbands on credit to generate incomes to sustain the family. Women, fishmongers/traders and processors in the fisheries communities close to Monrovia buy fish from industrial operators (cold storage owners) and resell it in the neighbouring villages. Few men migrate to other fishing grounds in search of fish or to nearby cities and towns to engage in odd

jobs (casual labours). Others continue to fish while a few engage in other income generating activities such as gardening. Funds acquired from these activities are just enough to maintain the assets in some cases. When food is not exceedingly scarce, people relax in their spending and the men prepare for the dry season by repairing equipments and gears.

3.6 Livelihoods outcomes

Globally the incomes generated from the exploitation of fisheries resources are very limited. It is due to the same reasons as the livelihoods strategies; because of the limited opportunities for livelihoods diversification and insufficient incomes generated from the activities of the fishers during the course of the year. Although incomes sometimes assist communities to stabilize by ensuring limited supply of basic needs for survival and improving community health and nutritional status, but they are not sufficient to significantly impact the social life of the community.

With regard to this, fisherfolk aspire to see the quality and standard of their lives improved through:

- construction of better and improved housing facilities;
- access to microcredit opportunities;
- access to adequate basic socio-economic services (safe drinking water, toilet facilities, health care, education);
- better access to fishing materials and equipment (nets, motors, canoes, etc.);
- adequate protection from industrial trawlers that damage their fishing equipment.

4. IMPLICATIONS IN TERMS OF POLICY

Three main factors – illiteracy, poor access to credit and weak organizational capacities of fisheries communities – were found to be the major reasons behind the low participation of fisheries communities in decision-making processes, especially in fisheries resources management and local development. Consequently, two main entry points were identified for any future intervention to assist the fisheries communities continue to benefit from the exploitation of available fisheries resource to increase and sustain their income and well-being, and reduce vulnerability. The improvement of human and social capital of the fisherfolk and the political and institutional environment could be entry points to making physical, financial and natural capital more efficient, and to reduce vulnerability through a better choice of strategies, permanent achievements, diversified and enduring partnerships, a better representation of communities leading to an active role in the preparation and implementation of policies.

4.1 Building social capital for empowerment

Future interventions will have to focus on building social capital, for example through development of professional organizations, particularly by improving the existing informal groups. The capacity of fisheries communities will be enhanced by making them familiar with the essentials of organizational development and leadership skills. This will help them to be a real partner to government and other intervening institutions.

Community members should be trained and supported to set up functional structures to enable them to participate effectively in the decision-making process while being able to protect their interests. The training should cover participatory project planning and implementation, resources management, small-scale businesses, literacy, advocacy, and lobbying to help the community to develop strong strategic partnerships (with national authorities, NGOs, financial institutions, development partners, etc.). To sustain the exploitation of the fisheries resources, the fisherfolk need to be sensitized on responsible fishing, particularly through the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, the National Fishery Policy and the National Fisheries Legislation.

The analysis of the livelihoods showed that it is possible to build on existing informal organizations in selected fisheries communities. There is a need to better organize traditional systems of savings and credit – club money – that emerge in the fisheries communities by improving their functionality and linking them to existing financial institutions, and to develop the spirit of savings (possibilities to

increase savings during the good fishing season, from October to May). Migrant fisherfolk, who are better organized, should be involved in the process to provide required support.

In short, improved fisher community organizations are expected to result in:

- active stakeholder participation;
- better resource management;
- strong partners to government and other intervening institutions;
- community development;
- improved access to credit/savings schemes, particularly micro finance services;
- a common voice towards institutions developing national policies;
- social cohesion (conflicts resolution);
- facilitation of supply-acquisition; and
- improvement of safety at sea.

4.2 Policies and institutions to improve livelihoods

Considering that the fisheries sector has a huge potential to substantially contribute to national socio-economic development and help address the major challenges of the rehabilitation and recovery efforts of the country's economy, the political and institutional environment should be improved. Policies and institutions at the local (micro), county (meso) and national (macro) levels should be adjusted to increasingly include the aspirations of fisheries communities and their adoption of the CCRF.

Despite the constraints noted above, there are some opportunities to adjust policies and institutions to create an environment favourable to the reduction of poverty and improvement of food security within the communities.

