

FECKLESS AND RECKLESS OR FORBEARING AND RESOURCEFUL? LOOKING BEHIND THE STEREOTYPES OF HIV AND AIDS IN “FISHING COMMUNITIES”

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ABSTRACT

Over the last decade evidence has emerged suggesting that in many countries fisherfolk, as an occupational group, are at greater risk to HIV and AIDS than the general adult population. This high vulnerability has been explained in terms of the lifestyles associated with fishing and related occupations, such as fish processing and trading. Fishermen have been portrayed as risk takers, their attitudes and behaviour shaped by the physical and economic risks of the fishing lifestyle. Women in fishing communities, often engaged in fish processing and trading and providing food and lodging in fishing settlements, are portrayed as being in subordinate social and economic positions and prey to sexual exploitation by cash-rich fishermen. There is a danger in such lifestyle summaries that fisherfolk are characterized as feckless risk takers with a reckless attitude to the chance of contracting HIV. In this article we look at the lives of some men, women, and children living in a lake-side community in Uganda severely affected by HIV and AIDS to illustrate how existing portrayals of fisherfolk, and fishing communities, need to avoid stereotypes in order to better inform appropriate health sector and livelihood support measures.

IN 1982 THE FIRST CASES OF AIDS-RELATED ILLNESS AND DEATH were identified in a fishing village on the Ugandan shores of Lake Victoria, in Rakai District.¹ Given these origins, one would expect lakeshore communities to have been the focus for subsequent research, but in the years

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1. D. Serwadda, R. D. Mugerwa, N. K. Sewankambo, A. Lwegaba, J. W. Carswell, G. B. Kirya, A. C. Bayley, R. G. Downing, R. S. Tedder and S. A. Clayden, ‘Slim disease: a new

following publication of these findings the incidence of HIV infection and AIDS-related illness were largely unrecorded in this type of setting, beyond what Pickering *et al.* referred to in 1997 as ‘glancing references in the media, conference abstracts and elsewhere to high rates of HIV infection in fishing communities in East Africa’.² There was a dearth of published material on HIV seroprevalence to substantiate these claims and the ‘glancing references’ were not enough to galvanize action to learn more and to provide such communities with appropriate support. Recently that situation has begun to change and it is now established that HIV prevalence in some fishing communities in low- and middle-income countries is high relative to national average seroprevalence rates.³

Many reasons have been given for the high rates of HIV infection at fishing ports and fish landing sites.⁴ These include the fact that most of those engaged in fishing as an occupation are aged between 15 and 35, the age range of people most vulnerable to sexually transmitted infections. Fisherfolk (fishermen, male and female traders and processors) are also often mobile, going to where fish (and work) can be found. Fishing ports and landing sites are centres of economic exchange between people who are often temporary residents, living away from their homes and families. As fishing operations are often strongly gendered, exchanges tend to be between male fishers selling their catch, and (often) female buyers, traders, and service providers. In some cases, with fish in short supply and with livelihood opportunities at stake in the highly competitive and female-dominated small-scale fish trade, so-called “sex-for-fish” exchanges take place.⁵ These sexual relations put fishers and fish traders at risk to HIV.

Fishing itself is a high-risk occupation and this may contribute to a culture of risk denial or risk confrontation among fishermen.⁶ Alcohol and/or drug use is also widespread among fisherfolk in many parts of the world as part

disease in Uganda and its association with HTLV-III infection’, *The Lancet* 2, 8460 (1985), pp. 849–52.

2. H. Pickering, M. Okongo, K. Bwanika, B. Nnalusiba, and J. Whitworth, ‘Sexual behaviour in a fishing community on Lake Victoria, Uganda’, *Health Transition Review* 7 (1997) p. 13.

3. E. Kissling, E. H. Allison, J. A. Seeley, S. Russell, M. Bachmann, S. D. Musgrave, and S. Heck, ‘Fisherfolk are among groups most at risk of HIV: cross-country analysis of prevalence and numbers infected’, *AIDS* 19, 17 (2005), pp. 1939–46.

4. Many fishing operations take place from beaches, lakeshores, and river banks, where there is no formal port. Places where fishers land their catch, and traders come to buy fish, are known as fish landing sites. They are often temporary in nature, comprising lodgings and services for mobile or migrant fishers and fish traders, but may be associated with more permanent nearby villages and towns.

5. S. Merten and T. Haller, ‘Fish for sex deals in view of the HIV/AIDS epidemic: opportunities, competition and heterogeneity of interests in the Kafue Flats, Zambia’ in ‘Responding to HIV and AIDS in the fishery sector in Africa. Proceedings of the international workshop held in Lusaka, Zambia’ (WorldFish Centre, Cairo, 2006), pp. 59–40.

6. ILO, ‘Safety and Health in the Fishing Industry’ (International Labour Office, Geneva, 2000). <<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/dialogue/sector/techmeet/tmfir99/tmfir1.htm>> (27 December 2006).

of shore-based recreation.⁷ Women involved in the fishery sector, or in providing food, lodging, and drink to fishermen, may also use alcohol for recreation or during their work. This further compounds vulnerability to HIV infection, as risk perception (for example of unprotected sex) changes under the influence of alcohol.⁸ In addition, fisherfolk are often socially marginalized and many, particularly those perceived to have less-skilled jobs such as fishing labourers, small-scale traders, and those who work in service sectors such as bars and lodgings, often have low status.⁹

Many of the above factors are also present among other occupational groups known to be at higher risk to HIV, such as miners, soldiers, and truck drivers, and in other settings where people are mobile, away from home, and have risky jobs or uncertain futures. In these situations, people within their sexual networks are also at risk of HIV infection and this is the case for fisherfolk in Uganda, some of whom have permanent homes in non-fishing communities in the agricultural hinterland.¹⁰

While the picture of the social and sexual norms of fisherfolk behaviour should not be taken as universal, it does appear from government, donor agency, and NGO reports, as well as a number of academic studies in the last few years, to be widespread enough to cause concern that fishermen, female and male fish traders and processors, and their sexual partners are at significant risk of HIV infection, particularly in countries with established or emerging epidemics.¹¹ Uganda, the focus of this study, is such a country.

