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Regional Synthesis and Policy Implications.

Discussion Paper Prepared for the First Policy Advisory Group Meeting, Lilongwe, Malawi

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Fisheries and HIV/AIDS in Africa: Investing in Sustainable Solutions



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Regional synthesis and policy implications

Discussion Paper

Simon Heck, WorldFish Center

I. Introduction

The Programme has so far uncovered basic factors of vulnerability to HIV/AIDS in fishing communities and among fish traders. These findings allow interpretation and conclusions at two levels: (i) identifying broad patterns of vulnerability and generic challenges faced by fisheries in the region, and (ii) understanding their specific manifestation in particular local contexts, including for example in specific types of fisheries or in the institutional context of a specific national HIV/AIDS response. Both these dimensions are important for understanding the potential long-term impact of HIV/AIDS on the fisheries sector and for developing targeted responses to this challenge.

This short paper tries to synthesize the findings so far, to place them in a wider context of what we know about fisheries and HIV/AIDS in the region and globally, and to identify key issues of regional significance that require policy intervention at different levels. Specifically, this paper addresses the following questions:

1. What are the **main vulnerability factors in different types of fisheries** and in different countries, and how do these affect fishing populations?
2. What broad **regional patterns** of vulnerability and impact are emerging from the case studies?
3. In order to develop sustainable solutions to these constraints, what are the key **Regional Challenges that require policy support** for an effective regional response to HIV/AIDS in the fisheries sector?

Local
vulnerability
factors

Regional
patterns

Regional
Challenges

Enhanced
regional
response

The purpose of this paper is to stimulate discussion of the key issues arising from the Programme's work so far during the First PAG Meeting. The paper concludes with three lead questions that will be a starting point for discussions during Day 2 of the Meeting.

II. Synthesis of findings: Vulnerability factors identified

The Programme has identified a range of factors contributing to the vulnerability of fishing populations and of specific groups within these populations. In some cases, field-based research is still under way that will further specify local variations and combinations of these factors. Together, these studies contribute to an emerging regional picture of HIV/AIDS vulnerability in the fisheries sector.

The main vulnerability factors identified in the case studies can be grouped into three categories:

1. Factors arising from the economic conditions, mobility and demography of fishing and fish marketing;
2. Factors derived from social and cultural conditions in fishing communities and wider society;
3. Factors arising from the institutional context of fisheries management, health service delivery and wider public sector and civil society policies;

Table 1 summarizes key findings of the case studies so far in each of these categories.

Table 1: Selected vulnerability factors identified in case studies

Factors Case Studies	Fisheries economic conditions, mobility and demography	Wider social and cultural conditions	Institutional and service delivery context
DRC	Demography of fishing camps (96% single males) and fish traders (95% females); High and diverse in-migration of fishers and traders into Kasenga corridor; Lack of capital by female fish traders – 90% of fish obtained on credit;	Commercial sex work common in fishing areas; Weak position of women in economic relationships; Weak family cohesion, poor household resources;	No institutions or infrastructure for HIV/AIDS support along main fish supply route to Lubumbashi (provides 97% of fish to urban markets); Low awareness of HIV/AIDS; Poor supply of condoms;
Benin	High and diverse in-migration of fishermen; Increasing competition over fish catches among traders; Enduring poverty of fishers and traders;	Gender inequalities;	Multi-sectoral response not well established; Need to support fisheries sector to formulate appropriate HIV/AIDS approaches; Administrative barriers to effective service delivery by Fisheries Department;
Malawi	Increasing competition among female fish traders over fish supply at landing sites; Migrant fishermen frequent many landing sites;	Transactional sex in fishing camps and in markets; Temporary marriages with migrant fishermen;	Poor business support services for women; Limited HIV and AIDS awareness; Poor supply of condoms;