- The Government is fully aware of the huge potential of the fisheries sector. This potential is being tapped through concrete actions recently undertaken in formulating the Draft National Fisheries Policy, Draft National Fisheries Legislation and Interim Poverty reduction strategy (iPRS) for the period 2008–2013. The fisheries sector can play a vital role if it is integrated into the various national policies and strategies. In particular, the sector can contribute to poverty reduction as an engine of growth. The sector can also benefit from available funds for specific interventions and improved access to economic and social basic services can reduce the vulnerability of the fisheries communities and increase livelihoods opportunities. Moreover, efforts will be made to assess the economic and social role of the fisheries sector to identify ways to increase its contribution through sustainable fisheries resources management system.
- NGOs and development partners are engaged in the process of reconstruction and revitalization of the Liberian economy. Some donors showed interest to support the development of the fisheries sector.
- Migrant fishermen, particularly Ghanaians, cooperate better with the fisheries administration and the local authorities than the Liberian fisher-folk. This could facilitate their inclusion in the process of design and implementation of policies to reduce poverty/vulnerability and improve food security within their communities. There is also a will to work together through the creation of a National Liberian Fishermen Association, which will group all fishers operating in Liberia.

4.3 Improving Fisheries Administration

It is vital for the Fisheries Administration (MOA, BNF) to improve its ways of working to sustain future interventions in fisheries communities. In that regard, the following recommendations need to be considered with the assistance of FAO which could play a catalytic role in the process:

- Support the Government of Liberia to sustain its development of the fisheries sector through the improvement and implementation of National Fisheries and Aquaculture Policy, and the mainstreaming of the sector into the Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy.
- Providing technical support to the national authorities, particularly the BNF to develop strong partnerships with all stakeholders at national level (fisherfolk, other Ministries, NGOs, private sector, fisherfolk and development partners such as United Nations Agencies and bilateral cooperation) and subregional and regional level (Fishery Committee for the Eastern Central Atlantic – CECAF; Committee for Inland Fisheries and Aquaculture in Africa – CIFA; Fishery Committee for the West Central Gulf of Guinea FCWC) to reinforce their capacities, the sector make more visible and facilitate the eligibility of the sector for funds mobilized for poverty reduction in Liberia.

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 - Marshall Beach (Margibi County);
 - Greenville Down Town Beach & Greenville Fish Town Beach (Sinoe County);
 - Toma Town Beach (Bormi County);
 - Little Bassa Beach, Port Beach & Custom Port Beach (Grand Bassa County);
 - Grand Cess Beach, Sassatown, Garaway Beach & Pinicess Beach (Grand Kru County);
 - Banjor Beach, King Gray Beach, Kru Town West Point Beach, Fanti Town West Point Beach & Popo Beach (Montserrado County);
 - Jackson Beach & Small Fanti Town (Rivercess County);
 - Old Kru Town Beach and Hoffman Station Beach Beach (Maryland County).

ANNEX 1

Participatory diagnoses of the livelihoods of fisheries communities (Guidelines for focus group discussions)

This note summarizes the main issues that need to be addressed as questions during focus groups to assess the livelihoods of fisheries communities.

An ideal entry point from a sustainable livelihood analysis point of view is the vulnerability of the community and how it deals with this. All poor communities experience vulnerability in their pursuit of their livelihoods and they usually articulate it with a high degree of understanding.

1. Assessing the vulnerability context

When analyzing the vulnerability context two basic considerations draw attention: (i) the extent to which different groups are exposed to particular trends/shocks seasonality and the sensitivity and adaptation (coping strategies) of their livelihoods to these factors.

These issues are best approached by phase, beginning with an overview of those risk factors to which different groups in the community are most prone (e.g. food insecurity, drought, eviction, illness and death etc) This can be followed by more detailed analysis of key problems, the nature and magnitude of expected changes, coping strategies and potential solutions (see table below in conjunction with technical information matrix).

Key questions:

- What months of the year is the community most vulnerable?
- What months of the year is food readily available?
- Is vulnerability due to seasonal change alone?
- What are the principle reasons for high vulnerability?

2. Assessing the capital assets

It is useful to break up the five components of livelihood assets into two main parts: human and social on one hand and physical, financial and natural on the other.

2.1 *Human assets*

- Have individual members of the community been educated?
- Have individual members of the community received skills training?
- Have members of the community received literacy training where necessary?
- Does the community have individuals trained in traditional medicine?
- Does the community have a traditionally trained midwife?
- Are girls sent to school?
- Are girls sent to school and for how long?