A recent newspaper report in Uganda carried the headline ‘HIV prevalence rate in Kalangala District at 27 percent’. Kalangala is on the Ssese Islands in Lake Victoria, a place heavily dependent upon fishing. The reporter, Aliga Issa, went on to say that in southern Uganda the high rate in Kalangala was followed by Sembabule District at 17.8 percent and the districts of Masaka and Rakai at 10.6 and 12.3 percent respectively. Issa said that ‘the studies [from which the data were taken] attributed the high

7. Cecilia Busby, ‘Agency, power and personhood: discourses of gender and violence in a fishing community in South India’, *Critiques of Anthropology* 19, 3 (1999), pp. 227–48; J. Appleton, ‘At my age I should be sitting under that tree’: the impact of AIDS on Tanzanian lakeshore communities’, *Gender and Development* 8, 2 (2000), pp. 19–27; Ariella Pahlke, Stella Lord, and Linda Christiansen-Ruffman, ‘Women’s health and wellbeing in six Nova Scotia fishing communities’ (report, Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women in association with Nova Scotia Women’s Fishnet, 2001).

8. S. Mbulaiteye, A. Ruberantwari, J. Nakiyingi, L. Carpenter, A. Kamali, and J. Whitworth, ‘Alcohol and HIV: a study among sexually active adults in rural southwest Uganda’, *International Journal of Epidemiology* 29, 5 (2000), pp. 911–15.

9. G. Hemrich and D. Topouzis, ‘Multi-sectoral responses to HIV/AIDS: constraints and opportunities for technical co-operation’, *Journal of International Development* 12, 1 (2000), pp. 85–99; E. H. Allison and J. A. Seeley, ‘HIV and AIDS among fisherfolk: a threat to “responsible fisheries”?’ *Fish and Fisheries* 5, 3 (2004), pp. 215–34; Kissling *et al.*, ‘Fisherfolk’.

10. K. Geheb and T. Binns, ‘Fishing farmers’ or “farming fishermen” . . . household, income, and nutritional security on the Kenyan shores of Lake Victoria’, *African Affairs* 96, 382 (1997), pp. 73–94.

11. Allison and Seeley, ‘HIV and AIDS among fisherfolk’.

HIV prevalence rates in the four districts to poverty, women's ignorance of their reproductive rights and high levels of prostitution especially at landing sites.' Issa quotes the Kalangala District Director of Health Services as saying that 'fishermen at the landing sites spend most of the time asleep during day before they go in the waters to fish at night and prostitutes take advantage of them because they are ever with huge sums of money.'¹²

The picture of the lifestyle factors that put fisherfolk at risk to HIV, and the view of fishing communities as places populated by feckless fishermen and prostitutes, as suggested above, may stigmatize these communities as undeserving of support and care, as we have noted elsewhere.¹³

Not only have fisherfolk been overlooked until recently as a group at risk of HIV infection but also, as a consequence of this neglect and the geographical isolation of many landing sites, they have been left beyond the reach of prevention, treatment, and mitigation efforts. That situation is slowly beginning to change as greater publicity is given to the scale of the epidemic in fishing communities by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the WorldFish Centre, as well as national governments such as Uganda and Kenya and international bodies such as the US President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR).¹⁴

While attention to the high prevalence of HIV in fishing communities is welcome and necessary to address a major human tragedy and public health issue, characterization of fishing communities as peopled by the feckless and reckless is both unhelpful and inaccurate. Fishing communities can be vibrant centres of economic activity, attracting young people in search of independent lives and incomes for their families, and they may also be places where traditional fishing-based livelihoods are under threat from declining fisheries and increasing levels of competition for the remaining catches.¹⁵ If fishing communities are to attract the attention of HIV and AIDS prevention, treatment, and mitigation programmes, there is a need to go beyond the stereotypes that have built up around such communities, seeking a more nuanced understanding of the lives of people within them so that simplistic stereotyping can be replaced by focused concern and action.

12. 'HIV prevalence rate in Kalangala district at 27 percent', *The Monitor*, 23 August 2006 <www.monitor.co.ug>.

13. J. A. Seeley and E. H. Allison, 'HIV/AIDS in fishing communities: challenges to delivering antiretroviral therapy to vulnerable groups', *AIDS Care* 1, 6 (2005), pp. 688–97.

14. FAO, 'Impact of HIV/AIDS on fishing communities', *New Directions in Fisheries* 2 (FAO, Rome, 2005); A. Gordon, 'HIV/AIDS in the fisheries sector in Africa' (Worldfish Centre, Cairo, 2006); Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industries and Fisheries, 'Uganda strategy for reducing the impact of HIV and AIDS on fishing communities' (Department for Fisheries Resources within the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry, and Fisheries, Entebbe, Uganda, 2005); EPOS/Futures Group Europe, 'Study on the impact of HIV/AIDS on Fishing in Kenya and how the MOLFD can respond', undertaken for Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries Development and National AIDS Control Council (Futures Group, Nairobi, 2004). PEPFAR has very recently prioritized fishing communities for prevention and care interventions in Uganda.