Factors Case Studies	Fisheries economic conditions, mobility and demography	Wider social and cultural conditions	Institutional and service delivery context
Zambia	Increased competition over fish stocks and catches; Increased and diversified migration; New investors entering fisheries; Higher capitalization; Marginalization of small-scale operators;	High alcohol consumption; Transactional sex; Female fish traders vs. local women; High levels of violence and abuse of women and children; Widespread insecurity;	Lack of health services; Limited awareness of HIV/AIDS; Limited or no access to ART; Community by-laws emerging but not fully understood or supported;
Cameroon	[baseline studies under way]	[baseline studies under way]	Weak information base on HIV/AIDS in fishing communities; Local initiatives and their possible impact undocumented;
Uganda	90% of residents in fishing camps live away from their spouses; but most return home at least once a month; High volume of daily or weekly movement of female fish traders from long distances; Many female fish traders on islands trade sex for food, shelter and transportation of fish;	When aware of HIV+ status, they move to other fishing camps or return home; Many women (57%) are compelled by female relatives to participate in fish trade migrations; Gender relations: Women in very weak negotiating position to ask for condom use;	New community institutions (BMUs) restrict movements with unknown implications; HIV/AIDS strategy for fisheries sector exists since 2005 but is not being implemented; Roles of key institutions to be reviewed;
Nigeria	[baseline studies under way]	[baseline studies under way]	Weak information base on HIV/AIDS in fishing communities; Local initiatives and their possible impact undocumented;
Additional literature reviews	Unpredictability of future returns from fishing leads to high-risk behavior; 'poverty traps' in fishing and fish trade – small-scale operators unable to raise their profits and break out indebtedness; Women's economic opportunities often precarious – resulting in dependency and exploitation;	Risk-taking culture among young men extends into sexual behavior; High level of violence and insecurity for women, youth;	Continued neglect of fishing camps by health services; Lack of integration of fisheries and health sectors (policy, service delivery, monitoring);

III. Regional patterns of vulnerability and impact

Looking across these case studies, a few broad regional patterns of vulnerability and impact are emerging. These are linked to broad differences in the types of fisheries, socio-economic conditions and institutional environments found across the region. At this stage of the Programme, these patterns are still tentative and would need to be validated through further research to arrive at a more conclusive *regional typology* of vulnerability in African fisheries.

Nevertheless, Programme findings do permit an overview of the main vulnerabilities and their likely impacts. Table 2 identifies the main regional patterns of vulnerability and impact emerging from the case studies.

Table 2: Regional patterns of vulnerability and impact

Source of vulnerability	Possible impacts
Mobility and demography: increasing and more diversified migration of fishermen and fish traders; resulting in temporary fishing camps or large migratory groups joining permanent communities; high ratio of single young males;	Weak social cohesion; Makes multiple sexual partnerships, commercial sex and temporary marriages more likely; Wide sexual networks facilitate spread of virus;
Gender relations: women fish traders in weak economic position vis-à-vis men (fishers, transporters); women in weak position to negotiate sexual relations or use of condoms;	Women compelled into transactional sex to secure livelihood within fisheries; high rates of exploitation, coercion and unprotected sex;
Increasing competition over fish catches: declining fish catches and increasing numbers of traders; new operators with higher capitalization entering small-scale fisheries – leading to further marginalization of female traders;	Further weakening of bargaining positions for female fish traders; Women increasingly compelled to apply risky strategies for participation in fish trade and for reducing operating costs;
‘Poverty traps’ for fishers and fish traders: small-scale operators with low margins of profit over many years; continued vulnerability to small economic or technological changes; no long-term business planning possible; lack of investment opportunities for stakeholders; no positive business models for small-scale operators;	Business practices continue to be driven by immediate needs to cut costs; Enduring debt and dependency relationships increase risk of sexual exploitation; Low savings for health services; Daily availability of cash without constructive investment opportunities; Aggravates alcohol consumption and commercial sex work;
Insecurity and lack of social and legal protection : high levels of violence, abuse and insecurity in fishing camps and along fish marketing chains; weak capacity for law enforcement and protection of social and political rights;	Illegality and insecurity go largely unchecked in many fishing communities; Women and children particularly vulnerable to abuse, including sexual abuse; Weak capacity for legal and social protection, care of minors and other vulnerable community members;
Lack of health services: continued neglect of many fishing areas by Government and NGO health services; remoteness of fishing camps, high costs of interventions, and lack of understanding contribute to this situation;	Low awareness of HIV/AIDS; No or irregular access to ART; Poor general health status; Low adherence to treatment requirements;
Fisheries sector administration: weak understanding of role of sector in addressing HIV/AIDS; inadequate plans and interventions by Fisheries Departments; low or no investments from fisheries revenue into HIV/AIDS response;	No proven approaches for extending HIV/AIDS services into fisheries sector available; Inefficiencies in Government and NGO engagement with fishing communities; Loss of expertise and sense of long-term ownership of fisheries resources by stakeholders;

