



The Bonga Fishery in The Gambia

A. N. Mendy, S. Mendy and A. Saine



Abstract

This poster describes the Bonga, *Ethmalosa fimbriata* fishery and its socioeconomic importance in The Gambia. The West African Shad (commonly known as Bonga), is one of the four shad species belonging to the family Clupeidae, sub-family Alosinae, found in Africa (Whitehead, 1985). Bonga fishery contributes to protein supply, food security and poverty alleviation. It is a major employer and a source of livelihood for the fishermen and the fishing communities along the coast.

Introduction

The West African Shad, Bonga (*Ethmalosa fimbriata*) is a tropical marine species distributed between 24° N (Lozano-Rey, 1950) and 12° S (Poll, 1953) latitude. According to Charles-Dominique and Albaret (2003), the distribution appears to be fragmented, with juveniles, sub-adults and mature adults having different habitat preferences. It has a strong affinity for estuaries, deltas and lagoons (Charles-Dominique and Albaret, 2003).

The older group has a preference for the marine environment, and the intermediate one is more adapted to estuaries, with a large plasticity with respect to reproduction.

The main concentrations of *E. fimbriata* are found in Senegal, The Gambia, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Nigeria and Cameroon. They also occur in Mauritania.

Bonga Fishery

The Bonga fishery in The Gambia is mainly concentrated around the mouth of the The Gambia River, an estuary, figure 1. It is mainly an artisanal activity with fishermen using motorized canoes and surround gill nets and purse seines.

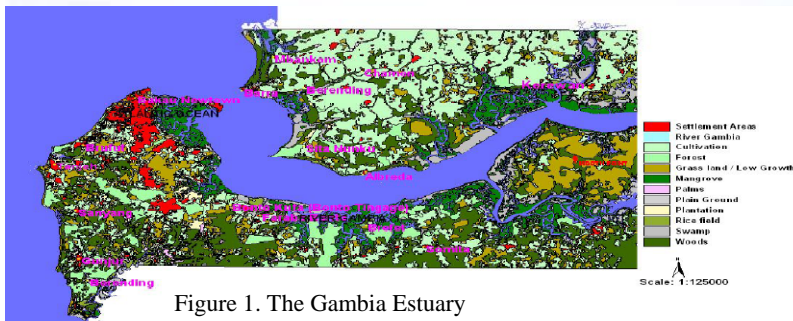


Figure 1. The Gambia Estuary

The bulk of total annual fish landings in the Gambia is dominated by Bonga (70 – 80%). Over 28 per cent artisanal fishermen operating along the coast target Boanga. The fishery is multifaceted with several socio-professions (fishing, processing and marketing)

Production and status of Bonga



Figure 2. Bonga canoe landing

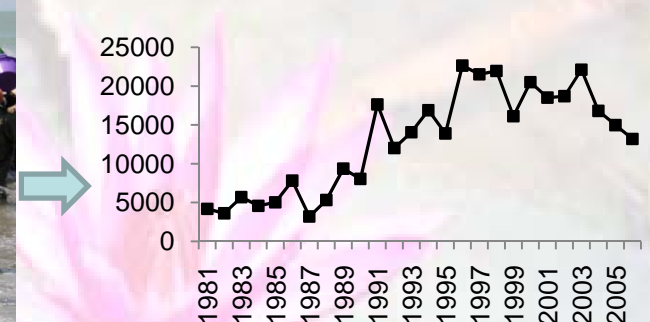
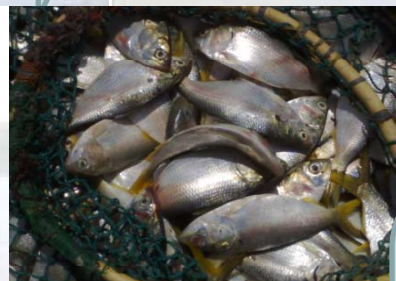


Figure 3. Annual bonga production

Bonga constitutes the bulk (over 70%) of fish catches (Figure 2.) in The Gambia and about 2 percent of total catches of main small pelagic fish in the subregion. Catches have been declining since 2001 from 18 500 to 13 000 tonnes, figure 3. As the species is found inshore and in estuaries surveys of small pelagic fish in Northwest Africa conducted under the Nansen programme do not estimate the abundance of Bonga. The assessment of the status of this species is constrained by lack of adequate fishery dependent data and no fisheries independent data.

Bonga Distribution and Marketing



Bonga is a commercial element sold and consumed fresh, smoked and in dried forms



Management

Like all artisanal fishing activities in waters of the Gambia, bonga fishery is opened to everybody with the means to extract the resource. The regulated mesh size for Bonga is 40 mm..

Conclusions

The Bonga fishery is a source of protein (75%), income and employment for over 1700 Gambians. It contributes immensely to food security

References

- Whitehead, 1985
- Lozano-Rey, 1950
- Poll, 1953
- Charles-Dominique and Albaret, 2003