15. Geheb and Binns, "Fishing farmers".

Many of the publications on HIV and fishing, including our own, speak broadly of “fisherfolk” and “fishing communities”, which may give the impression of a homogeneous group.¹⁶ As a consequence there is a danger that the dramatic news headlines, the focus of the media on the worst cases, and the dire statistical overviews will continue to lead to generalizations that go beyond their intention to galvanize support for these neglected communities and become negative stereotypes that portray fishing communities as “dens of iniquity”.

The purpose of this article is to suggest that a more nuanced view of fisherfolk is required in order to highlight the importance of bringing appropriate services to these marginalized communities, including support for HIV and AIDS prevention, treatment, and care. We do not totally refute the stereotype of fisherfolk because, as with many stereotypes, there is an element of truth in the characterizations, but we aim to go beyond the headlines and generalizations to understand the diversity of circumstances and factors that shape people’s destinies as individuals at different stages in their life courses and not just as ‘fisherfolk’ or members of undifferentiated fishing communities. Analysis of life stories allows us to understand the range of risks, opportunities, and choices people make and the means by which they navigate both the pleasures and opportunities, and the injustices and privations of everyday life, including sex and the risk of HIV infection and AIDS-related death.

The study site

This article focuses on the people who live in a village on the shores of Lake Kyoga in the south-eastern region of Uganda.¹⁷ The place has been an important landing site for over 30 years and the fishing area extends between six and twelve kilometres from the lakeshore. The village has two landing sites; it is at the one closest to the village that most boats with Nile perch, tilapia, and *mukene* (*Rastrineobola argentea*) land their fish.¹⁸ Ice containers and a weighing station are situated here, and this is the centre of the more visible fish trade. The smaller landing site, to the east of the main habitation, is mainly where boats using illegal gear to catch undersized Nile Perch land their fish, because the government guards responsible for

16. Allison and Seeley, ‘HIV and AIDS among fisherfolk’; Seeley and Allison, ‘HIV/AIDS in fishing communities’; Kissling *et al.*, ‘Fisherfolk’.

17. Lake Kyoga is formed by the Victoria Nile, which flows through it. It has a maximum depth of 8 metres, restricting navigation to shallow-draft vessels. It is 129 km long, covering an area of 4,429 sq. km. Recent survey data show 10,086 boats on the lake. B. B. Keizire, ‘Policy and planning processes for responding to HIV/AIDS in fishing communities in Uganda’ in ‘Responding to HIV and AIDS in the Fishery Sector in Africa. Proceedings of the International Workshop, held in Lusaka, Zambia’ (WorldFish Centre, Cairo, 2006), pp. 34–40.

18. *Mukene* or *omena* are small sardine-like fish that are widely traded in sun-dried form.

enforcement seldom go there. The village straddles a main road to the district capital that ends at the landing site. Large flat rocks close to the village are used as a drying surface for *mukene*. In addition to its fishing, the village is an important hub for traders as it lies on a route for cattle and other produce to and from districts to the north and east. The population of the village in August 2005 was approximately 500 people living in 145 households.¹⁹ Fishing is the most important livelihood activity in the village, although in recent years its importance has declined. A fall in the size of the catch has led people to turn increasingly to subsistence farming; trade in vegetables, fruit or second-hand clothes; the sale of cooked food; the brewing and sale of alcohol; and, in a few cases, the rearing of livestock. Some have been able to supplement their incomes in these ways. While others have moved away in search of better fishing sites.²⁰ The village has a primary school, but there is no government health centre so people have to travel seven miles to the nearest one. The nearest government hospital is in Kamuli, two hours away by public transport.

Who are the fisherfolk in the village?

Allison suggests that the small-scale fisherfolk of eastern and southern Africa can be categorized into two broad groups.²¹ The first group are the specialist fisherfolk, who tend to be mobile or migratory; they can be found living temporarily in lakeshore and coastal villages or makeshift fishing camps, sometimes with their families, but often with other fishermen in all-male groups. The second group of fisherfolk are residents of lakeshore villages who tend to fish part-time, or may not fish at all; instead they may own some fishing-related assets and depend on hired labour to do the actual fishing. Some members of these households are usually engaged in farming or other activities, and own land and livestock. While this categorization may capture the broad livelihood strategies of many male fisherfolk, it fails to account for the diversity of ways in which women, young people, and children are involved in the sector.

Like many fishing communities, the one described in this study is populated by a variety of people who derive their livelihood from the lake shores and are engaged in fishing, marketing, and processing; they may also provide support services like lodging, food, and drink, in addition to participating

19. The mobility of the population makes it difficult to give a precise population figure.

20. G. Bahigwa and the LADDER team, 'Iyingo village, Uganda' in 'Ladder Village Report 4' (Overseas Development Group, University of East Anglia, Norwich, 2001).