These observations bring into focus the main challenges for building a comprehensive response to HIV/AIDS in the fisheries sector in Africa. Approaches developed in other economic sectors need to be adjusted to the requirements of the fishing communities and

fish traders. Much can be learned from experiences with other mobile populations and high-risk groups. Yet other aspects are perhaps unique to the economic and business context in the fisheries sector with its seasonality, division of labor and high but short-term cash revenue.

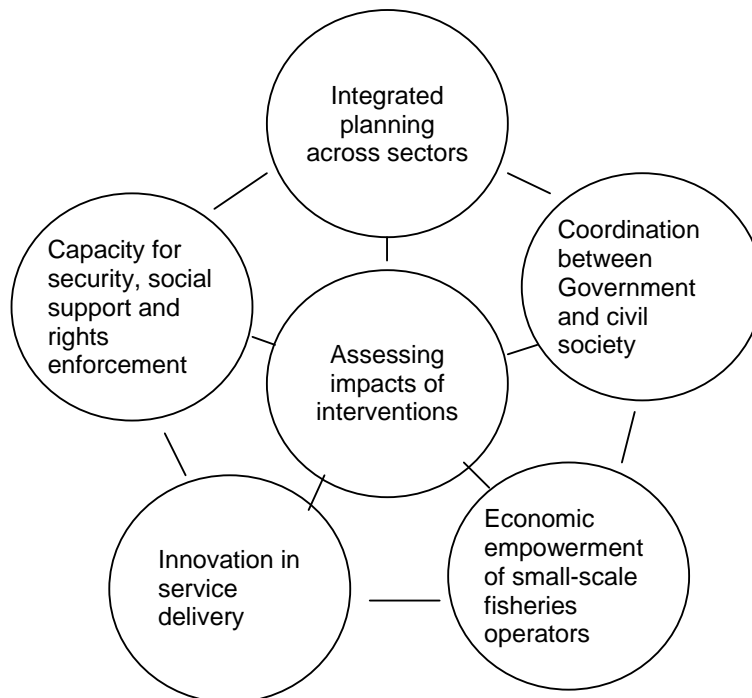
Importantly, the fisheries sector itself needs to understand its role in taking care of its human resources. Several of these vulnerability factors arise from 'fisheries' in the narrow sense, e.g. from fish-based business relations, competition, domestic and regional trade, or movement of fishers. Fisheries administrations, therefore, need to identify what they can do to safeguard economic opportunities for fisheries stakeholders in a way that is compatible with wider national and regional HIV/AIDS strategies.

IV. Regional Challenges that require policy support

Building on the above synthesis, a few key regional-level issues can be identified that require policy support across most or all of the case studies. These issues can be formulated as generic *Regional Challenges* that need to be addressed in order to reduce vulnerability to HIV/AIDS in the fisheries sector.