2.2 *Social assets*

- Does the community have a political structure and how is it organized?
- Does the community have social organizations and how are they organized?
- What are the kinship arrangements in the community?
- What are the gender relationships in the community?
- What are family sizes?
- What arrangements are made for women-headed households?
- Are the disabled looked after in the community?
- What is the nutritional status of the community?

- What are the infant mortality rates in the community?
- What are the most prevalent diseases?
- How are baptisms, marriages and funerals arranged?

2.3 *Physical assets*

- Do members of the community have their own houses?
- Does the community have a school?
- Does the community have a health centre?
- Does the community have a religious centre?
- Does the community have clean drinking water?
- Does the community have a communal meeting place?
- Do members of the community have land?
- Do members own working animals?

2.4 *Financial assets*

- Do members of the community have savings?
- How are these kept?
- Do members of the community have access to credit?
- If credit is available who provides it?
- If credit is available what interest is charged on it?
- Has money been converted into assets like tools, jewellery etc.?

2.5 *Natural assets*

- Does the community have access to a water body?
- Does the community have good access to fisheries resources?
- Is there commonly owned land the community can use?
- Is there a forest which can be used for wood, fruit etc.?
- What seasonal benefits are to be had from the climate?

3. Assessing the policies, institutions and processes (PIPs)

3.1 *Assessing the performance of institutions*

- Do government extension services assist the community?
- If there are government extension services what do they cover?
- What part does local government play in assisting communities?
- Are there aid organizations working in the community?
- What roles do aid organizations play in assisting communities?
- Are there religious organizations working in the community?
- What development roles do religious organizations play?
- What are the mechanisms through which people's views are captured and included in the development planning process?
- How do government/quasi-government organizations link with civil society organizations and groups; how do they hold themselves accountable to their clients?
- Are there obvious "gaps" in civil society organizations?
- Do key agencies have local offices or service points; how accessible are these?
- Are policies and development plans of given organizations adequately resourced in human and other relevant terms?
- What is the role of decentralized local political and administrative structures?

3.2 Assessing policy and policy processes

- Are there government policies that assist poor communities?
- If the latter is positive what are they?
- How are policies framed, based on what sources of information?
- How are different interests and groups represented in the policy formulation process? Who is included and/or excluded?
- Who has the greatest influence on policy and policy changes?
- Is policy coherent and independent of special interests?

4. Assessing the livelihood strategies

- What does the community do when food is extremely scarce?
- What does the community do when food is not so scarce?
- What does the community do when food is generally available?
- Are there differences in livelihood strategies by gender?
- Are there differences in livelihood strategies by age groupings?
- Are there differences in livelihood strategies by socio-economic class?

5. Assessing the livelihood outcomes/aspirations

- Do livelihood strategies improve/sustain capital assets and how?
- Do livelihood strategies assist in community stability?
- Do livelihood strategies improve community health?
- Do livelihood strategies improve community nutritional status?
- Do livelihood strategies improve community educational attainment?
- Do livelihood strategies improve social life in the community?
- Do livelihood strategies affect gender relationships and in what way?
- Enumerate in detail the livelihood aspirations of the community.

ANNEX 2**Team of BNF involved in the livelihood survey**

Counties	Team	Time table for Field work
Region I: Cape Mount County Bomi County and Montserrado County	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mr Raphael Collins, Livelihoods Working Group Member, Supervisor (BNF) 2. Mr D. Wisseh Kay, Livelihoods Working Group Member (BNF) 3. Mr Andrew Sumo, BNF, Team Leader 4. Mr Issac Morris, BNF 5. Mrs Helen Kerdiah, BNF 	17 January–7 February 2008
Region II: Morgibi County – Grand Bassa County and River Cess County	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mr Eric B.C. Kekula, Livelihoods Working Group Member, Supervisor (BNF) 2. Mr Alvin Jueseah, BNF, Team Leader 3. Mr Ruth Allison, BNF 4. Mrs Lawrence Kieh, BNF 	17 January–7 February 2008
Region III: Grand Kru County and Maryland County	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mr Henri Larway, Livelihoods Working Group Member, Supervisor (MOH) 2. Mr Roland Nyema, BNF, Team Leader 3. Mr Sando Fahnbulleh, BNF 4. Mrs Lilian George 	19 January–9 February 2008
Region III: Sinoe County	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mr Glasgow B. Togba, BNF, Team Leader 2. Mrs Judith Karn, BNF 3. Mrs Agna M. Kay, BNF 4. Mr Moris Nenneh, BNF 	19 January–9 February 2008

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