21. E. H. Allison, 'The fisheries sector, livelihoods and poverty reduction in East and Southern Africa' in F. Ellis and H. A. Freeman (eds), *Rural Livelihoods and Poverty Reduction Policies* (Routledge, London, 2005), pp. 264–5.

in a range of agricultural and non-farm occupations. The life stories of two women in the village illustrate some of the diversity captured in our study:

Ruth is 35 years old and a widow.²² Betty is forty years old and divorced.²³ The main source of income for both women is selling *mukene*. Ruth owns a *mukene* net and she rents a boat at the cost of US\$1,000 US\$ (approximately 30 pence) a day at the landing site.²⁴ She bought the *mukene* net (costing US\$120,000) and four pressure lamps (used in fishing at night, costing US\$140,000) in 1998; she bought two new oars for the boat in June 2005 (costing US\$10,000).²⁵ Betty owns a fishing boat, a *mukene* net, four pressure lamps, and two oars. She bought this equipment in 2004 after borrowing money from a male relative. Betty employs her nephew Ronald and another nephew who lives nearby at the landing site to fish for her. They work at night when the moon is not very high (about 21 nights a month) because that is the best time for *mukene* fishing.²⁶ Ronald also tends the equipment on the boat, although Betty or one of the younger boys mends the net. Ruth employs two young men from the landing site for the same purpose, and at the same rate of pay: US\$1,500 per bowl of *mukene* that they catch.

Ruth and Betty are not unusual in the fishing communities around Lake Kyoga (or the larger Lake Victoria to the south). *Mukene* were not fished commercially in Lake Kyoga until the early 1990s.²⁷ The emergence of these small fish as a commercial species provided a new avenue for women's involvement in fisheries, perhaps because its low value made it less attractive to male fish traders. These fish are also lighter and easier to carry than a 100-kilogram Nile Perch, for example. A number of studies show that women are the main *mukene* traders in the region.²⁸

22. All names have been changed.

23. While both these women are now single it was not just widows and divorcees who were involved in *mukene* trading; several other women who were still married, whether as a single wife or as a co-wife, also undertook this work.

24. The exchange rate is currently US\$3,300 to £1.

25. Oars frequently get lost or broken, so we can be sure that Ruth had had to replace the oars several times between 1998 and 2005.

26. The lamps are placed on specially designed wooden cradles, which are set out in a square on the water and are anchored (with a line and a weight) over the lake to attract the *mukene*, so darkness is required to make this method effective. From a management point of view, *mukene* fishing is problematic because of the use of small-mesh seines (including mosquito netting) to catch this species; the small-mesh nets targeting *mukene* catch juvenile Nile perch and undersized tilapia, 'thereby conflicting with management objectives for those species, where management for stock sustainability is dependent on setting minimum mesh sizes to allow the smaller, immature fish to escape.' E. H. Allison, 'Linking national fisheries policy to livelihoods on the shores of Lake Kyoga, Uganda' in LADDER Working Paper 9 (Overseas Development Group, University of East Anglia, Norwich, 2003), p. 3.

27. John Obbo Okaronon and Jackson Wandanya, 'Fishery resource base for the Uganda sector of Lake Victoria' (paper presented at the National Seminar on the Management of the Fisheries of Lake Victoria, 6–8 August 1991, Jinja, Uganda) <<http://www.fao.org/docrep/006/AD147E/AD147E01.htm>> (26 November 2006).

28. J. Eric Reynolds and J. S. Kitakule, 'Field document No. 2. Socio-economic aspects of Lakes Victoria and Albert fisheries: the 1991 FISHIN Community Survey' <<http://www.fao.org/docrep/006/AD150E/AD150E00.htm>> (9 September 2006); Bahigwa *et al.*, 'Iyingo village'; Appleton, 'At my age'; Allison, 'Linking national fisheries policy'; A. Madanda, 'Commercialisation and gender roles among Lake Victoria shore fishing

It has been less common for women to own boats and fishing gear although over the last 10 years, with an increase in *mukene* processing and trade, the number of female owners has increased.²⁹ Betty's boat ownership is therefore unusual and an indication of her position and status in the village.³⁰

Both women are actively involved in managing the fishing and processing, as well as in trade:

Each morning the women, or sometimes Ruth's daughter (if Ruth is sick), meet their boats and crew at the landing site and collect the catch. Sometimes the *mukene* are sold to local women at the landing site for processing. However, Betty and Ruth are usually the ones who oversee the measuring of the *mukene* into the large round plastic bowls in which they are sold, pay the labourers, and then make repeated trips carrying the bowls of fish to spread it out on a rock near their homes to dry in the sun, sweeping the *mukene* periodically during the day to ensure the fish are thoroughly dried. Later in the day the women are often assisted by their children to go to sort the catch, taking out any under-sized Nile perch from the *mukene* to make it ready for sale, often to traders who take the catch to other markets.

There are other fisherfolk in these women's families. Ruth's eldest son, for example, is a fisherman. He had been migrating to work in Apac District on the other side of Lake Kyoga because the pay was better there. In mid-2005 he took a job at the landing site back in his mother's village, weighing the catch in preparation for loading onto one of the traders' vehicles; he returned because he did not like being away from home so much, particularly when he discovered that his wife was having an affair with a local man.

Women, fishing, and HIV

Women's involvement in fisheries has often been overlooked because of an exclusive focus on male fisherfolk.³¹ Studies of HIV prevalence in fishing communities are no exception: many of the available statistics relate solely to the men involved in fish-catching operations.³² However, other studies do acknowledge that the men and women who work in associated occupations such as fish trading and processing are also especially vulnerable to HIV infection, partly because the women may be within fishermen's sexual networks and partly because women involved in fish trading and processing

communities in Uganda' (research report, supported under the 14th OSSREA Research Competition on Gender, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, December 2003).

29. Appleton, 'At my age'.

30. Bahigwa *et al.*, 'Iyingo village', p. 24 report that only two women owned boats in the village in 2001. Betty has been the women's secretary on the Local Council and is well respected.

31. M. J. Williams, N. H. Chao, and P. S. Choo (eds), 'Global symposium on women in fisheries: Sixth Asian Fisheries Forum, 29 November 2001, Kaohsiung, Taiwan' (The WorldFish Centre, Penang, Malaysia, 2002).