The specific interventions required to address these challenges may have to take different forms in different countries and locations, reflecting the diversity of conditions laid out in the case studies. But focus on the key issues is important for the wide range of responses to add up to a targeted, transparent and cost-effective approach that will reduce vulnerability among the largest numbers of people and with the best chances of sustainable impact.

Six inter-related Regional Challenges are emerging that need to be addressed in order to build a more effective regional response:



Specifically, these Regional Challenges have the following characteristics and policy implications:

- 1. Integrating planning and service delivery across fisheries and health sectors:**
Planning and delivery of services to fishing population suffers from lack of integration between fisheries and health sectors. This results in economic inefficiencies within Government as well as in lack of services received by target populations. Examples for this problem include poor rate of reinvestment of fisheries revenue in human services; underutilized logistical capacity; and fishing communities without any access to health services.
- 2. Coordinating service delivery between government and civil society:**
A range of initiatives by civil society organizations is under way to address HIV/AIDS vulnerability and other health and livelihoods issues in fishing communities. Yet, these are typically not coordinated amongst themselves or with government programmes that aim at similar objectives. A coordinated response can reduce vulnerability by improving the geographical coverage of services, avoiding interruptions when specific projects come to an end, fostering learning from successes as well as failures, and increasing cost-effectiveness. Policies are required that enable coordination and provide incentives for collaboration.
- 3. Structuring the informal fisheries sector:**
In the context of increasing competition within the 'informal' sector and growing pressure for higher capitalization across the fish value chain, vulnerable groups require targeted support to enable them to continue their participation in this sector. Small-scale operators, including female fish traders, require an economic and business environment that allows them to increase their profit margins and break out of 'poverty traps'. Policies promoting higher-value market access, associations, standards, contracts and business services are needed. This would reduce exploitation and direct vulnerability of women and youth and would result in potentially higher incomes for these groups.
- 4. Strengthening social capacity in fishing communities and along market chains:**
Alongside economic empowerment, vulnerable populations require stronger social support that will reduce insecurity, abuse and violence. Policies need to support community efforts to build social support capacity, develop and implement local by-laws or 'codes of conduct' in fishing camps, improve the security environment and strengthen legal protection and recourse for vulnerable groups.
- 5. Innovation for providing services to mobile populations:**
Many fishing populations and fish traders will continue to be mobile, since this is an essential aspect of their economic lives. Policies need to safeguard their ability to pursue their livelihood while having access to essential services. Policy needs to encourage innovation in targeting migrant fishers and mobile fish traders through schemes such as 'smart cards', 'fish trader +' and others. These potential options, however, need to be carefully monitored and assessed before they are promoted widely. This is particularly important when services such as ART are being provided that require very strict follow-up regimes.
- 6. Monitoring the impact of the wide range of initiatives under way:**
While multiple initiatives at local, national and regional levels are a positive sign of growing commitment, it is essential that the impact and effectiveness of these initiatives are being assessed. Only then can progress be made and sustained on a broad, regional scale. This may require specific impact assessment programmes that can provide consistent and objective data for identifying best-bet options. Policies are required that enable an independent and unified impact assessment approach to be

developed and implemented. As a result, initiatives at all levels will be able to implement cost-effective and high-impact interventions, and these efforts will add up to a more comprehensive regional response.

V. Lead questions for discussion

The observations and suggestions in this paper are meant to stimulate discussions of the best ways to address the key constraints of HIV/AIDS in the fisheries sector in the region. The Meeting will provide wide opportunities for exchange of views and experiences.

In order to start these discussions, the following three lead questions are proposed:

1. Do the six key Regional Challenges agree with your experiences, or are there other big challenges of regional importance that need to be addressed?
2. What efforts are currently under way at national level, both in fisheries and health sectors, which directly address - or can be used to address - some of the key issues identified by the Programme so far?
3. At regional level, what do you see as the main policy implications arising from the key technical issues and what vehicles do we have available to pursue regional policy support?