32. Kissling *et al.*, 'Fisherfolk', p. 1941.

often have multiple sexual partners associated with their trading activities: the so-called “sex-for-fish” deals mentioned earlier, where women traders secure access to a fisherman’s catch or a male wholesaler’s trade by providing sexual services.³³

The focus on fishermen is understandable given concern that their particular vulnerability to infection stems from the dynamics of fish catching and trading operations and their resulting “risky” lifestyle. But the vulnerability of women and children in general (rather than the “prostitutes” referred to in the newspaper report cited at the beginning of this article) is less often considered, perhaps because more attention has been paid to temporary landing sites, where families are not often found, rather than villages like the one that is our focus in this article.³⁴ The situation of both Betty and Ruth highlights this vulnerability.

Ruth’s husband, who was known to be HIV positive, died four years ago in a road accident. Susan, Ruth’s co-wife, lives in separate rooms in the same building.³⁵ Ruth has five children. Four of these children, aged five to 14 years, are living with her. An older son, the child she had with her first husband (who has also died) is married and lives nearby with his wife and young child. Ruth is living with HIV and while she is not on anti-retroviral therapy she often seeks treatment for opportunistic infections. Ruth’s late husband was a fishmonger; he used a vehicle to transport fish to nearby markets. When he was alive Ruth was quite well-off; she was his favourite wife and he used to give more support to her and her children than to Susan. When he died his assets were divided between the two women by the clan administrator. One of his two boats, a video player, and a radio/cassette player were sold when he died, and the remaining boat soon after. Ruth has had to sell off a number of assets, including the stock of a small shop she ran and some of her goats, to pay for her treatment and to support her children. Ruth has a new partner now, a *mukene* fishmonger who lives in a different sub-county, but he does not provide her with much support. He transports her *mukene* to trading centres outside the village, but while this helps her market her catch he does not always give her the money he earns from the sales.

Betty has no children of her own (that is the reason her husband separated from her) but she fosters three boys, children of relatives who have died of AIDS-related illnesses. Her nephew Ronald, who is married with a baby, lives on her compound in a separate mud-brick hut. Betty has a small amount of land on which she cultivates maize and millet. She used to own more land but sold it to pay for the treatment of one of her brothers who died of AIDS-related illnesses.

33. H. Pickering, M. Okongo, A. Ojwiya, D. Yirrell, and J. Whitworth, ‘Sexual networks in Uganda: mixing patterns between a trading town, its rural hinterland and a nearby fishing village’, *International Journal of STD and AIDS* 8, 8 (1997), pp. 495–500; W. K. Nahamya and C. B. Elwange, ‘Susceptibility and vulnerability to HIV/AIDS among the fishing communities in Uganda: a case of Lake Kioga’ (paper presented at the International Conference on HIV/AIDS and Food and Nutrition Security, Durban, South Africa, 14–16 April 2006); Merten and Haller, ‘Fish for sex deals’.

34. Hemrich and Topouzis, ‘Multi-sectoral responses to HIV/AIDS’; Appleton, ‘At my age’; Nahamya and Elwange, ‘Susceptibility and vulnerability to HIV/AIDS’.

35. The women do not get on. They maintain separate kitchens and try to avoid too much contact. Susan and her children moved into the house on the instructions of the clan administrator when the husband died.

The trade in *mukene* is not without its problems and women have to seek other ways to diversify their livelihoods to provide the income they need:

Ruth and Betty complain that the *mukene* catch is very poor these days because a number of floating islands (made up of aquatic plants which move around the lake) are clogging the fishing area. High winds and cloud at night are also a problem at times. Ruth's treatment costs are high and she worries about the future because business is poor; she cannot save for her children because all the money she gets from the *mukene* sales is spent immediately. While Betty has to find money for school fees she says she is better off now, because she has her own boat and net. Last year she was able to buy two goats with her profits.

Farming plays a part in supporting the home food consumption of both families; there is also a surplus that can be sold to provide useful added income. In addition, both women rely at times on assistance from relatives and friends, including sexual partners. Ruth, for example, had a partner for a few months who traded in *mukene* and helped her out.

Transactional sex plays a part in the lives of women in the village. While both Ruth and Betty talked about the multiple partners that their former husbands and partners had had, they were discreet about their own sexual histories.³⁶ However, our knowledge of a number of other women, particularly young women, who had had multiple partners and received financial and material support through those relationships, suggests that sexual partners do provide an important way for some women to get support.

Suzan was about 20 years old and still in Secondary School. She was an orphan. She had a relationship with a successful fish trader who was supporting her and paying her school fees, until she had sex with a primary school teacher. Then the trader ended the relationship (and the support).

Suzan and others like her do not fit the stereotype of a 'prostitute' or commercial sex worker; as portrayed in the media. Yet transactional sex is an important part of economic activity in a place where fishermen and traders are much better off than women, particularly younger women, who have limited options through which to make a living.³⁷ The apparently high levels of HIV prevalence in the area means that they face the risk of infection, as well as infecting partners, through their relationships.³⁸ As van

36. The tendency for women often to under-report, and men to over-report sexual partnerships has been reviewed by S. Nnko, J. T. Boerma, M. Urassa, G. Mwaluko and B. Zaba, 'Secretive females or swaggering males? An assessment of the quality of sexual partnership reporting in rural Tanzania', *Social Science and Medicine* 59, 2 (2004), pp. 299–310. Both Betty and Ruth said that they did not drink alcohol and that religion was a key part of their lives. Betty was a member of the Church of the Holy Spirit and Ruth was a Catholic.

37. This situation of unequal gender relations is not unique to fishing villages. See for example: Philip W. Setel, *A Plague of Paradoxes: AIDS, culture and demography in northern Tanzania* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL and London, 1999); Carolyn Baylies and Janet Bujra, *AIDS, Sexuality and Gender in Africa: Collective strategies and struggles in Tanzania and Zambia* (Routledge, London, 2000); and Francine van der Borne, *Trying to Survive in Times of Poverty and AIDS* (Het Spinhuis, Amsterdam, 2005).

38. Data on sero-prevalence in this community are not available.

der Borne has cautioned, targeting HIV and AIDS prevention messages at “prostitutes” will not reach women who have multiple partners but are not commercial sex workers or do not consider themselves to be in that category.³⁹

Men, fishing, and HIV

Many men involved in fishing in the village had multiple partners. Young men who work in fishing at the landing sites reported that they were sexually active with more than one girlfriend in the village, or at other landing sites. The girlfriends of the younger school drop-outs (aged 14–17) were often school girls.⁴⁰

Some men in the village did fit the stereotype of drunken, irresponsible, individuals. However, there were men in the village who did not. One such man was Henry:

Henry is 41 years old, married to Mary. They have seven children aged between two and 15 years. They came to this village from a nearby sub-county for the fishing. The family is Seventh Day Adventist. Henry is a gillnet fisherman. His eldest son works with him on their rented boat after school and at weekends. Mary makes *sambuza* (a snack food) for sale.

Over the months of study we found Henry always busy with his work, anxious about his children’s education, and often worried about money. Both he and Mary were caring parents. Neither drank alcohol and both were strict followers of their religion. There were other men like Henry, usually older men, often with large families, who worked hard at their fishing or trading; some of them also made steady contributions as community leaders. While this group of men was not in the majority among those involved in fishing, their existence in the community points to the dangers of stereotyping all men involved in fishing as careless fathers and husbands.

It is not only men and women who are active in fishing and other income-generating activities in the area; children too have an important part to play in the fishing community, and it is to their roles that we now turn.

Children, fishing, and HIV

Mention has been made above of the role that Ruth and Betty’s children play in fishing activities; in this section we look at children as fisherfolk in

39. Francine van der Borne, “I am not a prostitute”. Discords in targeted HIV/AIDS prevention interventions in urban and trading centers in Malawi’ (unpublished contribution to the Takmi Fellowship Program in International Health, 2003) <<http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/takemi/RP214.pdf>> (11 February 2007).

40. It should be remembered that some primary school as well as secondary school pupils are in their late teens or early twenties. However, children were reported to be sexually active from the age of 12 years.

more detail. Appleton records how 'local jobbing fishermen' in the Tanzanian fishing village she studied were providing work for young boys orphaned by the AIDS epidemic in seine netting from the beach, in return for some of the catch.⁴¹ This suggests that the children's involvement is exceptional. That does not appear to be the case in the Lake Kyoga village in our study. The following is an extract from the diary of Betty's sixteen-year-old nephew, who is a primary school boy:⁴²

Saturday July 2005

After eating, I fetched water for my aunty. Then, together with my aunty, we started sorting Nile Perch from *mukene* up to 5 p.m. I went to the main centre to chat at the shop while watching *mweso* [a board game] players. At 6 p.m. I came home to help my aunty while she was preparing supper of potatoes and Nile perch, which was ready at 9 p.m. After supper, I did homework for one hour and then went to sleep.

Ruth's fourteen-year-old daughter, Teddy, undertakes similar activities:

Saturday May 2005

I woke up at 6.30 a.m. I then went with my mother to the landing site to get *mukene*. We stayed and waited until about 7.30 a.m. until the boat came. There were five bowls. I carried one bowl at a time to the rock and when I finished I went to wash the bowl at the landing site. I also washed my legs and head. I came back home at 10 a.m. I found my mother had prepared porridge for me. I took porridge and after finishing I went and collected water and prepared food. I went to sweep *mukene* with my younger brother and my friend, and we came back at 1 p.m. We found potato and Nile Perch were ready to eat and we were given food by my mother. After eating, I rested for two hours and at 4.30 p.m. I went to pick *mukene* from Nile Perch. I came back at 6.30 p.m.

Sometimes Teddy's work is harder because of her mother's recurrent illnesses.

Friday June 2005

I woke up at 6.30 a.m. I went to the landing site to wait for the fishermen with *mukene*. They came with 10 bowls of *mukene* and I carried them to the rock up to 9 a.m. After putting the *mukene* on the rock I went to take breakfast, which my brother's wife had prepared. I ate it and started taking the goats to the rock because my brothers had gone to school. I came back and prepared lunch before I went to sweep *mukene*. I prepared potatoes and meat. I went to sweep *mukene* with my brother's wife. We came and at 1 p.m. started eating lunch with my brothers and mother, who is sick. After eating, I rested for two hours. At 4 p.m. I went to sort *mukene* from Nile Perch up to 6 p.m. I came at home to prepare supper at 7 p.m. I bathed and started talking with my mother and brothers. At 9.30 p.m. we ate and went to sleep.

41. Appleton, 'At my age', pp. 24–5.

42. Over six months in 2005, 24 children recounted their daily activities for one day each month to a local research assistant. Many provided accounts that gave a very clear picture of their daily activities.

There is a gender divide in the work girls and boys do. Boys at the landing site are involved in hook fishing (catching small tilapia), trap/line fishing with fathers/older brothers, paddling canoes, and supervising their father's/uncle's boat/nets/fishermen and catch. Boys, as Teddy points out above, are usually the ones to care for goats. Girls are engaged in collecting *mukene* from the fishermen, and both boys and girls take the catch to the rock for drying and sweeping *mukene*, and then sorting Nile Perch from the *mukene* and collecting the dried *mukene* from the rock ready for sale.

While many children are busy with fisheries-related work, they are also engaged in other livelihood activities that are as important in generating their household's income. Teddy, Ruth's daughter, had to miss school to do household chores as well as attending to the *mukene* business when her mother was sick, because the family are so dependent on that income.

The stories above, about children, women, and men, show that the fishing village is populated by a variety of different people, some permanent settlers like Ruth and Betty who have lived and worked in the village much of their lives and others, notably fishermen and fish traders like their former husbands, who move from place to place because of their work. If HIV and AIDS interventions for fishing villages and landing sites fail to recognize the different groups and the close links between those who stay put and those who move, there is the danger that some of those most in need of care and support will not be reached because they do not fall into the categories targeted. In the next section we discuss the dangers of labelling and the importance of recognizing diversity in both policy and programming.

The question of community

We have already cautioned about the assumption that this particular village, or indeed any other fishing village or landing site, is a homogeneous "community". However, groupings are often necessary for targeting and it is not only for HIV and AIDS interventions that "fishing communities" has been used as a convenient label for grouping people associated with fishing. The 'Uganda Strategy for Reducing the Impact of HIV and AIDS on Fishing Communities' talks of fishing communities as being a 'hot-spot for HIV and AIDS' and advocates a role for Beach Management Units, Lake Management Organizations, District Fisheries Officers, and the Department of Fisheries Resources in addressing the spread of HIV and the mitigation of the impact of the epidemic in fishing communities.⁴³ It is useful to look at the background to fisheries management in order to understand how this strategy may be flawed.

43. Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industries and Fisheries, 'Uganda strategy'; Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industries and Fisheries, 'Guidelines for Beach Management Units in Uganda' (MAAIF, Entebbe, 2003) pp. 1-7.

The Ugandan National Fisheries Policy of 2003 provides for decentralization and community involvement in fisheries management. The policy states that stakeholders will be involved in the management of fisheries by devolving some decision-making responsibilities from central to local governments and communities. The Fisheries Sector Strategic Plan derived from the policy includes the creation of a national network of 'Beach Management Units (BMUs) that are supported through various training programmes to build up the fisheries sector through the improved management of fisheries resources. The aim with BMUs is for 'citizens and government [to] share responsibility in fisheries management as active partners in fisheries planning and development'. Communities, in partnership with local governments, are expected to control who fishes and how to share the benefits from fisheries. The BMUs provide the 'institutional structure at the grassroots to improve planning and to sustainably manage fisheries resources'.⁴⁴

The development of participatory fisheries management is portrayed as a successful policy innovation in integrating environmental resource concerns and poverty reduction, empowerment, and equity considerations.⁴⁵ However, the experience with the BMU in our study village tells a rather different story. Shortly after the BMU was established at the main landing site in the village, its financial support was withdrawn and the Unit if it was to survive had little choice but to establish its own system of fund raising: this it did by accepting payment from people who wished to contravene the rules.

Both Ruth and Betty have good relationships with senior and influential people at the landing site, Ruth through the contacts of her husband and Betty through her position as women's secretary on the Local Council 1 (LC1).⁴⁶ Betty, for example, pays US\$5,000 a month to the fish guard and the BMU so that she can use the *mukene* net and boat, even though this means that under-sized Nile perch are caught – which she does not want, since they have to be sorted from the *mukene* before sale – and Ruth pays US\$3,000 a month to use her net.⁴⁷

The use of the fine *mukene* nets, which also catch the juvenile Nile perch, was illegal, hence the need for Betty and Ruth to pay a bribe to allow the use of this fishing gear. The problem, as Allison observes, is that the BMU structure is imposed from above to regulate fishing and, as the stories of

44. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

45. Fiona Nunan, 'Empowerment and institutions: managing fisheries in Uganda', *World Development* 34, 7 (2006), pp. 1316–32.

46. The lowest tier of the Ugandan local government system.

47. Fishing for *mukene* is supposed to take place in deep water where the small Nile perch will not be found; however, the use of small-gauge nets often results in their being caught. Sellers are not permitted to sell undersized Nile perch.

Ruth and Betty illustrate, can be manipulated as easily as any other structure if the right incentives are provided.⁴⁸ Allison comments that:

A number of problems have arisen, however, principally around the way that CBFM [Community Based Fisheries Management] has been conceived and implemented. Prominent among these is the fact that participatory, decentralised management is a donor-driven agenda. Fisheries department staff have not always been eager to participate in a programme that reduces their powers and forces them to collaborate with fisherfolk as partners rather than law enforcers and expert advisors. Similarly, communities have rather negative experiences of government fisheries staff and trust is lacking. The externally driven agenda also means that ownership of new 'community' based initiatives by fisherfolk is sometimes limited.⁴⁹

This observation should sound a warning to those seeking to target 'fishing communities' with HIV and AIDS interventions through fisheries management structures. The status of BMUs as effective vehicles for addressing HIV- and AIDS-related issues, as is envisaged in the national strategy on HIV and AIDS in fishing communities, is questionable if they are viewed primarily as the bodies responsible for enforcing unpopular fisheries rules and regulations.⁵⁰ In 2004, during the period in which BMUs were being established, the government sent the army to help enforce the use of legal fishing gear on Lake Kyoga. Illegal nets were confiscated or burnt. The army deployment only lasted a couple of months, but several households in the study village lost their nets during the campaign; this had a severe effect upon their livelihoods. The loss was compounded by the failure of rain that year, which meant crop harvests were poor. Many people suffered and had to look for alternative sources of income. The government relaxed the rules on illegal gear because of the public disquiet over the situation, but the memory of the harsh treatment is still fresh in people's minds and does little to enhance the reputations of those who are supposed to enforce the rules.⁵¹ Since then, the BMU has increased the cost of licences for boats and fishermen, which has added to the problems faced by fisherfolk.

An additional challenge to designing appropriate HIV prevention and AIDS response strategies is the problem of defining and delineating the

48. Allison, 'The fisheries sector'.

49. *Ibid.*, pp. 268–9.

50. Talking about HIV and AIDS continues to be a very real problem in the village. Many people do not want to discuss it, particularly if they are affected and/or if they believe it is due to witchcraft. However, a few people were very open about discussing AIDS, particularly if a household member was known to be affected. Even so, they were more likely to speak about people who had died of AIDS, than speak 'ill' of the living. Putting the onus on BMUs to give out AIDS information in such a situation is very problematic.

51. The BMU at the main village landing site was initially interested in enforcing the regulations, but the regulations were relaxed by the government in the lead-up to a referendum and election. Then the BMU began to concentrate on the income stream it could derive from corruption. Initially three members of the BMU were taking bribes, but then a meeting was held and all the BMU committee wanted their cut of the 'profits'.

“community”. Agrawal and Gibson have argued that the view of communities as small, integrated structures with shared norms ‘fails to attend to differences within communities, and ignores how these differences affect resource management outcomes, local politics and strategic interactions within communities’.⁵² This seems to be particularly true of the fluid ‘fishing communities’ we have described.

Conclusion

The use of “law enforcers” such as BMUs as vehicles for HIV and AIDS awareness raising is only a part of our concern. There is a broader issue around the stereotype of “fishing communities” that sees these communities as hotspots for alcohol abuse and casual sex, populated solely by “fishermen and prostitutes”. Many people in the village are not “feckless and reckless”, as the stories in this article have shown. They are people making a living out of fishing, bringing up and educating children, and generally “getting by” by being personally resourceful in a resource-poor setting.

We have argued elsewhere for greater attention to be given to marginalized people, such as fisherfolk living in remote locations, in the roll-out of treatment and care for people living with HIV.⁵³ It is also important, given the large numbers of children growing up in such settings as well as the people who are still likely to be uninfected, that efforts are redoubled on prevention. At the time of writing, even a seemingly simple thing like obtaining a condom, so that one can practice safer sex, is difficult in the study village: there is a choice of whether to spend US\$200 to buy one or walk or cycle seven miles to where they are available free at the Government Health Centre – when they are in stock.⁵⁴

In attempting to galvanize support for AIDS prevention and care at fish landing sites, talking about “communities” as if the settlements were stable homogeneous populations is misleading and, if it engenders a feeling that interventions successful among more settled populations are suitable in “fishing communities”, it is also dangerous. As Creed recently pointed out, the word “community” is often seen as not requiring a definition because grouping people in such a way is ‘part of the commonsensical way we understand and navigate the world’.⁵⁵ Interventions that target only

52. A. Agrawal and C. C. Gibson, ‘Enchantment and disenchantment: the role of community in natural resource conservation’, *World Development* 27, 4 (1999), p. 633.

53. Seeley and Allison, ‘HIV/AIDS in fishing communities’; J. A. Seeley and E. H. Allison, ‘HIV and AIDS among fisherfolk: what is at stake?’ in ‘Responding to HIV and AIDS in the fishery sector in Africa, proceedings of the international workshop, held in Lusaka, Zambia’ (WorldFish Centre, Cairo, 2006) pp. 26–9.

54. A labourer earns approximately US\$1,000 a day, so US\$200 is a considerable amount of money for a single condom.

55. Gerald W. Creed (ed.), *The Seduction of Community* (James Currey, Oxford, 2006), p. 4.

fishermen and women fish traders (themselves complex groups) on the basis of a caricature obtained from the available statistics and accounts of male sexual risk taking and female sex-for-fish transactions, is an inadequate response and carries the danger of eliciting government and local authority actions that are extreme in nature and damaging to livelihoods. For example, if fisherfolks' mobility is seen as adding to their HIV risk context, then this may lead to policy and management measures that discourage mobile and migratory fishing, which are common strategies to cope with the movement and fluctuating production of fish.⁵⁶ Similarly, if mobile women fish traders are stereotyped as engaging in sex-for-fish deals, this may lead community leaders and organizations to make women's mobility more difficult, thereby threatening their livelihoods. Stigmatizing fishing communities on the basis of generalizations about fisherfolks' behaviour may further marginalize such communities, and would seem to place these people among those least likely to receive support and care.

What then can be done? While there has been increased interest in recent years in providing support to fisherfolk to build their resilience to HIV and support those already infected, more needs to be done in terms of access to services in general, as well as applied research that helps to improve access for "fishing communities", and increase awareness of the reality of the lives of people like Betty, Ruth, Suzan, Henry, and their families as they make their living on the shores of Lake Kyoga. Media reports that continue to characterize all people in all fishing villages and landing sites as just "fishermen or prostitutes" do a great disservice to fisherfolk by prejudicing the opinions of policy makers and programmers.

56. E. H. Allison and F. Ellis, 'The livelihoods approach and management of small-scale fisheries', *Marine Policy* 25, 5 (2001), pp. 377–88.

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